

Read also Deuteronomy 8:1-10. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Jesus was about thirty years old. He goes out to the wilderness of Judea where John the Baptizer was actively doing his ministry. Jesus went to John to be baptized. We might wonder, *why would Jesus need to be baptized?* Even John asked that question. This is one of those indicators that Jesus was fully human. He fully identified with you and me. Let's read it. MT 3:16-4:4

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread." But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Mt 3:16 - 4:4)

Jesus' work as Son of God has begun. At the same time, he is like one of us. So we look at his life on two levels: that of being fully God and fully man all at the same time. Jesus is God's unique Son and He is also a fellow human being who wholly identifies with us. As we affirm that Jesus is part of the Trinity, we want to also look at how Jesus, the man, lived his life, so that we can live our lives the same way.

Jesus, led by the Spirit, went into the wilderness to be tempted.

This should remind you of another wilderness. Moses wrote:

"Remember how the LORD your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands" (Deut. 8:2).

Then it might remind you of another wilderness—your own! How many of you have had times you can identify as a wilderness?

You've had a long dry spell about what to do with your life. **How long, Lord?**

You feel like you just do the same ole'- same ole' every day. **How long, Lord?**

You want to get married, but there's no one to pop the question. **How long, Lord?**

You need a new job, you need a better boss, but nothing has happened. **How long, Lord?**

You've been dieting for a week and have lost nothing! **How long, Lord?**

You have a live oak in the yard and it's losing its millions of leaves. You are the only rake-r. **How long, Lord?**

You are in the wilderness.

Here is what God says about the wilderness:

I'm humbling you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you in the wilderness with unknown manna from my hand. I'm doing it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, you live by every word that comes from the Lord's mouth. (Deut 8:3, personalized)

It is an interesting concept to look at your circumstances from God's perspective. God is at work in you—all of you. You and I cannot outgrow the need for God to test your character, to shape your life, to stretch you where you need stretching. This may be a problem for you, but it is also a blessing. God knows you and can make of you more than you ever dreamed.

God has got God's nose in your business. If someone is messing in your business it is best that it be God.

God is accomplishing something wonderful in you just like God was guiding the life of Jesus.

You noticed that it said Jesus got baptized then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. It did not say 'Jesus went home, ate lunch, packed his sleeping bag, took forty days of rations, a flashlight, cell phone, pocket knife and five changes of clothes.' Then he was ready for his test from the devil.

No, Jesus probably went out there to talk to God about his mission. He wanted to get away and pray. Perhaps he wanted time just to listen. Maybe one day led to the next and then the next and he didn't really think about food. Maybe he was recalling the forty days Noah spent in the ark. Or maybe the wilderness was like that which the Israelites were in and he was reliving their story. Perhaps he remembered Moses and Elijah, both of whom fasted for forty days in the presence of the Lord and Jesus went with the purpose to fast.

Suddenly, forty days had passed and he was extremely hungry.

You may not think a person can fast all that long, but I assure you they can. Hear the story of Eddie Rickenbacker.

Eddie Rickenbacker was, among other things, the U.S. WWI air ace. A little background: Eddie left school to go to work at age thirteen when his father died. He became a mechanic and a racecar driver and later owned the Indianapolis Speedway. He was consultant to the military and head of Eastern Airlines, but that is not what I want to talk to you about.¹

During WWII, he was on a B-17 from Honolulu to New Guinea when the plane had to make a crash landing on the ocean. Eight men abandoned the plane in three rafts. They only had four oranges which they split among themselves over the course of eight days—one slice each every other day; no other food or water. For twenty-four days they drifted, circled by sharks, fighting the elements, sunburn, chilling nights, injuries, nightmares, discouragement. But they hung on. Eddie knew losing faith that they would be rescued would be the end of them. Losing faith would be Satan's triumph.

One of the men had a New Testament. So Eddie suggested they all read together. With each day the men added more—prayers, reciting things like Psalm 23. Soon they were informally confessing their sins to one another, talking to one another in an uninhibited manner about their

¹ Winston Groom, *Eddie Rickenbacker, Jimmy Doolittle, Charles Lindbergh, and the Epic Age of Flight* (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2013)

hopes, fears, and mistakes. Some initially scoffed at this daily “church meeting.” But soon they all changed their minds and participated avidly, because there was no place else to go but God. It was the hunger, and desperation, and the reducing of life to its barest forms that drove them there.

Hardship, the wilderness, brings good things if you seek God and do not let yourself be overcome by Satan.

All their efforts to catch fish had failed. They had no bait. After talk about self-mutilation for bait, at just that moment, from an empty sky, a seagull landed on Eddie's head. Everyone froze as he slowly reached up, praying he could seize it. They ate it, and used the entrails for bait and caught two more fish that day. It was like manna in the wilderness.

That night this was their Bible reading:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? . . . For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Mt 6:25, 33-34)

This led to more prayers. “Old Master, we're in an awful fix. We are counting on you at least by day after tomorrow to bring us something to eat and to drink.” And they all began praying this way—straightforward, out loud, no pretense.

The next day's prayer went like this: “Old Master, we prayed for food and you delivered. And now we ask for water. Well, if you don't deliver, it will be up to you.”

That night a squall formed out of nowhere and rain poured down and swept over them. They were washed clean, drank plenty of water, and gathered two extra bucketsful.

Their rescue came on day twenty-four, in just as miraculous a way, when a plane came out of the blue. While it was too far off to see them, Rickenbacker still said, “If one came, then more will come, and we must have the courage, the faith, and the patience to wait for them.”

His character had been shaped by the wilderness of the sea. His courage led the other men to stay the course of hope.

Are you facing your wilderness with courage that God is at work for you? Or are you giving in to Satan?

Satan came against Jesus after forty days of hungering and said, “Command these stones to become loaves of bread,” a great temptation for Jesus to rely on his own powers to meet his needs rather than trusting his Father. But Jesus replied, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Jesus' strength had been built by the deprivation in the wilderness. What strength might God be building in you by your hardships and struggles?

“Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

These are some words that come from God's mouth:

- ✓ Your heavenly Father knows you need food, drink, and clothes. (Mt 6:25f)
- ✓ You are so valuable to God that every hair of your head is numbered. (Mt 10:30)
- ✓ Seek first his kingdom and righteousness and all these things will be given to you. (Mt 6:33)
- ✓ If God is for us, who is against us? (Ro 8:31)
- ✓ In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Ro 8:37)
- ✓ Happy are the ones corrected by God! Do not despise the discipline of the Almighty when you sin. You will be at peace with the stones of the field, and its wild animals will be at peace with you. (Job 5:17, 23)

This is the first temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Are you in a wilderness? If so, do not be discouraged. Move instead into courage and hope, trusting God will be there for you, for God has a strong person with a bright future in mind, at the end of the wilderness.

AMEN