

“Steadfast Love and Faithfulness Genesis 9:8-17, Psalm 25:1-10, 1 Peter 3:18-22, **Matthew 4:1-11 (Sermon)** Delivered by A J Johnson 2/18/18

Our scripture readings this morning begin at the beginning. At the very beginning, God thought of you and I and of all humanity as He said to Noah and to his sons with him “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ...”

God goes on to include all living creatures. And with all creation in mind, God says I’m going to make a sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and all creation....

A visible reminder. A rainbow in the clouds that it should be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. An agreement made by a loving God and established between God and all life on earth.

Imagine, a God who says, you can hold me to my word. I will keep my word with you, even when you don’t keep your promises to me.

A God who says I will give you a visible reminder that I am a faithful God.

And so that is where our texts ground us in this morning.

No wonder the Psalmist in Psalm 25 can say “In you, LORD my God, I put my trust. I trust in you” and goes on further to say “No one who hope in you will ever be put to shame.”

And “remember Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from old.”

At the very heart of that is the basic understanding that we serve a God who loves us. Who cares for us. An eternal God, who has an eternal love for us.

But the psalmist goes on to say in our second reading this morning that “All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.” (Psalm 25:10)

The Psalmist speaks of a God to who he can go and ask for forgiveness and strength from. Who has love and mercy ‘more than enough’. A God who is steadfast and merciful and full of love. So much love that psalmist declares he can put his hope into God all day long.

This is one of those Psalms that when you read it, you are instantly encouraged, instantly uplifted. You feel like whatever is in front of me I can go on.

And we are in that particular time which we call the “Lenten Season”. When we must confront the reality of a God who’s love for us was so great, that He would send His one and only Son to not only be an atonement for our sins, but would show us how to live as we ought.

And our journey as we follow Christ to the cross this morning takes us to witness a familiar moment. Familiar to us, because in our humanity we have all had one experience in common. The experience of having our resolve tested.

Our scripture opens in Matthew 4 with the words “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” (Matt 4:1)

The important words here are “Led by the Spirit”. In other words, there was a purpose and a reason for what Jesus was about to go through.

And since we know that there are common things to our experience as humans, such as the faithfulness of God, and the testing that comes our way it’s important to take a look at how Christ responded in the wilderness on that day since we know that temptations and testing come to all as well.

There are key points that we can look at as we examine our Matthew scripture this morning

The first thing we see Jesus do as he is confronted by the enemy is Jesus used the word of God and knew the word of God

From Matt 4:3-4:

³The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

The devil throws ‘punches’ of a sorts, much like a street fighter or a bully. It’s the sucker punch of doubt. The devil waits until Jesus is impacted by human hunger after fasting for 40 days, and attempts to entice Jesus with what will satisfy the flesh. The devil tempts the flesh and twists the word of God.

This sucker punch of doubt is a move the devil goes to often. If he can get us to doubt what God has said to us, he can get a foothold. With that foothold we are then focusing more on the human desire we are confronted with at the moment and it becomes very easy for our minds and our hearts to be swayed away from what God would have for us.

We overcome the sucker punch of the devil with the word of God.

When confronted with the twisted words, Jesus comes back at it with a direct quote from Deuteronomy 8:3 “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

So what’s the principle here? We must know the Word of God for ourselves. This is why Bible study is so critically important. This is why meditating on the scriptures is important.

We have to be clear about what we know.

It has been said that the FBI agents are trained in spotting counterfeit currency not by studying every piece of fraudulent money, but by know the look, feel, even the smell of the real money/dollar. They know the real thing so well that spotting a fake becomes easy.

There are so many counterfeit religions, misspoken scriptures, and misuse of the word of God, that we have to know the real thing. We can’t know the real thing if we have not become students of God’s word.

Joshua 1:8 says: “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

It is the responsibility of every Christian to know the Bible for ourselves. 2nd Timothy 2:15 says “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

The Bible is quite simply the word of truth.

Jesus knew this when He faced the enemy in the wilderness.

In other words, when satan tries to convince Jesus in His physically weakened state that Jesus’ meal situation can be remedied by breaking what Jesus came there to do.

Remember Jesus was led to the wilderness by the Spirit – so God had a divine plan in motion that Jesus needed to follow. To not do the direct will of God is sin. Once we determine not to do what God wants, we sin.

Jesus confronts the enemy using the word of God letting satan know that God will take care of Him. That same faithful God that the Psalmist talked of. That same faithful God who established a covenant for His people.

The Faithful One, Jesus tells him will take care of me.

You see, when we allow our needs to tempt us to moving outside of God's will, we sin. Jesus could have turned those stones into bread. In this moment Jesus is confronted with the reality of the human body he was in. He was hungry.

Having gone without food for 40 days and 40 nights, in His humanity was hungry. In Jesus' power of His divinity, He could have turned those stones into bread, but He would have been exercising His powers independently of the Father. And Jesus came to obey the Father. The Father whom Jesus knows is faithful.

And then we have this curious moment that occurs in the next verse that takes us to our second point this morning. Point 2: We have to faithfully follow God's plan.

Matthew 4:5-6 reads:

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." ⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

Jesus, who knows everything, because He is God 'enfleshed'. Both human and divine. The devil can offer Jesus no real authority, because Jesus is already in control. As we read in 1 Peter 3:22 Jesus Christ, "who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him." ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

In other words, power and authority is not what is really being offered here, but a way to circumvent the plan that will unfold with the cross. Jesus is trying to be tricked that Jesus can get some kind of short cut. Avoid the cross. Avoid the pain. Avoid all the difficulties. I'll give you all of that if you just abandon the plan.

There are no short cuts to the plan of God. That's the lesson for us today. God has a plan for our lives. Every step God wants us to take is ordered by the Lord. That's why we pray "Father your will be done".

We may have one plan for our lives that would sidestep all the things we would perceive as difficult, but God wants us to remember that He is a faithful God. His plan wouldn't lead us where His grace would not keep us.

And if we encounter heartache and difficult moments on the way? Proverbs 16:4 “The LORD works out everything to its proper end” and again in Romans 8:28 “28And we know that in all things **God works for the good** of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

God has a purpose for us. Even when things seem dark, God is still faithful. God still has a plan, a purpose. We never go wrong to stick with God's plan for our lives. How do we get to know God's plan for our lives? By getting to know God through prayer, meditation, listening to and for His voice.

And finally, we come to the final temptation and the final lesson for us this morning. Matthew 4:9, the devil says about all the things he was showing Jesus, ⁹“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

To which Jesus replies, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ ”

We have to know who is the true object of our worship and our devotion, and worship and serve Him only!

We do not worship personalities or give our devotion to famous figures of the day. That's what the world does. God reminds us “worship the Lord your God and serve Him only! In other words, we must remain faithful to God. Let us do as Jesus did and never become separated from our love and devotion to God.

He is faithful to us, we have to remain faithful to Him. Steadfast love and faithfulness.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.