

CAP ASH WEDNESDAY SERMON 2024

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: Luke 4:1-13

I love this period of Lent. It is so special because it gives us such a wonderful opportunity to focus on the cross, the one thing that was given as a gift, that has enabled us to know that our journey here will end in the presence of God because of what He has done for us. Even as we think about that, of being in His holy presence, Lent gives us the opportunity to take steps in our own lives to make sure that we can get rid of those things that would mar our own being, mar our sense of holiness, mar the kind of holiness that we think we have, as Isaiah found out. And Lent gives us that opportunity to say: I didn't realize that I had this particular issue or problem or trait. And then to say, Lord, would You help me get rid of it? it's a wonderful time where, as I often say, we can have a holy discontent with our spiritual lives. And then allow the Lord to work what He always does so beautifully.

Luke 4:1-13

"⁴ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness ²for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. ³ And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." ⁴ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.'"

⁵ And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶ And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and ^[c]its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. ⁷ Therefore if You ^[d]worship before me, it shall all be Yours." ⁸ Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"

⁹ And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; ¹⁰ for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,'"

*¹¹ and,
'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP,
SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'"*

¹² And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'"

¹³ When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time."

Heavenly Father, this is an account of Your Son, and we invite You, Holy Spirit, to speak to us, to show us what we can take away from this confrontation that You had, Lord Jesus, with the evil one. in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

I'd like for us to follow through with this passage of scripture, just pulling out salient things that I think are important for our understanding as we get into this Lenten period.

1. Being filled with the Holy Spirit.

The first thing that strikes me is in v.1. It says, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil."

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit. When we are in confrontation with the evil one, and it's par for the course, that as you go through these forty days and try and deal with stuff that's in our lives, that the evil one will also be coming to try and thwart it. because his agenda is always to thwart the purposes of God. And the one sure way of being able to be victorious is to make sure that we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from Jordan to be tempted by the devil. How can we be sure that we are filled with the Holy Spirit? The obvious answer is to make sure that we are emptied of everything that is not of the Spirit. We need to be able to look at our lives and say: What in me is not of God? What in me would be at crossroads with what God wants in my life? What in me takes away peace? What in me steals joy? What in me has a conflict with God's will? All of these things are areas that we need to mine from our lives, and then ask the Lord to take them away. Yield our will to His and say, "Lord, would you do a dredging in my heart, in my life? would you show me these things and then would you take them out? I yield to you. Would you do a clean-up joy in my life? And as we do that, beloved, invite the Holy Spirit to then take the place of all those things so that we can be filled with the Holy Spirit.

I love the idea of coming to the table at the end of this service; and I invite you. This is a time where we are open to the Holy Spirit of God speaking to us, doing the things that He wants to do because He loves us so much. As we go through this service and He begins to point out areas in your life, make a note of it. Even as we speak, give them up to the Lord. But you'll have an opportunity as you come to the table to be able to say: I come and I lay this down. And even as I partake of the Supper that You have given to us, Lord, I invite the infilling of Your Spirit as well. Allow the Spirit of God to start moving and working in your life so that as we look at inviting the Lord to do a clean-up job in our lives, we are also being filled with the Holy Spirit to be able to do that.

2. Fasting.

Jesus ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. When Jesus was in the wilderness, He was fasting. And fasting has, in many ways, become synonymous with Lent. We fast during this period of 40 days. We fast from something. We give up something during this time.

There are a couple of things that I want to point out about fasting that might be important.

- **Fasting is never an end in itself.**

You cannot fast for the sake of fasting. The only thing that will happen is you'll probably lose weight. But fasting is a spiritual exercise which leads to something. When we fast from something, you begin to feel the need for it, you begin to be drawn to it. it's at that point that you then turn to the Lord and ask for His help.

Fasting must always lead us to the presence of God. It cannot be an end in itself. It should never be that you fast from something during the 40 days and never turn to the Lord during that time. It should never be that you start looking forward saying, "Only 19 days more and then I can start partaking in what I gave up." That would be the worst attitude that you can have about fasting. Fasting must be as you miss the thing that you're fasting from, you turn to the Lord and say, "Lord, it's because of the fasting that I have this relationship with You." It increases the relationship that we have with the Lord. Take those things that are close to your heart to Him. Fasting brings us closer to the Lord as we make sure that that dimension is the end of fasting.

So, as you fast, make sure that you always end in the presence of God and tell Him the things that are upon your heart.

- **Fasting is not meant to get the Lord to make a decision in your life.** “Lord, I’m going to fast for 40 days, and at the end of 40 days, I expect this.” No! It’s not a kind of transaction we make with the Lord. Fasting helps us to draw so much closer to the Lord. Because of it being a spiritual dimension, we begin to understand God’s will, God’s way, God’s holiness in a better way. And that helps us navigate what we are going through. It’s only through the lens of the Lord that we can then see what’s going on. It’s a better lens, and that’s what fasting helps with.

I remember hearing once of somebody who was fasting from meat, and they ended up at a barbecue one day. Everybody was eating meat, and the smell was so tantalizing. Finally, he looked at somebody else who was fasting and said, “Hey, fasting is not letting anything go into your stomach. So if we just take that piece of barbecued meat and chew on it, just the juice goes down, but we spit out the meat...” And another person said, “Man, you just lost the glory and the beauty of fasting in that moment.” Which was so true. In the midst of the humor of it all, that was the truism – that they had lost what God gloriously gives us through fasting.

- **Not drawing a line between the physical and the spiritual.**
v.3 And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” You have to understand what that really means – if You are the Son of God. In the Greek, it actually reads “If You are the Son of God, and you are.” Satan is acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God. If You are the Son of God, and of course You are, okay, then turn the stone to bread.

Jesus was hungry, and this would have been a very good option for Him. “Just go ahead and get some food. Why are you not doing that? you can do it. you are the Son of God.” And Satan was trying to draw a line between the physical and the spiritual. And that’s the key to fasting as well, that they both come together. It’s not about not having something. It’s about not having something so that we get closer to God. Satan was trying to make a wedge between the two and say, “Listen, You have the power to make these stones into bread. Do it. You’re hungry. Go ahead and do it.” But see how Jesus responded.

3. Know the Word of God.

Jesus said, “It is written: man shall not live on bread alone.” Beloved, the most effective way to blunt Satan is to use the Word of God. Always. He cannot stand the Word of God, because the Word of God is truth and Satan is a liar.

It is written. Here’s the thing. We can only say it is written if we know that it is written. We can only use the words we have committed to memory when we meet a temptation like this. To know how to respond – what words can I use from the Word of God that will help me in this situation? If we don’t know what is written, how can we use what is written?

There’s a limit to how many times you can use John 3:16, or “the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” As you look at these days before Easter, maybe one of the disciplines that you can do is to memorize scripture. Everyday pick one verse to memorize and at the end of this Lenten season, you would have 40 verses that are added to your arsenal as you deal with Satan. I’d be more than willing to send you a verse every day. I think it would be one of the most wonderful things that we can do –

begin to take the scripture from the pages of the Bible, and have them etched upon our hearts. "It is written," He said. You cannot go against the word of God. And I've got the word of God in my heart.

4. Do not give allegiance to Satan.

V.5 says, And he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. and the devil said to Him, "I will give you all this domain and its glory, for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You worship before me, it shall be yours."

The most striking part of these couple of verses is this: For it has been handed over to me. Do you know when it got handed over? In the Garden of Eden. It got handed over when Adam and Eve chose allegiance to Satan rather than to God. God made them managers, stewards of everything that was on earth. But as managers, they changed their allegiance to Satan. And in that change, Satan was able to say, "I will give you all this domain and its glory for it has been handed over to me." That's what we lost and it took the incarnation to get it back from Satan.

When we yield to Satan, we give him access to the things that we have. That's what happens at a micro level. Each time he comes and offers us something, and we take it, he takes a little bit of our life and he has that hold over us. His aim is to just expand that hold on you, to continue to take more and more of you and to snuff out the voice of the Holy Spirit. That's what happens when we yield to him.

How do we yield to him? We yield when we yield to areas that are in the dark. Remember this: God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness. It's a spiritual principle that God exists in the light and Satan exists in darkness. When we operate in darkness, Satan has full access into us. What is darkness? Darkness are the things of the flesh. Anything that is outside of the will of God is darkness. So a good point for us during this time is to ask the question: What are areas of darkness. There are good lists in Galatians, Ephesians – the things of the flesh. Is there anger? Is there resentment? Is there bitterness? Is there strife? Is there gossip? There's a whole list of things, all of them are areas of the flesh that Satan has clear landing rights. It might be good for us to ask the question: What have I allowed into my life that allows Satan access? "Therefore," he says, "if you worship me, it shall be yours." That's what Satan desires. He wants our worship. We are committed to worshipping the one true God. In v.8 Jesus answers, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord, your God and serve Him only.'" Scripture again.

5. Satan can use scripture to tempt us.

In v. 9-11, "And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,' and 'On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'"

Satan now uses scripture to try and tempt Jesus. He's quoting from Psalm 91. Yet, he doesn't quote fully; he misses out a few words. Later, check out what Satan has left out. But that's the way he comes. He will use God's word out of context. He will take away parts of it to make it sound like it's the right thing to do. And here again, the only way that you and I can know that it is a truncated word from the Bible is to know the actual word. It places that amount of weight on knowing scripture. Jesus answered and said to him, "You shall not put the Lord, your God to the test."

6. Satan waits for the opportune moment.

¹³ When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.

Satan never gets tired of trying to trip you up. Never. He will do it until we leave this earth. And the way to have victory is during these periods of spiritual renewal, we need to build ourselves up

spiritually so that even at the end of these 40 days, and we go into the 41st, and the 42nd and the 365th day, we would have been so well prepared that we can withstand his attacks. Because he always waits for an opportune time to come back to us.

I want to lay before you three things as we close.

- i) He challenged the Father's ability to meet Jesus' needs.
Here was Jesus, hungry. And Satan was saying: Stop depending on your Father. you can do it yourself. And so often we get caught in that – waiting for God to do something in our lives, and finally we say: forget it. I'm just going to do what I think I need to do. I wonder whether some of us here need to say, Lord, I'm not going to jump in. I'm not going to yield to that temptation to take things away from You and begin to chart my own life.
- ii) He offered Jesus an easier way to meet His goals. The goal that Jesus had was to give His life. he was saying, in short: I will give you all the kingdoms of the world. Why do You want to die? Why? just take the kingdoms. Yet, if Jesus had taken it, it would have been only for that generation. It's the cross, the Blood that He shed that has made Him available for all generations.
And so often the temptation for us is to cut a corner and think temporarily instead of thinking permanently. To think of temporal things instead of the eternal. And I wonder whether there are things that are facing you today where you're tempted to cut a corner and say: Forget it. I'll just make the move myself.
- iii) He challenged the Father's protection of His son. Throw Yourself down. This is the word of God, Your Father. he says that He will protect You, that nothing will happen to You. Go ahead. And again, Satan very often uses scripture out of context. I want to say this to you beloved. Don't take verses out of the Bible by chance. Don't open your bible and say: I'm going to open it and whatever it says, I'm going to do. That's not the way for us to use the word of God.

A story is told about a man who opened the bible and said, "The first verse I see, I'm going to follow." He opened it and it said, "and Judas went and committed suicide." He closed it again very quickly and said, "I think I'll use another verse." Again he opened it and it said, "go and do likewise."

Don't ever use the word of God like that. Use the word of God in context. Always. Look at what it says. Look at the reasons why it was spoken, when it was spoken. then, if you think that this is a verse for you, this is a direction for you, then take it back to the Lord and say, "Lord, would You give me peace about this? Would You show me that this is Your will and Your way." And where God's will is, beloved, there is always peace. where His will is not, you will not have peace.

I'm going to end here as we head into the Lord's Supper. There's a lot in this passage that we can mine for many Wednesdays, but I'm going to trust that the Spirit of God is speaking to each one of us, pointing out areas that we need to deal with. And maybe today is an area that can be dealt with just like that. Or maybe there's an area that has been so long-standing, that it's going to take these 40 days to really get victory. Maybe the Lord is saying, "I want you to press until we get that out of you."

Heavenly Father, we look to You, Abba, and say: Would You shine the light of Your presence upon our lives? Would You show us those things that really have no business being in our lives? Then Lord,

would You inspire us and encourage us to deal with it? Lord, all of us are here because we want to grow as disciples. We want to grow into Your likeness, to be reflectors of Your image, to be image-bearers in truth. and so we open ourselves up to You and say: Lord, would You work in our hearts? Even today, I pray for each one here. I pray that your word would come with great clarity. Pull away those things that can bring confusion, for You are not a God of chaos but of order. And show us Lord, what we need to deal with today. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.