



Into the Wilderness *World Hunger Emphasis* *Matthew 4:1–11*

*The tempter came to him and said,
"If you are the Son of God,
tell these stones to become bread."
Jesus answered, "It is written:
'Man shall not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes from the
mouth of God."
March 5, 2017*

Thoughts for the Week

Scripture: Isaiah 1:11-17, I Samuel 15:22, Ezekiel 14:4-5, I Thessalonians 4:3/Ephesians 5:15-20, Romans 8:28-30, Acts 3:19

"Keys to the Deeper Life" by A. W. Tozer

When Praying is Wrong

"Most Christians no longer initiate, they imitate -- and the world is their model. The holy faith of our fathers has in many places been made a form of entertainment, and the appalling thing is that all this has been fed down to the masses from the top... The radical element in testimony and life that once made Christians hated by the world is missing from present-day evangelicalism. Christians were once revolutionaries -- moral, not political -- but we have lost our revolutionary character. It is no longer either dangerous or costly to be a Christian. Grace has become not free, but cheap. We are busy these days proving to the world that they can have all the benefits of the gospel without any inconvenience to their customary way of life. It's "all this and heaven too."

This description of modern Christianity, while not universally applicable, is yet true of an overwhelming majority of present-day Christians. For this reason it is useless for large companies of believers to spend long hours begging God to send revival. Unless we intend to reform, we may as well not pray. Unless praying people have the insight and faith to amend their whole way of life to conform to the New Testament pattern, there can be no true revival.

Sometimes praying is not only useless, it is wrong. Here is an example: Israel had been defeated at Ai, and "Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the ground on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening came; he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads." According to our modern philosophy of revival this was the thing to do, and if it lasted long enough, should certainly have persuaded God and brought the blessing.

But, "the Lord said to Joshua, 'Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions... Go consecrate the people. Tell them, 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel says, 'that which is devoted [to another god] is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove [the accursed thing] from among you.'"

We must have a reformation within the Church. To beg for a flood of blessing to come upon a backslidden and disobedient Church is to waste time and effort. A new wave of religious interest will do no more than add numbers to churches that have no intention to own the Lordship of Jesus and come under obedience to His commands. God is not interested in increased church attendance unless those who attend amend their ways and begin to live holy lives. Isaiah spoke of this same thing as well: "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you, even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen, for your hands are full of blood. Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong and learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed,

defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow..." (Isaiah 1:11-17).

Prayer for revival will prevail when it is accompanied by radical amendment of life, not before. Prayer meetings that are not preceded by practical repentance may actually be displeasing to God. "To obey is better than sacrifice" (I Samuel 15:22). We must return to New Testament Christianity, not in creed only, but in complete manner of life as well. Separation, obedience, humility, simplicity, earnestness, self-control, modesty, cross bearing all must again be made a living part of the total Christian concept and be carried out in everyday conduct. We must cleanse the temple of the hucksters and the moneychangers and come fully under the authority of our risen Lord once more. Then we can pray with confidence and expect true revival to follow."

The Church needs to hear that. We all need to hear and consider it if we struggle with why God is not answering our prayers. Grace does not mean God turns a blind eye to all sin. It means He loves His people enough to do whatever He knows is necessary to get them to consider their sins, repent for those sins, and turn from them -- even if what He must do is refuse to answer their prayers until they have turned away from them (Ezekiel 14:4-5). His will for our lives, is, after all, "our sanctification" (I Thessalonians 4:3 / Ephesians 5:15-20). And because that is His will for us, He will not relent from His work of purifying and conforming us to the likeness of Jesus -- the stated purpose for which He chose and predestined us (Ephesians 1:4-5 / Romans 8:28-30).

These words made me do some soul-searching, which led to repentance. Maybe the Spirit has moved in you too, and you sense the need to do the same. If so, remember the words of Luke, that when we repent, "times of refreshing come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

Happy Birthday – Ray (3/9)

Why Did the Spirit of God Lead Jesus into the Wilderness

The first verse of the temptation narrative contains the strange remark that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Obviously the Spirit is the same "Spirit of God" who had just been mentioned in Matthew 3:16 and who descended on Jesus when he was baptized. This is puzzling. Why would God's Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, and did God use Satan as his instrument to tempt Jesus?

The following suggestion is made: In order to understand Matthew 4:1, one has to recognize that Jesus was not just a kind of second Moses repeating to a certain degree the experience of Moses (Deut 18:15; Acts 3:17-26; John 6:1-15). Jesus also had to cover the ground where Israel had walked. He had to repeat Israel's experience to gain the victory where historical Israel had failed. The Spirit of God led Jesus in the desert for forty days (4:2) in order for him to experience what Israel had experienced in the wilderness for forty years.

Evidence for this conclusion is provided by Jesus' response to the first temptation. When Satan demanded from Jesus to prove his divine sonship by turning stones into bread, since he was hungry (4:2-3), Jesus replied: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God"

At issue are the covenant, obedience, faithfulness, and love towards the Lord. Deuteronomy 8:1-6 refers back to Israel's wilderness experience:

"All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your forefathers. You shall remember all the ways which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him." (NASB)

The correspondence between Matthew 4:1-4 and Deuteronomy 8:1-6 is interesting. Not only are Deuteronomy 8:3b and Matthew 4:4 identical but additionally, a number of common words are found in both records, namely "to tempt/test," "desert," and "forty." The idea of being hungry is also present. Obviously, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8 to point to the similarity between his and Israel's experience. Israel was tested by God to prove its commitment, obedience, and love to the Lord. Israel failed. Jesus took its place and succeeded.