

An Introduction – From Ash Wednesday

Whatever we do it has to start somewhere. As Jesus prepared himself for his mission, we prepare ourselves. The inspiration for this work came from God and reading the scriptures. When Praying I first was drawn to the parallel between the 40 years of the Exodus journey and the 40 days Jesus fasted in the wilderness. (The Israelites were Exiles in Egypt for much longer than this but it is the journey we are concerned with because we are all on a journey, coming from different starting points but hopefully ending with God on Earth.)

This naturally flowed into the 40 days of Lent, a time of preparation. In 2021 when I am writing this it looks like this will also be the beginning of our journey out of the isolation caused by the Covid-19/Sars-cov-2 pandemic into a new era. How this era pans out and develops is down to the players in the world, living out the life Jesus has planned for us. This is designed to provide a starter on readings for the Journey. The bible readings are followed by notes from some commentaries, some thoughts of my own, and some questions that might have some relevance to you and the scriptures. Feel free to use this as a starting point and not to be constrained by my thoughts.

¹ For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.¹

Sometimes we like the ritual, and when it is taken away we feel the loss deeply, as if it was the real thing. This journey is about preparing and concentrating on the real thing. That is the one true Eternal God, who is the Father in Heaven, the Son born, crucified, raised from the dead and risen again, ascended to heaven, and the Holy spirit that fills us with life, guides, gifts and empowers us, until we too are called to be with Him who adopts us as his children.

So I encourage you to set some time aside, to pray and listen to God for extended periods of time, to read the scriptures and think about the quotations, on your own or with friends (in person or using zoom, facetime, messenger, or even just a phone) as we seek to follow Jesus in our journey this Lent

Yours in faith
John Whitney

¹ Jeremiah 29:11 (NIVa 2011)

Exodus 12:31–36 (NIVa 2011)

³¹ During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, ‘Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. ³² Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.’

³³ The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. ‘For otherwise,’ they said, ‘we will all die!’ ³⁴ So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. ³⁵ The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. ³⁶ The Lord had made the Egyptians favourably disposed towards the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

Matthew 6:1–21 (NIVa 2011)

6 ‘Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² ‘So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

⁵ ‘And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ ‘This, then, is how you should pray:

‘ “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

¹⁶ ‘When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your

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head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

¹⁹ ‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Some thoughts from others

Jesus warns his disciples that obedience in the public arena does not guarantee a reward from God, because motive is more important than simple activity. Jesus goes on to demonstrate this by three examples of Jewish piety—giving to the needy (6:2–4), praying (6:5–15), and fasting (6:16–18). By the time of Jesus the phrase “to do mercy”² had become a technical expression of caring for the poor by giving alms.³

6:14–15 Verses 14–15 repeat in third-person form the thought of v. 12 and add the negative consequences of failure to forgive others. See the comments on v. 12 for more details, but note that Jesus is not claiming God’s unwillingness to forgive recalcitrant sinners but disclosing their lack of capacity to receive such forgiveness^{4,5}

6:16–18 Various kinds of fasts were commonly practiced in OT times, though the law required only one fast a year, on the Day of Atonement (though fasting is probably implied by the command to “afflict yourselves”; Lev. 16:29–34; 23:26–32). In addition to abstaining from food, people were to humble themselves by praying, mourning, and wearing sackcloth.⁶

6:16–18 Jesus proceeds with the third example of a common element of Jewish piety. He himself has fasted for forty days (4:2–11). Pharisees typically fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, refraining from food but not from drink. In light of such texts as 9:14–17, fasting is more controversial in Christian circles than

² See Acts 9:36; 10:2; 24:17; cf. Tob. 1:3, 16; 4:7–8; Sir. 7:10.

³ WILKINS, MICHAEL J.: [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Zondervan Publishing House, 2004

⁴ C. F. D. Moule, “ ‘... As We Forgive ...’ ” in *Donum Gentilicum*, ed. E. Bammel, C. K. Barrett, and W. D. Davies (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 68–77.

⁵ BLOMBERG, CRAIG: [Matthew](#), The New American Commentary. vol. 22. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992

⁶ CROSSWAY BIBLES: [The ESV Study Bible](#). Wheaton, IL : Crossway Bibles, 2008

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prayer or giving to the needy. Jesus apparently did not give this spiritual discipline a high priority, especially during his ministry, but he did anticipate that it would occur later (9:15).⁷

Since the religious leaders fasted in order to get recognition from the people, that is all the reward that they will receive. “Acts of righteousness,” such as fasting, are of no value if not done with the right motives.⁸

No Questions – Just time to pray.

⁷ BLOMBERG, CRAIG: [Matthew](#), The New American Commentary. vol. 22. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992

⁸ WILKINS, MICHAEL J.: [Matthew](#), *The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI : Zondervan Publishing House, 2004

Lent 1- 40 days / 40 Years

It is tempting to see the whole 'Lent thing' as a bit religious, and so taint it with the brush Jesus uses to taint the Pharisees. Indeed the secular world knows it is missing something and is driven to create pale imitations such as Veganuary, Movember... there are constantly people telling us to give up this or that and to shout about it publicly. But is that what we should be feeling? The whole time of preparation in the wilderness is set against the temptations (and failures) of the Israelites and Adam and Eve in the garden (from where they were cast out). As the Israelites asked in verse 11 of Moses, it is right we ask of God What have you done to us by bringing us through Covid and these lockdowns? Our journey is to take us to greater faith and equip us for ministry in the new normal as Jesus made himself fit for his ministry. We are reminded we are called to be temples of God, resting spaces for his Holy Spirit, and that we are loved by God. In doing this it was in fasting and prayer that Jesus went through his 40 days in the wilderness. So let us concentrate on spending some time each day listening to God and his word. Look at the encounters if the Israelites in the wilderness with Sin, and Jesus encounter with the Devil up close and personal. As we follow this Easter Journey where Jesus conquers sin and death, to rise again.

Exodus 14:10–16 (NIVa 2011)

¹⁰ As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. ¹¹ They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Didn't we say to you in Egypt, "Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians"? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!'

¹³ Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴ The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.'

¹⁵ Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. ¹⁶ Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.'

Matthew 4:1–2 (NIVa 2011)

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

Some thoughts from others

Crossway Commentary says

The temptations are a diabolical attempt to subvert God’s plan for human redemption by causing Jesus to fall into sin and disobedience, thus disqualifying him as the sinless Saviour.

4:1 Jesus was led up by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit guided Jesus in his earthly life, providing a pattern for Jesus’ followers to be empowered and led by the Holy Spirit (cf. notes on Gal. 5:16; 5:17; 5:18). The Greek for tempted (peirazō) can also mean “test.” While God clearly never tempts anyone to do evil (see note on James 1:13), he does use circumstances to test a person’s character (e.g., Heb. 11:17). by the devil. Diabolos (Gk. “slanderer, accuser”) is here preceded by the definite article to indicate that this one who tempts Jesus is uniquely “the devil” (see also Matt. 4:5,9)

Wilkins Writes:

Jesus’ ministry begins in the desert, probably once again referring to the highlands of the Judean desert west of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. This is likely the same desert in which John the Baptist appeared (3:1). But unlike John, Jesus will not first preach. He will fast. Throughout his public ministry Jesus will often get away to lonely places by himself to prepare for a particularly significant event (e.g., 14:13, 23).¹⁰

Turner writes:

4:1 Matthew’s τότε (tote, then) places Jesus’s testing temporally and logically after his baptism. Jesus must first be attested by the Father before he may be tested by the devil. There are several references to the devil in Matthew. Six times he is described as ὁ διάβολος (4:1, 5, 8, 11; 13:39; 25:41). He is also referred to as σατανᾶς (adversary) in 4:10; 12:26 (cf. 16:23 referring to Simon Peter), as Βεελζεβούλ in 10:25; 12:24, 27, as ὁ ἐχθρός in 13:39, and, if the substantive adjective refers to a person, as ὁ πονηρός in 5:37, 39; 6:13; 13:19, 38.

⁹ CROSSWAY BIBLES: [The ESV Study Bible](#). Wheaton, IL : Crossway Bibles, 2008

¹⁰ WILKINS, MICHAEL J.: [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Zondervan Publishing House, 2004, Pg 154

Although the desert may have been viewed as a place of danger and evil spirits (Matt. 12:43), its chief import here is redemptive-historical. Jesus as God's obedient Son recapitulates the history of Israel, God's disobedient son. This seems clear from the parallel features of the accounts and the repeated citations of Deut. 6–8¹¹

And some questions for us

1. What is the most important thing you feel you have to do every day?
2. What do you get hungry for?
3. Where is the most remote place you have ever been and where have you been the loneliest?
4. When we try and get away for some quiet time who comes after you, trying to drag you back to the busy world?
5. What is your biggest distraction or displacement activity?
6. How does this compare to people around you and your neighbours in the world?

¹¹ TURNER, DAVID L.: [Matthew](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Academic, 2008 Pg 126

Lent 2 - Tempted with food.

When we are tempted it is often with the familiar but currently in short supply items of our everyday life. The Israelites left Egypt with unleavened bread, but soon were complaining that Moses and God hadn't provided for them in the wilderness.

How often do we grumble? How often do we have to be assured that God hears us! Moses has to repeatedly assure the people that God hears them and answers with meat and bread. Given that they had been following God's path, been brought through the red sea (literally) and been given drinkable water where there was only bitter water why were they so quick to doubt.

Our time in this wilderness has been long with false dawns and yet vaccinations and improving treatment why are people still searching for the way the vaccine will fail when it is being demonstrably successful. God is with us in this suffering and will provide. Why should we turn away. The tempter was trying to persuade Jesus to make substandard provision for himself, like people relying on others to help their neighbours instead of helping themselves, like those relying on others to take the vaccine thinking they will be safe, forgetting those that the unvaccinated may infect and kill. Jesus new we need the whole package that only God can provide, and this is what he is demonstrating here. We need the whole life of God, his provision, forgiveness and life-giving spirit. Remember sometimes we don't have to wait as long as we expect, in Exodus 4:7 they are told they will see the glory of the lord in the morning but are shown it approaching in verse 10.

Exodus 16:1–12 (NIVa 2011)

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. ² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat round pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.'

⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. ⁵ On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.'

⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against

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us?’⁸ Moses also said, ‘You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.’

⁹ Then Moses told Aaron, ‘Say to the entire Israelite community, “Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.” ’

¹⁰ While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked towards the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.

¹¹ The Lord said to Moses, ¹² ‘I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, “At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.” ’

Matthew 4:3–4 (NIVa 2011)

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

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

Some thoughts from others

Peter Enns writes

Without any hint of anger or malice, God provides for his people again, but with one minor provision. They are only to gather as much bread as they need for each day. This is a test, a point explicitly made in 16:4,¹²

The ESV Study bible says

16:7 Moses repeatedly stresses that the people’s grumbling is both against the Lord (also twice in v. 8) and heard by him (also vv. 8, 9, 12), regardless of how they choose to describe their situation (see vv. 2–3). Since the people are responding to the Lord’s power as if it is disconnected from his person (see v. 3), Moses says that they will see the glory of the Lord (v. 10), which is a manifestation of his presence (see 24:16–17; 40:34–35).¹³

¹² ENNS, PETER: [Exodus](#), *The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI : Zondervan, 2000

¹³ CROSSWAY BIBLES: [The ESV Study Bible](#). Wheaton, IL : Crossway Bibles, 2008

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Stuart Douglas says:

God was testing his people throughout the exodus events: leading them in odd directions without fully explaining why (14:1–4), surprising them with potentially destructive enemy attacks even after they had left Egypt (14:10ff.; cf. 17:8ff.), requiring them to walk into and through deep ocean water (14:15ff.), and taking them to locations that lacked the necessities of life (as in 15:23ff. and 16:2ff.). All of these challenges were part of a plan to develop a people’s willingness to trust him. Explaining¹⁴

Craig Bloomer says:

4:3–4 Matthew now refers to the devil by his function. “The tempter” addresses Jesus with the same title God applied to him at his baptism (3:17). The first-class conditional clause, “If you are the Son of God,” does not imply any doubt on the devil’s part (cf. Jas 2:19). Rather, what is in doubt is what type of Son Jesus will be. If stones can become children of Abraham (3:9) or provide water for the Israelites (Exod 17:1–7), then they can surely satisfy Jesus’ hunger.¹⁵

Esv Study bible says:

Jesus obeyed as a man, as the representative for all who believe, so as to “fulfill all righteousness” (3:15) on behalf of his people.¹⁶

Wilkins highlights that:

The voice from heaven recently confirmed the identity and the p 158 relationship to Jesus as “my Son, whom I love” (3:17). Satan does not doubt Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, nor is he trying to get Jesus to doubt it; rather, he is trying to get Jesus to misuse his prerogatives as the Son of God.¹⁷

¹⁴ STUART, DOUGLAS K.: [Exodus](#), *The New American Commentary*. vol. 2. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006

¹⁵ BLOMBERG, CRAIG: [Matthew](#), *The New American Commentary*. vol. 22. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992

¹⁶ CROSSWAY BIBLES: [The ESV Study Bible](#). Wheaton, IL : Crossway Bibles, 2008

¹⁷ WILKINS, MICHAEL J.: [Matthew](#), *The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI : Zondervan Publishing House, 2004

Some Questions

- 1.** When have you most doubted who you are?
- 2.** How would you have reacted to the provision in wilderness?
- 3.** What were you prepared to do to assert or hide your identity?
- 4.** How does being an adopted child of God change your identity?
- 5.** How would you contrast the people in the exodus with Jesus, and also with people inside and outside the church today?
- 6.** Can you understand why it was important for Jesus to resist supplying his own needs? How does this contrast and compliment him saying 'Ask and you will receive' to us (John 16:24, Luke 11:9, Mark 11:24)
- 7.** How do you feel about James' comments on our asking in James 4:3