

DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 4th Mar 2019)**Read - Matthew 4:1-11***... the tempter came to him and said.... v3*

Evil is a reality. Whether you picture Satan as a little red man with horns and a three-pronged fork, or whether you prefer to think of evil as a negative, malevolent power at work in the world, evil is a reality. We see it in the corruption, in the bad things people do, in the crime, in the hurt and the pain and in the selfishness deep within the soul of all of us. The purpose of evil is to get us to do wrong, and to turn us away from God and what is right. Ultimately the purpose of evil is death, not life. And every day we are touched by it in some way or other.

At the start of Jesus' ministry he was confronted by the power of evil, trying to get him to take a path that was not God's will. But would you notice how subtle Satan was. He didn't blatantly ask Jesus to do bad things. Instead he offered him things that at first glance seemed to be good. *Turn these stones into bread* – think of how you can satisfy not just your own hunger, but how you could use your powers to feed the hungry masses. *Jump off the highest point of the temple* – people would be amazed by your powers and follow you. *Do it my way and you could govern the kingdoms of the world* – think of all the good you could do if you were in charge of the world. Think of how you could use political power to change society and make the world a better place.

We must be aware of the subtle and devious ways the evil one tries to lead us astray. He sometimes comes to us disguised as an angel of light and offers us something that seems to be good. But later we find that it was not God's way.

Lord, protect me from the subtle power of evil.**DAY 2****Read - Luke 4:1-13***Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only' ". v7*

Will you notice secondly, that Jesus used scripture to counter the devil's wiles. Scripture not only contains the wisdom of God to guide us the right way in life, it also has the power to defeat the things of Satan and overcome any influence he may have over us.

Listen to these words St Paul wrote to a young Christian called Timothy. *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that God's servant may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 4:14-17)*

It is important, not just to quote verses from the Bible, but to read it regularly and faithfully so that we get to understand its deeper meaning for life, and especially for our life. So many people just have a superficial knowledge of the Word of God, or haven't read it at all. But when we live with it, and live by it, it gives us wisdom and guidance.

God's word also has power and it can **protect** us from the power of evil and wrong in life. Evil sometimes takes hold of a person's life in powerful ways; maybe you know this. God's Word can set us free from that power. Quote a verse of scripture to the devil and he will back off.

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Ps 119:105**DAY 3****Read - 1 Peter 5:8-11***Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. v8*

The last verse of Luke's account of the temptation of Jesus says, *"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him (Jesus) until an opportune time."* (Lk 4:13) In other words, Satan would wait and at a suitable moment he would come back and try again.

Temptation is never just a one off thing. The devil will come back at us time and again to try and lead us astray. In fact the closer we walk with God the harder he will work to try to drive a wedge between us. When we are far from God the devil will often leave us alone. But when we try to live close to our Saviour he desperately wants to break up that relationship.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray, *"Lead us not into temptation (do not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear), but deliver us from evil."* We pray this regularly, and the assumption therefore is that this is an on-going battle. We can never assume that the devil is finished with us. But if we walk with our hand firmly in the hand of our Lord we are safe and the evil one cannot separate us from him. As Paul said to the Christ-followers in Rome, *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither the present nor the future, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Rom 8:38-39). God's presence and power is always there for us to call on when we need it.

I need thee every hour, stay thou nearby: temptations lose their power when thou art nigh .

DAY 4

Read - Job 1:6-12

The Lord said to Satan, "Very well then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." v12

The Old Testament does not give us a very clear picture of Satan. Often, like this incident in Job, the devil is just one of the angels (a fallen one, none-the-less), and God talks to him now and then. But that changes in the New Testament. In the NT we find there is an all-out war between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. Good and evil are radically opposed to each other.

But two things come out clearly in this passage from Job, Firstly, evil can only test us because God **allows** the devil to do his work. This is not the same thing as saying that God causes or is responsible for evil, There is nothing bad or evil in God. And God is infinitely greater than Satan. But God **permits** the devil to test us. During this time on earth God allows the devil to do his evil work, but one day that permission will be withdrawn, and Satan will be destroyed (Rev 20:10).

The second thing is that Satan may test us **up to a point**, but he is never allowed to destroy us. He may touch our things and even our bodies, but he cannot go further than that. He cannot touch our soul. He can tempt us and make bad things happen to us, but if we decide to give our soul to the devil, that is **our choice**. Satan's testing can go so far, but no further. It is always reassuring to know that, as scary as the devil is, his powers are limited. I can always shout at him, "Get away from me Satan! My soul is in God's hands. My God is much bigger and more powerful than you are!"

Thank you Lord that you are infinitely greater and more powerful than Satan

DAY 5

Read - John 17: 6-19

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. v15

Jn 17 contains Jesus' last recorded prayer before he died. He prayed for his disciples and for all Christians down the ages. He prayed for their unity. He says to the Father, "*I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but I do ask you to protect them from the evil one.*" When John speaks about "the world" he means, the world apart from God. People living without God in their lives. As followers of Jesus we live in the world, but we are not "of" the world. The world is where we live and where we have to work out our salvation. The world is where our battle with the evil one takes place.

The chief place where the spiritual battle for the world takes place though is in the human heart. It takes place in our inner struggle with what is right and what is wrong, in temptation, in the choices we make, in our thinking, in our passions and desires, in our materialism, in our conflict with others, in our lusts and addictions, in our hate and our anger (Rom 7:18-20). We must be strong to resist the evil one. This is why it is important to stay close to Jesus.

Sometimes we come under attack through trouble, persecution, pain, or suffering. The devil can be very subtle and will often even use something that seems good on the surface, to get a believer off the track. But know this, Jesus is even now at the right hand of God and he prays continually for us that we will overcome the wiles of Satan.

Leave no unguarded place, no weakness of the soul; take every virtue, every grace and fortify the whole. Hymn 719, v3

DAY 6

Read - Ephesians 6:10-18

Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. v11&12

The fight against evil is a spiritual battle. Much of it may be fought in the earthly realm, and many of its aspects have to do with earthly things, but ultimately it is about spiritual things. It is about the destiny of our soul.

Paul gives us this wonderful picture of the **armour** that Jesus gives to protect us against the power of evil. If we live with **truth**, and always seek to uphold the truth we have nothing to fear. If we **live righteously** we will always be close to God, for God is a righteous God. Righteousness simply means to live the right way, according to the Laws of God. And we should be ready to **share the good news (the gospel)** of the **peace** which Jesus has brought – peace with God, peace with others, and peace in our own hearts. Our **faith**, our belief in God, and our trust in him will always shield us from the tricks the devil uses to try and trip us up and get us away from God. We have **assurance of our salvation** in Christ Jesus as a guarantee, and the spiritual sword of the **Spirit** to defend us, and to attack when we need to attack. And finally there is the amazing **power of prayer** to sustain us. Prayer keeps us in touch with God.

These are the things that can shield us and protect us from anything Satan may bring against us. But remember, the devil's power is always a false power. He has no real power over us unless we ourselves give him that power.

Father, thank you that your love protects me.