Pleasing God in Hardship

Deuteronomy 8; Matthew 4

Tested through temptation to see if we will obey God from the heart

Summary

The wilderness is a hard place and a testing place; but it is a transforming place. Through the situations of life, God's providences are designed to give us opportunities to obey Him from the heart or to expose a sinful heart.

Use an illustration about a practical hands-on test that shows whether or not one actually has the skill. An illustration where a test shows what something is actually made of, a litmus test, etc.

Heart Exposing Work of the WildernessDeuteronomy 8

Background: Deuteronomy is three messages preached by Moses just before dying. In these messages he applies the Law and interprets their wilderness experience calling on them to obey the Lord. Verse 1 reiterates the command/blessing system they lived under.

God's Providences to Lead (v.2a)

God has led them through the whole wilderness experience. This has been 40 years of chastening due to their disobedience at Kadesh-Barnea. They must understand that the hardships they have experienced are in God's control.

So must we. God is in control of our own wilderness experience. If we are going to have a transforming work done in our hearts, we must believe in the sovereign power and providence of God.

God's Purpose to Humble (v.2b)

God's primary aim is to humble His people. He is at work to expose our sin and to humble our pride. He will do whatever it takes to accomplish this aim. God will work to undercut boasting in anything except Himself.

God's Program to Expose (v.2c)

God was at work to test them, to expose whether they would obey Him from the heart.

The testing involves measuring their obedience.

Will God's people obey Him regardless of the circumstances? What does it take to get a person to disobey God?

The testing involves exposing their hearts.

God is testing the heart as the root and source of obedience. The sense here is that the outward match inward.

God's Provisions to Test (v.3-4)

God has done three important things to test their obedience and their hearts.

Brought them through humbling circumstances.

God humbles His people through their situations and their sins.

He is exposing and transforming a heart full of pride and self-congratulation.

Allowed them to suffer in the lack of basic needs.

God allows them to go hungry to see what they really crave for.

He is exposing and transforming a heart focused on the things of this world.

Provided for them in supernatural ways.

God provides them supernatural bread and sustains shoes and clothing.

He is exposing and transforming a heart that takes God for granted.

Taught them the importance of the Word of God for daily living.

God's people must learn that the Word of God is their daily food, more important even than physical food.

God's Principles to Guide (v.5-7ff)

What must we know so as to profit from this obedience testing heart exposing work?

Accept God's paternal child-training. (v.5)

God is doing this as a wise and diligent father. It is chastening in the best and broadest sense. He is not punishing us as a severe judge. He is transforming and training us as a good Father.

Walk in God's ways with holy fear. (v.6)

God delights in an obedience in relationship. This phrase "walk in God's ways" calls us to more than just doing what He says. It draws and demands that we obey and submit with joy in the context of fellowship (1 John 1).

God delights in an obedience with reverence. Obedience from the heart is one that is informed and inspired by an awe and respect for God.

Expect God's blessing in His own time and way. (v.7-10)

God's blessings cannot be demanded. The testing work of the wilderness is designed to weed out demanding hearts that carp and complain.

God's promises will be fulfilled. Make no mistake, He will accomplish what He promises. The ultimate fulfillment will be grander than we can possibly imagine.

God's Precept to Warn Them (v.11-16)

Their hearts are to be organized by remembering what they have been taught and desiring the good the God brings. God's method is to do this through a series of warnings.

Lest we forget God in the midst of plenty. (v.11-16)

A heart satiated with the blessings of God may turn away from being satisfied with God Himself. The good that God does for us may be forgotten with the effect that we turn away in our hearts from God.

Lest we deceive ourselves in the midst of pride (v.17-20)

A heart speaking lies to itself needs to remember truth, repent of sin and return to the Lord.

Notice here how the words remember, forget and say are all heart functions with grave or good consequences.

Heart Confirming Work of the Wilderness Matthew 4

Matthew structures this section of his book to show that Jesus is the new Israel of God. He is the out of Egypt called son, baptized, pleasing to God and now tested in the wilderness.

Approved by God (3:17)

At the end of the baptism, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and the Father speaks. In the Father's speech, Jesus is approved by God.

In His Identity

The Father declares that Jesus is the Son of God. His identity is established. This is parallel to Deuteronomy 7.

The Father is pleased with Jesus. God delights in Christ.

Led by the Spirit (4:1)

God is taking Jesus into the wilderness to test Him by exposing Him to Satan's temptations. Through the temptation, Jesus' identity and purity will be challenged.

Follows the Plan of God

Jesus' going into the wilderness follows the plan of God. This is not an accident. It is in accordance with the types in the Old Testament and with what the Scriptures declare.

Serves the Purposes of God

Jesus is led into the wilderness in order to be tested and tried. God's purpose is to vindicate Jesus' identity and purity through this testing.

Weakened by the Fasting (v.2)

It is almost certain that this is a religious exercise. He is fasting, not simply because there is no food, but because he has intentionally chosen not to eat.

Physical weakness is often the situation in which Satan will tempt us. It has the effect of heightening the physical temptations and weakening our spiritual resolve.

Tempted by the Devil (v.3-10)

The temptation is testing to see whether Jesus will obey God from the heart. Like Eve, He is tempted directly. Like Israel, He is tested to expose and exhibit what is in His heart. The Word of God is the bulls-eye in each of these temptations and all the testing.

The temptations are designed to challenge the identity of Christ. "If you are the Son of God" then you ought to be able to do these things. It has the "Come on, prove yourself" effect.

In the Pressing Needs of the Body (v.3-5)

Jesus is hungry. The body surely is craving food. But the right, natural desires of the body, even at the "craving" level, do not excuse sin. Satan's temptation frames heart issues for our own temptations:

To exercise His creative power to serve Himself.

His Divine power is not for His own, personal use. It is always to be subjected to the will of God, His Father.

To be impatient for the will of God

God will provide for Jesus in His own time. While Jesus may have the ability to do what Satan is suggesting, it is not the time now. He will wait on God.

To heed the forceful commands of the tempter

Satan offers this first temptation as an imperative. It is spoken as a command. It is meant to see if Jesus will obey Satan to satisfy His body.

To succumb to the demands of the body.

The wants, needs and even cravings of the body are to be in submission to the Word and the will of God.

Jesus' response in quoting from Deuteronomy 8 is not just an answer to turning stones into bread to satisfy His hunger. It tells us what is actually going on here. He connects His own experience with that of Israel. The wilderness with its hunger is a place to hear and heed the Word of God.

In the Presumptive Misuse of the Scriptures (v.6-7)

In this temptation, Satan takes Jesus up to the Temple and then, quoting a part of Psalm 91:9-13. Satan tempts Jesus in two significant areas.

By changing the meaning of the text (Psalm 91:9-13)

Satan is changing what the text means – the dwelling place of the Most high is not the building made with hands but the eternal habitation of God who is first the Lord Jesus and the heavenly city of Zion.

By seeking to test God

It is not faith to put oneself in unnecessary danger in order to see if God will do what He says. It is presumption, even in the promises of God, to take risks solely to prove that God will keep His Word.

By attempting to end Jesus' life early

Satan does not believe that Jesus will be rescued. He thinks that if Jesus does this, then he will probably die. This is another attempt to destroy Jesus before He actually gets to the cross.

In the Perverted Worship of the Lord (v.8-10)

Satan tempts in three critical areas:

By offering pleasure now instead of the pain now.

Jesus would be responding to the immediate gratification offered by Satan. Is Jesus willing to wait on God's time for the public acknowledgment and acceptance of the Kingdom? This is an issue of the cross. Why not receive all that was promised without having the pain and suffering entailed?

By making promises he cannot and will not keep.

Jesus would be recognizing the illegitimate authority of Satan. Satan has no authority to do this, even as the prince and power of the air.

By eliciting praise he does not deserve or is entitled to.

Jesus would be reverencing Satan instead of worshipping God.

Reflect and Respond

All of your hardships are in God's sovereign providence. He may lead in and through a wilderness as He did His Son and His Old Covenant people.

God has mighty life changing purposes in your hardships.

God will use your hardships to expose your heart, what you really belief and truly want.

God is doing all that He does for His children as loving heavenly Father. Your hardships are family matters.

Satan's temptations in your hardships are God's trials to see if you will obey Him from the heart.

At the core of all that God is doing is:

To increase your reliance on the Word;

To bring repentance over sins;

To enable your worship of Him

May God's grace and peace be yours as you please Him in the midst of hardships and trials.