



Matthew 4:1

4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Yesterday we stood alongside a shell-shocked John the Baptist and a huge crowd who stood in silence as they witnessed the Trinitarian God break into human history – God the Father and God the Spirit commissioning God the Son at the beginning of his ministry on earth.

If we were in any doubt as to the humble origins of Jesus' birth and appearance all doubt was removed when God thundered 'this is my Son' and the Holy Spirit rushed upon Jesus to equip and empower his ministry. The Messiah, God's anointed king is here.

But again today, Jesus refuses to work to the script of Jewish expectations about his coming. After the highpoint of yesterday, John and devout Jews would have expected God's king to turn towards Jerusalem to take the fight up to the Romans. They would have expected Jesus to go off to battle against the Romans to retake his rightful throne. But instead Jesus turns in the opposite direction and heads further out into the desert.

What is Jesus doing? I'll tell you. King Jesus

is going out to battle but not against Caesar. Jesus is going out to do battle with the true king of this world, he's going out to do battle with the devil. It's the first showdown, if you like, between two competing kingdoms and their rulers. The kingdom of God up against the kingdom of this world. Jesus isn't retreating out into the desert, he's going out there to fight the first skirmish, he's going out there to advance God's kingdom.

In this one verse of Scripture today there's so much to discuss. I'd like you to notice three things.

Firstly, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus out into the wilderness. As we've seen Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and yesterday he was publically anointed by him – just like all the prophets and kings and judges of old. The

Holy Spirit equips and empowers the ministry of Jesus. And when Jesus returns to heaven the Holy Spirit is poured out into the hearts of all believers and empowers the ministry of the whole church. He is still doing this today. The book of the bible that shows the explosion of the early church is entitled Acts of the Apostles. It could well be named Acts of the Holy Spirit as through the work of the Spirit Christianity spread like wildfire. So firstly, the Holy Spirit equips Jesus for ministry, guiding him and empowering him, and it's the same for us today.

Secondly, Jesus is led out to the wilderness to be tempted. This is rich with Old Testament overtones. Yesterday, when God said 'this is my son whom I love, with him I am well pleased.' The 'well pleased' part recalled prophecies from Isaiah about the coming Ser-

vant of the Lord who in many ways would represent Israel, all of God's people, reduced to one man, Israel's champion of sorts, Israel reduced to one. And in Israel's history, the desert was a place of temptation and failure. This time around however, Israel reduced to one man would not fail, despite severe temptation, and thus he would go on to take hold of God's great promises to Israel and bring them to reality.

But there's even more than this. Jesus is more than just Israel reduced to one, he's also all of humankind reduced to one, he's the representative human being, humankind's champion. In Genesis 3, all of humankind fell through Adam's sin when he, along with Eve, were tempted by the devil. Jesus, the representative man, is about to be tempted by the same devil but unlike Adam he will not fail. When

Adam failed, through him the whole world was plunged into sin. When Jesus succeeds, through him the whole world again will have hope. So secondly, we find in this passage rich Old Testament overtones of hope and salvation for the whole world.

Thirdly, Jesus is tempted by the devil, by Satan himself. Perhaps tested might be a better word here. Tempted is kind of an internal word, a battle with your own sinful nature. But here Jesus is tested by something, someone external. And that someone is the devil, Satan himself, and this is the first time Satan is mentioned in Matthew's gospel so it is a fair question to ask, 'who's Satan?' The bible gives him lots of names which all add up to give you a picture of his character. He's 'the slanderer,' 'the tempter,' 'the tester,' the 'accuser,' the 'adversary,' 'the father of lies,' when he lies

he speaks his native language, he's the 'prince of this world' and a murderer who prowls around like a roaring lion waiting for someone to devour.' Where did he come from? In the beginning God created everything and everything he created was good but somewhere between that point and the creation of man, angels that God created turned against him, and their leader is the devil whose name is Satan. He is an intelligent, powerful spirit-being who is thoroughly evil. He's directly involved in inflicting evil on the lives of human beings, as well as on a much larger scale, and he leads a host of other powerful spirit beings called demons who help him in trying to stop God's good purposes for our world.

So instead of turning towards Jerusalem and setting his sights on Caesar, Jesus turns towards the true prince of this world and goes

out to do battle against Satan. It's the first showdown between two competing kingdoms and their rulers – the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of this world, the prince of peace versus the prince of this world. And this first battle will play itself out over the next few days as we work our way through the start of Matthew chapter 4.

But for today take some time now to think a little deeper than usual. Just as Jesus saw so clearly by the power of the Spirit his true adversary, why not take some time now to step back from our culture and reflect on who is really pulling the strings. Satan is the father of lies. He's cunning and crafty and he's been working for centuries infiltrating human culture to do as much as he can to distract people from what is important. The good news is that Satan was defeated on the cross, his fate

is sealed, he is doomed. But the bad news is that the most dangerous enemies are the ones who know they are going to die and therefore having nothing to lose. And Satan is bent on taking as many people with him as possible. So perhaps just reflect on an area or two of our culture. It might be the music you listen to, some of your favourite shows on television, the expectations of your workplace, or goals you've set for yourself in the gym. What's behind these influences? Is it possible that they've been subtly redirected by Satan to distract you away from worshipping God and towards worshipping something else (which usually in the end is ourselves)? Could some of these influences be subtly steering you away from God? Perhaps so cleverly that they have gone unnoticed until this morning? And once you've thought deeply about this then pray about it. You might thank God for the

gift of the Holy Spirit and pray that he would fill you with wisdom and help you see more clearly in this world. You might thank God that because of Jesus Satan has no power and that once you're onto him he always retreats because he's a coward and he's defeated. You might then again pray that God would by his Spirit always keep you alert and sober minded so that you might avoid all of the devil's traps. And if the music you love or the career that you're so invested in all of a sudden has taken on a slightly different light you might pray that God would give you a strong conviction of what you should do about it and thank him for opening your eyes this morning.

Thanks again for listening today. I hope you've been left with some food for thought and I look forward to picking this up again with you tomorrow.