



Turning

Mark 1:9-15

Pelham Road Church

Greenville, SC

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Both in Luke and Matthew, in the fourth chapter of each, a lengthy description of the temptation story is told. As you can tell, Mark's version is much simpler and shorter.

Jesus goes to the wilderness and returns with this message, repent. Metanoia, the time for change has arrived.

Metanoia is translated "repent." Its meaning ranges from turn around to change your mind, but what it most assuredly does not mean is to stay as you are. Jesus returns to say that his kingdom will be built by the type of people who will be humble enough to admit when they are wrong and change course. People strong enough to turn from a previous decision, which has brought them pain and destruction.

We will be speaking a great deal about turning over the next 40 days.

At times the repenting will be a turning away from gossip, envy, jealousy, hate, and the list goes on, more about this on Sunday, March 15th. Other times this turning will be about changing course, what was once working for you is sadly destroying you, it's time to change, more about

this March 22. But we will also be talking about change as repenting and being humble enough to turn from bad thinking about God, which takes us back to the temptation story.

The final temptation, according to Luke, in many ways, is the most interesting. This is the temptation for Jesus to take a nosedive off the pinnacle of the Temple, so Angels can be enlisted to keep nature from taking its course. The foundation for this temptation comes from the 91st Psalm, listen.

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust.'

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler

and from the deadly pestilence;
he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not fear the terror of the night,

or the arrow that flies by day,
or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.

Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling-place,

no evil shall befall you,

no scourge come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you

to guard you in all your ways.

On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

The theme for this Psalmist is that the pious prosper and the wicked are destroyed. Jesus recognizes this as dead theology. Jesus said and believed something different;

"Your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45).

God offers no protection from the mishaps of life or the meanness of others.

So in this temptation and the counter-argument in the Sermon on the Mount, we see Jesus' rejection of the literalist interpretations of his day. The tempter can quote Psalm 91 if he likes, but Jesus, the one who would be crucified, rejected the idea that "no scourge would come near him, you, or us." Jesus, in his own theology, proved this Psalmist idea did not pass the reality test.

The Psalmist presumed the divine never allows bad things to happen to good people. Certainly, Jesus would be safe; after all, he was God's son.

The angel promises a divine parachute and long physical life for the righteous. But Jesus was taking notes; this is not what he saw. Jesus learned that Herod had slaughtered thousands of innocent children; their only problem was being born in too close a proximity to his own birth.

Further, Jesus recognized that the Herodian Dynasty, one of the most corrupt and evil, was still in power despite the Psalmist claim to the contrary.

Jesus rejected this theology of protection. Instead he identified with the Psalmist who composed the 22nd Psalm.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;

and by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy,

enthroned on the praises of Israel.

This is the Psalm Jesus quotes on the cross. Jesus agrees with this Psalmist; there are going to be tears and pain in this world because "it rains on the just as well as the unjust" but remain faithful anyway.

Jesus rejected this idea of divine protection and instead knew God would never abandon him. Further, Jesus' eyes were wide open evil, corruption, and meanness, are not winless. Jesus' theology was crafted with reality and hope. Jesus faith, and the faith he taught others, was not dependent on being insulated from personal suffering. Jesus moved forward, knowing there was no guarantee for the righteous.

This is a healthier way of following God because before Jesus' life was over, he would see a righteous man named John killed by the most corrupt Politian of the day. Further, he would see his own disciples fall away and abandon him, while the forces of evil increased and encircled him.

If you fall for the idea that God will not allow pain to visit the righteous like the author of Psalm 91, then you will forever be asking, "Why."

Jesus found his strength in the words of Moses, "You shall not put God to the test."

Jesus says "no" to dead theology, and he inspires us to do the same. Are we mature enough to reflect on our own thinking about God and ask tough questions? Jesus is calling us to follow his example and turn (metanoia). To turn from a popular religious idea to difficult spiritual truths. To turn from religious ideas that are centered on making us feel good to ideas that lead to spiritual healing. To turn from pride to humility. From certitude to faith.

While we will each must turn from something different, we all turn toward God. In the wilderness, Jesus called us to turn toward God. Lent is indeed about shedding bitterness, faithlessness, fear, and being undisciplined, it is also about changing direction, and abandoning the dead theology that has poisoned us. Still, most importantly it is about renewing a relationship with the living God.

Turn toward the living God. Only you know where you stand, close or far, willing or stubborn, full of hope or full of fear, but here at the threshold of Lent, let's turn to the Savior.