

## Everything That Was Written in the Past

Last week we concluded our first installment of a series we've been studying together called "The Story." This series will lead us through 31 stories in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Last week we looked at the story of Samuel, the tenth story in the series. We will take a break from this until next fall when we will pick up with the story of the first kings of Israel, Saul and David and continue on through the end of the Old Testament. This summer, beginning in July, we will focus on the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament books of Proverbs, Psalms, Job, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. That should be fun.

A few weeks ago, during Spring break, we took a break from our series on "The Story" and reflected on the fact that some people are a little uncomfortable spending so much time in the Old Testament. In our particular heritage, Churches of Christ, we often refer to ourselves as New Testament Christians. Some have interpreted this phrase to mean that the Old Testament is less important to us than the New Testament, especially the New Testament from the book of Acts on. In that earlier lesson I noted Jesus' statement that he had come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it and tried to show how Jesus' teaching and thus the teaching of the New Testament is not a replacement of the Old Testament but a reinforcement of it. This morning I want to return to the life of Jesus and to show again the

role of the Old Testament in his life, and thus in our own, especially in dealing with the temptations and trials we face in our life. But I want to begin by reminding ourselves of the Apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 3:16, *All Scripture is God-breathed, useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

All of us would surely agree with Paul. Scripture is vital to spiritual growth. But what we sometimes forget is, the Scripture to which Paul refers is not our New Testament, rather it is what we call today the Old Testament. In Paul's day there was no New Testament. True, the various as yet uncollected writings of the apostles might have been included in Paul's mind, but when the early believers heard the word "Scripture," they would think first of the Jewish Scriptures, the Law and the Prophets. In fact, much of what would later be called the New Testament, is the Old Testament!

According to one source there are over 340 direct quotations of the Old Testament in the New and over 2,300 allusions to Old Testament passages. For example Paul instructs us specifically to read the Old Testament for spiritual instruction. *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope* (Romans 15:1- 4).

Mark begins his gospel by describing it as the gospel of Isaiah. When Mark

writes his gospel he follows an outline provided in the book of Isaiah.

In the book of Acts we are told the disciples were devoted to the apostles' teaching. Much of their teaching directs us to the old prophets. Paul quotes Habakkuk in Romans 1:17, *The righteous will live by faith*. He quotes Isaiah in Phillipians, *Every knee will bow every tongue will confess* and in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, *No eye has seen no ear has heard no mind has conceive what god has prepared for those who love him*. Later in that same letter he quotes Hosea, *Where O death is your victory, where O death is your sting?* Peter quotes Moses, *Be holy because I am holy* and he quotes Isaiah, *All men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field, the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever*. James quotes the Proverbs, *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble*. Its fine to be New Testament Christians as long as we don't forget that the New Testament is filled with affirmation of Old Testament teaching. The simple fact is, if we don't know the Old, we won't fully understand the New.

Perhaps the best reason for us to devote ourselves to the Old Testament Scriptures is simply the fact that these were the scriptures our Lord was devoted to! These are the scriptures Mary shared with Jesus as he grew up. These are the scriptures Jesus heard preached in the Synagogue. These are the scriptures that shaped Jesus and his teaching, the scriptures he

referred to when he said *I came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it*. As disciples of Jesus then, it makes sense doesn't it, for us to reflect on the words Jesus reflected on and especially so in times of stress and trial, because we know that Jesus, in times of great stress, gained strength and guidance from the Old Scriptures.

We see that in Matthew 4, the temptation of Jesus. You know the story. Immediately following Jesus' baptism, Jesus goes into the desert. It is a time of intense spiritual discipline: rugged terrain, hot and dusty, no food or water, Jesus seeks the Father and the Father's purpose for his life. At the end of 40 days, Satan comes and tempts Jesus. And during this time of great spiritual struggle, we see one reason why the Scriptures were so important to Jesus, for he turns to them to find spiritual direction and strength.

Three times Satan tempts Jesus and three times Jesus deals with temptation by quoting from the old scriptures, specifically the book of Deuteronomy. In this story we learn the truths Jesus had learned to depend on. Satan begins his temptations with, *If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread*. By this time Jesus must have been desperately hungry, so Satan appeals to Jesus' physical hunger. Use your power as the Son of God and make a meal. Here is a great temptation not only to Jesus, but to all of us: to value immediate physical and material satisfaction over eternal spiritual fulfillment. Satan offers Jesus the spiritual equivalent of a

happy meal, a kind of MacFaith that values above everything else instant gratification.

But Satan is not merely tempting Jesus the man, he is also tempting Jesus the Messiah. He wants Jesus to turn these stones into bread not just to instantly feed himself, but also to be a Messiah who appeals to the people by showing his ability to instantly feed them, instantly heal them, instantly give them what they want. Satan is tempting Jesus to buy his followers. Give people what they want and they will let you lead. This is a constant temptation for religion. Believe in Jesus and you will be rich, successful, famous. But because Jesus knew the Scriptures, Jesus knew better, because he knew the story of Israel in the wilderness, and the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 8: 1-5. Matthew only records a phrase, but surely Jesus has the whole passage in mind. *Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart... He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that...Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*

Jesus knew there was something worse than a famine of food, there can be a famine of the Word. The prophet Amos had taught him that. *“The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “when I will send a famine*

*through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it (8:11,12).*

Because Jesus knew the Word he knew that filling one's belly with food would never be as satisfying as filling one's heart with God. The prophet Isaiah had taught him that. *Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. (55:1-3)* Well, Jesus not only passes this first wilderness test, he would go on to fill his teaching with these same truths. Matthew 6:33 records, *Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you.* John 6: 27 says, *Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.*

So, having failed to snare Jesus with his first temptation, Satan tries a second. *If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down for it is written...* And here, Satan reverts back to an old technique he used with Eve, quoting God's word against God himself. He quotes Psalm 91:11 to Jesus: *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.* This is a great

temptation for those who follow God and believe in God's power. It is the temptation to be people who demand of God rather than depend on God. True, God can deliver us from evil, he can heal us, he can miraculously provide for us. It is also true, he can choose not to, or at least not on our demand, our timetable.

We can understand better what Satan is trying to do by looking at how Jesus responds. It is written, Jesus says, "*Do not put the Lord your God to the test.*" Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16. Here Moses is reminding Israel of the story told in Exodus 17:7 at Meribah when the water came from the rock. God had delivered Israel from Egypt, miraculously led them with pillars of fire and cloud, miraculously fed them with manna but Israel was now thirsty and she grumbled, *Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to make us and our children die of thirst?* Israel had a "What have you done for me lately" faith. When things went bad, they lost faith. If God didn't rescue them immediately, they immediately doubted him. Jesus knew his scriptures and because he knew his scriptures he was able to resist Satan by remembering the truths and the lessons learned in this story of Israel.

Jesus knew that his faith was not in what God would do. His faith was in God whatever he would do. Jesus knew the words from the story of Job, *Though he slay me, yet will I fear him.* Jesus knew the story of Daniel's friends who as they stood ready to enter the fire by faith, said to

Nebuchednezar *Our God can save us, but even if he does not, we will serve him.* Jesus knew the faith of Jeremiah who despite all the tragedy God allowed in his life, is still able to declare, *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercy never comes to an end. The Lord is my portion, I will trust in him.*

Again Jesus passes the test by trusting in the truth of scripture, truth he will continue to teach in his own ministry. Matthew 12:39 *A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign!* It is not that signs and wonders are not given at times to help us believe, but he knows our faith must be in God, not in signs. Jesus would say later to his disciples, *Because you have seen me you have believed: blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (Jn 20:29).

Here is a very important choice all of us must make, a choice between the religion Satan offers and the religion Jesus offers. Satan wanted Jesus to be a Messiah that gave people what they wanted, when they wanted it, instantaneously and sensationally. But Jesus knows we must love God for who he is, not just for what he can give us or how spectacularly he can give it. As Jeremiah said, *The Lord is my portion.* Portion means “the part that is allotted to a person.” If all I get out of this world is the Lord, if I lose everything else but get him, then I’ve gotten all I want! We must love God for who he is or we will not love God at all.

Well by now Satan is surely getting a little desperate; so he pulls out all the stops. Taking Jesus up to a high place he shows him the whole world and says, *All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.* This is no false promise. Satan can deliver kingdoms to Jesus and Jesus knows it. Finally, in this third temptation, we get to the bottom line, the basic choice. The only choice really. Who are we going to worship? What kind of a God do we really want? Bob Dylan got it right years ago when he sang, *You gotta serve somebody. It may be the devil, it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody.*

Well, there is no doubt who Jesus is gonna serve and he responds with passion. This is one of those moments in scripture that I would love to have been there to witness... I think. *Away from me! It is written! Worship the Lord your god and serve him only.*

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your strength and with all your soul. This is the greatest commandment.*

*For what does it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul!*

*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. I will show you whom you should fear. Fear him who can destroy both body and soul in Hell!*

*You who say to yourself, "I have plenty of good things laid up for many*

*years. I will take life easy: eat, drink and be merry.” You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?!”*

Well, Jesus doesn't say all of that, but all of that is certainly in his heart because that is what he goes on to teach to anyone foolish enough to think they could ignore their creator, live as they please and not suffer the consequences. As the scriptures say, *God is not mocked. A man reaps what he sows.*

Sometimes we New Testament Christians may get the idea that the Old Testament has little if anything to say to us. But we should not forget that the God who has spoken to us through his Son is not different than the God who spoke through the prophets. He has not changed. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. There is not an Old Testament God of wrath and a New Testament God of love. The Old Testament is not about Law and the New Testament about Grace. Man has always lived by and under God's grace and God's law will always do what it has always done, show us the perfect way, expose and condemn our sin and demonstrate our need for grace.

The apostle was right when he said *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*

When Jesus needed strength to resist the devil's attack, it was the Scriptures, the Old Scriptures, that he turned to. What logic would lead us to think that what blessed the Lord would not similarly bless us? It was in those old

scriptures Jesus found the truths that enabled him to defeat Satan: the truth that we were made to enjoy far more than bread; that we were made to have a trust relationship not a results relationship with God; that we were made to worship God and to worship him only. So, today as we struggle to resist the never ending temptations Satan brings our way, may the truths we have learned and will learn from the great stories of scripture and the wisdom we gain from the old scriptures, continue to guide us as they guided leaders like Joshua, Samuel and David and prophets like Amos, Elijah and Isaiah, and most importantly the Lord Jesus himself. For as the apostle Paul said, *Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Rom 15:1- 4).*