

Repent and Believe in the Gospel

SUNDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2024 **GOSPEL READING: Mark 1:12-15**

12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him. 14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

SCRIPTURE READING: Genesis 9:8-15

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. 11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh."

Meditation: What is the significance of Jesus spending 40 days and nights of solitude, prayer and fasting in the Judean wilderness? In the Old Testament 40 days was often seen as a significant period of testing and preparation for entering into a covenant relationship with God. In the days of Noah, God judged the earth and destroyed its inhabitants in a great flood because of their idolatry and total rejection of God. Noah and his family were spared because they obeyed God and took refuge in the ark for 40 days. When the flood subsided God made a covenant with Noah and promised that he would not destroy the human race again. Jesus came to fulfill that promise.

Forty days of retreat to seek the face of God

When God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, he brought them into the wilderness of Sinai. Moses went to the mountain of the Lord at Sinai and remained there in prayer and fasting for 40 days (Exodus 24:18). At the conclusion of this 40-day encounter God made a covenant with Moses and the people. After the prophet Elijah had confronted the sin of idolatry (the worship of false gods) in the land of Israel and destroyed the 400 priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-40), he fled into the wilderness and journeyed for 40 days to the mountain of God at Sinai (1 Kings 19:8). There God spoke with Elijah and commissioned him to pass on the work of restoring the worship of the one true God in the land. After Jesus was anointed by the Spirit in the waters of the Jordan River, he journeyed to the wilderness of Judea for 40 days to prepare himself for the mission which the Father sent him to accomplish - to offer up his life as the perfect atoning sacrifice for our sins. Through the shedding of his blood on the cross he won for us a new and everlasting covenant which fulfilled and surpassed all the previous covenants which God had made with his people.

God's Word and Spirit sustains those who seek God's will

Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us in their Gospel accounts that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. Mark states it most emphatically: "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12). Why was Jesus compelled to seek solitude for such a lengthy period? Was it simply a test to prepare him for his ministry? Or did Satan want to lure him into a trap? The word *tempt* in English usually means to entice to sin or wrongdoing. The scriptural word here also means *test* in the sense of proving and purifying someone to see if they are ready for the task at hand. We test pilots to see that they are fit to fly. Likewise, God tests his servants to see if they are fit to be used by him.

God tested Abraham to prove his faith. The Israelites were sorely tested in Egypt before God delivered them from their enemies. Jesus was no exception to this testing. Satan, in turn, did his best to entice Jesus to choose his own will over the will of his Father in heaven. Despite his weakened condition, due to fatigue and lack of food for 40 days, Jesus steadfastly rejected Satan's subtle and not so subtle temptations. Where did Jesus find his strength to survive

the desert's harsh conditions and the tempter's seduction? He fed on his Father's word and found strength in doing his will. Satan will surely tempt us and will try his best to get us to choose our will over God's will. If he can't make us renounce our faith or sin mortally, he will then try to get us to make choices that will lead us, little by little, away from what God wants for us.

As soon as John the Baptist had finished his ministry, Jesus began his in Galilee, his home district. John's enemies had sought to silence him, but the Gospel cannot be silenced. Jesus proclaimed that the time of restoration proclaimed by the prophets was now being fulfilled in his very person and that the kingdom of God was at hand. What is the kingdom of God? The word "kingdom" means something more than a territory or an area of land. It literally means "sovereignty" or "reign" and the power to "rule" and exercise authority. The prophets announced that God would establish a kingdom not just for one nation or people but for the whole world. God sent us his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, not to establish an earthly kingdom but to bring us into his heavenly kingdom - a kingdom ruled by justice, truth, peace, and holiness. The kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus' mission. It's the core of his Gospel message.

Two conditions for the kingdom - repent and believe

How do we enter the kingdom of God? In announcing the good news of the Gospel Jesus gave two explicit things each of us must do in order to receive the kingdom of God: *repent and believe*. Repent means to turn away from sin and wrongdoing in order to follow God's way of love, truth, and moral goodness. When we submit to God's rule in our lives and believe in the Gospel message the Lord Jesus gives us the grace and power to live a new way of life as citizens of his kingdom. He gives us grace to renounce the kingdom of darkness ruled by pride, sin, and Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44) and the ruler of this present world (John 12:31). Repentance is the first step to surrendering my will and my life to God.

Repentance means to change - to change my way of thinking, my attitude, my disposition, and the way I choose to live my life - so that the Lord Jesus can be the Master and Ruler of my heart, mind, and will. Whatever stands in the way of God's will and plan for my life must be surrendered to him - my sinful pride, my rebellious attitude, and stubborn will to do as I please rather than as God pleases. If I am only sorry for the consequences of my own sinful ways, I will very likely keep repeating the same sins that control my thoughts and actions. True repentance requires a contrite heart and true sorrow for sin (Psalm 51:17) and a firm resolution to avoid the near occasion of sin. The Lord Jesus gives us the grace to see sin for what it really is - a rejection of his love, truth, and wisdom for our lives and a refusal to do what he says is right and good for us. His grace brings pardon and freedom from guilt and breaks the power of bondage to sin in our lives through the strength and help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. If we yield to the Holy Spirit and not to our sinful inclinations, we will find the strength and help we need to turn away from all wrong-doing and whatever else might keep us from living in his truth and love.

To *believe* is to take Jesus at his word and to recognize that God loved us so much that he sent his only begotten Son to free us from bondage to sin and harmful desires. God made the supreme sacrifice of his Son on the cross to bring us back to a relationship of peace, friendship, and unity with our Father in heaven. He is *our* Father, and he wants us to live in joy and freedom as his *beloved* sons and daughters. God loved us first and he invites us in love to surrender our lives to him. Do you believe in the Gospel - the good news of Jesus Christ - and in the power of the Holy Spirit who transforms each one of us into the likeness of Christ?

Lord Jesus, your word is life, joy, wisdom, and strength for me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may have the strength and courage to embrace your will in all things and to renounce whatever is contrary to your will for me.

OPENING PRAYER: - Lord Jesus, your word is power and life. May I never doubt your love and mercy, and the power of your word that sets us free, and brings healing and restoration to body, mind, heart, and spirit. **Amen**

CLOSING PRAYER:- **"World Peace"** Lord, we pray for the victims of the recent Cyclone in Nth. Queensland that they have the resolve to rebuild their lives and homes after the forces of nature have turned against them, also the war in Ukraine and now Israel with Palestine

that those effected have the strength to go on and the leaders of these countries find a peaceful resolution to these wars. **Amen.**