

Rest in God's shadow

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 March 2025

Preacher: Rev Carol Rattenbury

[0 : 00] Pray with me a moment. Lord, I ask that you would give me the words to say this morning. The words that we need to hear.

Words not from my mind, but words from you. Lord, we come as a community of your people, eager to hear from our God.

In Jesus' name, Amen. I'm sure you'll have heard many sermons over the years about Jesus' temptations.

But there's just a few points I'd like to make at the start of the service. And you may well have heard them all before and say, oh yeah, know that, know that.

Well, that's fine. But maybe somebody doesn't. Maybe somebody hadn't thought of it in this way. Following his baptism, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness.

[1 : 06] Yeah, it's the Holy Spirit that takes him there. And I think the first lesson that I took from this when I read it was that we expect the Holy Spirit to take us to good places, to comfortable places, to places where we can be happy.

But here, the Holy Spirit is leading Jesus into the wilderness. Not that the paths of righteousness that we speak about in the 23rd side are always going to be comfortable paths.

The wilderness, as we've sort of got a glimpse of it on that little video clip. It's a dry and barren place.

Very inhospitable. And then, on top of that, Jesus is fasting. He's not eating. He has a lack of food. Which is why we give up things for Lent.

To identify with him and what he went through. One of the good things about being in the wilderness is there weren't any distractions.

[2 : 27] The only thing that Jesus needed to focus on was his relationship with his Father. But there was a distraction, wasn't there?

There was Satan, the devil, whatever name we give him. He was there, trying to act as a big distraction.

But Jesus isn't frightened of the wilderness. He often went to the wilderness as a place to pray. It was a place he did feel close to his Father. So, Satan comes to Jesus and attacks him through what he sees as his weaknesses.

What better temptation to place in the way of a hungry person than the prospect of some bread? But Jesus knows he's committed himself to a time of fasting.

Now, the man who fed 5,000 people plus, if he didn't want to be hungry, he didn't have to be hungry.

[3 : 44] But Jesus knew this wasn't the time to feed himself. But he doesn't argue with the devil. He doesn't try to barter and say, if and what and maybe.

He just goes straight to the scriptures. And he says, it is written in the scriptures, A person does not live only by eating bread. A person lives by everything the Lord said.

He turns it on its head. He turns what the devil is throwing at him on his head and turns it back to focusing on a relationship with the Lord.

It's not about bread. It's not about what you eat. It's about that relationship with the Father. Next, the temptation is to take a shortcut.

To avoid the cross. Satan is appealing to the humanity in Jesus. Offering him a totally selfish power grab.

[4 : 48] But you know, as God's son, he knows he's already set aside all power and authority. He's laid that on one side for a much greater purpose.

He's laid that aside for the redemption of the world. For our redemption. For our salvation. Christ worshipping Satan isn't going to be entertained, is it?

But again, Jesus doesn't argue or debate. He shields himself with scripture. Worship the Lord your God, and only the Lord your God.

Serve him with absolute single-mindedness. There's no getting away from it. Jesus isn't going to be tempted in that way.

You know, the devil's learning. And back in Genesis, the serpent is described as being, more crafty than any other creature. And so, having appealed to Jesus' humanity and failed.

[5 : 56] He then now attacks him as God's son. And tries to undermine who he is as God's son. So, he takes God's word and uses it to try and usurp the word of God.

Dreadful misuse of scripture. Let's just hear for a moment the exchange that went on. For the third test, the devil took him to Jerusalem and put him on top of the temple.

He said, if you are God's son, jump. It is written, isn't it? That he has placed you in the care of angels to protect you.

They will catch you. And you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone. All very true. As we heard in our reading, that's exactly what scripture says.

It's not being used appropriately. So, Jesus then uses scripture appropriately. Yes, he says.

[7 : 03] It's also written. Don't you dare tempt the Lord your God. I've taken these quotes from the Message Bible to try and make them more immediate.

We do have to be very careful how we use the Bible. Because the Bible can be misused. We can use it to justify all sorts of things.

To justify our own selfishness and our own desires. That's why we need to study it. And we need to find out what it really means. And not play scripture jousting.

We need to know what God is really saying. Let's just look for a few moments behind the obvious events. So, what really is happening here?

This is a battle in the spiritual realm. And Jesus knows that that shield of faith that Paul writes about in his letters to the church in Ephesus is the only thing that will extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one.

[8 : 16] That shield of faith is found in trusting and having faith in the power of God and of his word. And he shows us that when we are tempted, when we are oppressed, frightened or troubled in any way, we too can hide in God and the promises of the Bible.

He sets an example for us to follow. But when we are troubled, when we feel we are being tempted in all sorts of ways, we can go and hide ourselves in the Bible and in God himself.

What does it mean to hide in God? When I was little, my mum used to hate thunderstorms.

I don't know whether you relish them. But she was so frightened, she'd go and hide under the stairs cupboard until they passed. She would simply wait passively until the noise stopped and she could come out.

I don't think God is saying, come to me and wait passively until the bad things stopped. If we were to do that, we'd perhaps never come out.

[9 : 39] I think, and I found an article that actually gives a far more dynamic picture of what it means to hide ourselves in God.

And that was, it's like staying within the boundaries of God's shadow. God's shadow. That sort of picture of a bird and a shadow on the ground of the bird, that's a picture we get from the Psalms.

And staying in that, within that shadow is staying in a place of protection. Think of it as a child staying close to their parents.

Playing a game of keeping up with mum or dad by standing in the shadow that the sons cast. that's what living and hiding in God is about.

Another picture that the scripture presents is that of a hen gathering her chicks around her. And a mother hen will fluff up her wings and fluff up her feathers and the chicks come underneath her protection.

[11 : 00] That's a picture that Jesus gives us of what God wants for us. It's an active process. It's a process of following and walking with God.

Wherever he's going, we're going too because we're hidden in his shadow. And as our psalm that was read to us earlier says, the one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Most High.

God is truly a hiding place for us. A place where he shields us and fends off harm. A place of refuge. A place where he can guard us.

Where he can catch us when we fall. Where he delivers us from harm. And he cares for us. He is truly a hiding place.

In God and his word there is a hiding place for each one of us. It's a secret place.

[12 : 09] A place of refuge shared by no one else. And your hiding place in God will be very different to mine. But that doesn't matter. It might be a physical space.

Somewhere you go. And maybe you go and you watch the sea rolling in. Or you go into the countryside and see a mountain.

Or you watch the sunset. It might be a special room in your house. Or it might be like Susanna Wesley used to do. Susanna was mother to John and Charles Wesley.

And when she wanted to be alone with God she would sit in her chair pick up her apron and put it over her head. She was finding her hiding place in the Lord was under her apron.

Or it might be an inner space. A place you can find within yourself when everything's happening round and about you. And you find that place of inner serenity. That inner place of peace with God.

[13 : 18] Somewhere we all need somewhere that we can find rest for our mind and spirit. And not in a new agey sort of way that empty your mind and you'll be fine.

It's a place where we can be filled with God's presence. We get away from the cares of the world to find that place of peace in him.

I do know that many of you are worried you're tired you're anxious frustrated afraid angry even despairing I don't ignore that and it might sound trite or flippant or I haven't really understood but it is true that God knows our individual situations and he knows that it's at times like this when all those emotions and all those feelings are going through our bodies that we need most to hide in him.

Last time I was preaching here God gave me the message of come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest for I'm gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for yourselves.

That invitation still stands and I don't think it's any coincidence that the next service I come to he gives me a very similar message to pass on.

[15 : 00] It's not saying that you didn't listen and didn't get it right the first time it's just that word of reassurance that hiding place is still available to you.

We might not find it easy to set aside that time to hide ourselves in the Lord but it is possible we can find a place to be still in his presence to find comfort in the truth of his word to let his peace guard ourselves and recognise that our lives are hidden with Christ in God.

There's an old hymn before the throne of God above I think it's verse three says this when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within upwardly I look and see him there who made an end to all my sin.

So we have an example of Jesus who hid himself in scripture who when tempted he was only too ready to hide behind what he knew to be true in the word of God.

I found a testimony of somebody who also found that they could hide themselves in the word of God and in God himself.

[16 : 40] Her name is Holly Gerrith and as she's quite happy to share a testimony online I have no qualms about sharing it with you this morning. Holly says I hold a list in my hand the words are written in black sharpie on cream paper in a square unlined journal the page looks so small that the sentences scrawled on it feel really big more than I could ever handle I'm going through a process of healing and my assignment for this week is to write down my fears The wise strong encouraging friend to my right said okay read your fears out loud I panic for a moment read them out loud what where people can hear for a second I consider running out of the door but then I think no

I want to be free whatever it takes I clear my throat and begin I'm afraid of not being good enough I'm afraid of disappointing God and others I'm afraid of rejection failure conflict disapproval inadequacy you know we all have fears it might be those particular ones but we all have things that we want to run away from a bit like that scary film we had behind the sofa or maybe hiding our brokenness with a forced smile but Holly goes on God knows of this tendency we have as humans and he doesn't tell us not to hide we're not in trouble for this instinct what God does want is to change where and how we hide he himself wants to be our hiding place and then she quotes from psalm 32 for you are my hiding place you protect me from trouble you surround me with songs of victory she writes

I used to think that I had to get rid of my fears or worries or frustrations or anxieties or tiredness or any of these other negative things before I came to God that he wanted me to be strong at all times but when God says do not fear in scripture it's almost always for someone who's really afraid it's not a rebuke it's a reassurance like a scared child finding comfort and security in the arms of a loving parent when Holly first looked at her list of fears she wanted to run from them but instead perhaps for the first time she realised she could run to God with them and she got on her knees and told him what scared her most and

God freed her from all those fears She knows she'll face fear again but in that moment it was a breakthrough she now knows that whatever she's facing she doesn't face it alone she faces it with the Lord who is her strength and security!

He gives her the courage to go on to make her brave His love and truth are bigger and stronger than anything we fear Like Jesus and like Holly we can have that place where we can hide we can hide in God and we can hide in his word and there we're protected we're protected from any enemy attack there we find peace there we find rest for ourselves
Amen