

Becoming Rooted in the Word of God

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Hi, I am Sarah Christmyer. Thank you for joining me, as we seek to know the Lord and to drink deeply of His word, let us pray.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen. Lord, inspire us to read your scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night. I beg you to give us real understanding of what we read, that we in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet I know that understanding and good intentions are worthless unless rooted in your graceful love. So I ask that the words of scripture may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into our hearts. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

The Importance of Being Rooted in The Word of God

That is one of my favorite prayers to read before reading scripture and it's by Origen of Alexandria and it really expresses what I'm hoping to get across today, which is the importance of really being rooted in the word of God. We are going to look first of all at Jesus's temptation in the wilderness, and then we're going to spend some time praying with Psalm one, which will give us a way to drink deeply of that word. So previously I talked about how we really want to create a wilderness for ourself inside of our souls during Lent so that we can yearn for God and turn our, you know, turn our hearts toward Him.

And I don't know about you, but usually about a week or two into Lent some of the novelty of my Lenten observances starts to wear off. And I really don't want to be foregoing sweets or wine or Instagram or whatever it is that I've decided to give up. And yet I have to remind myself that's exactly why I'm doing this, so that I long so that I can turn my longing to him.

Going Into Temptation

But then the first Sunday of Lent, every single year, not just year A, the church has us read the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. And it was interesting to me. I notice as we were looking at it this year, that while the longing might be the point for me in Lent right now, the longing wasn't the point for Jesus. In fact, it's the temptation that was the point. This year we read from Matthew. So looking at Matthew chapter four, Jesus it says, "*was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, to be tempted by the devil.*"

So specifically, the reason He is going there is to be tempted. And people have often pointed out that he's actually, in a way, he's redoing what Israel did when they went through the desert to get to the promised land. They were tempted over and over and over again. And what Jesus does is He's tempted in many of the same ways that they are, but then He reaches

back into the word of God and to the book of Deuteronomy, specifically, to find answers to the devil for temptation. For example, when He's been 40 days in the desert, He's really hungry and the devil comes to Him and says, hey, you know, if you are the Son of God, pick one of those stones, turn it into bread, you can eat that. And what does Jesus say? It is written, you know, he's quoting Deuteronomy, "*man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*"

And that is actually what Moses said was the reason that God let them get hungry in the wilderness. He let them get hungry in the wilderness and fed them with manna so that they would learn that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. So very important lesson here for the Israelites. God let them get hungry and then fed them Himself in a way that they could never be naturally fed so that they would know the importance of His word. Not just of hearing it and knowing it. It's not just important in itself, it's important for them to know it and to do it, okay? Even Adam and Eve had to learn that lesson and actually them not knowing that lesson is how we are all in the situation that we are since the fall anyway.

And I think it's interesting that this year, year A, the church pairs the account of the fall in Genesis three together with Jesus's temptation in the wilderness. And if we look at those two things together, we'll see in the Garden of Eden, you know, the serpent tempted Adam and Eve to lose their faith in God's fatherly goodness. He made them question God's word, which is exactly what he did to the Israelites and it's what he tried to do to Jesus. We look at Adam and Eve and how did they respond to that temptation? They had heard the word of God, but they listened to the word of the serpent instead of to what they knew of the word of God. And that's how they fell. And all of us with them.

Now we see the spirit, the Holy Spirit taking Jesus into the desert, which is into the wilderness, the place where Adam and Eve were, you know, tossed out into after the fall in order to undergo the same kind of temptation so that he can answer Satan rightly, which he does, using the word of God rightly, and basically tells Satan to take a hike, you know? So I guess the question for us today then is if we feel dry inside, if we feel hungry, whether that's from physical or from more likely a spiritual kind of hunger, if we're lonely, you know, how tempting is it not only to find something lesser than God that will satisfy us, but how tempting is it to listen to the voice of the tempter instead of to the voice of God? And so Satan will say to us, just like he said to Adam and Eve, you know, did God really say such and such? He's withholding good from you. He doesn't want you to have that really beautiful apple right there. He's withholding something good from you. He doesn't have your best interests at heart. You know, you are the one who knows what's good for you. And if you take it actually you'll be like God, don't we hear those same things all the time from our world? We do, the devil's the same, uses the same tactics on us.

Man Does Not Live By Bread Alone

And so that's why it's really good to know when he tempted Jesus that way. What did he say? It is written, *man does not live by bread alone*. You can substitute for bread whatever it is that you're trying to live by, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. God's word brings life, it's very important. So what does it mean to live by God's word? You know, how do we do that? I think it's really helpful to have this analogy that he gives us with bread, with

food, okay. Number one, physical food. Do you just like have your meal one day and then you're good for the rest of your life? No, you know, you come back again and again, you have to eat all day, you have to eat every day. Or you go hungry, going hungry makes you feel hunger, you start wasting away and so on. It's the same with the word of God. We can't just, I don't know, hear it at Mass and then run off and forget about it. We need it every day. Not only that, we can't just taste food, right? You don't just taste it, decide if it's good and then spit it out. You have to eat it, absorb it into your body so that it can build up your body.

It's the same with the word of God. We can't just go to Mass, listen to it, let it go in one ear out the other, you know? No, we have to taste it, savor it, chew it, digest it, allow it to become part of us where it can actually do its work of building up our lives, making us fruitful and productive and filling us with life.

That's why Jesus said in Luke 11, he said, *"blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it,"* keep it meaning hang onto it, but keep it also meaning obey it, doing it. You know, like my mother used to say to us, did you hear me? She didn't mean, did you actually clock what I was saying? She meant, did you hear me enough to actually do what I asked you to do, right?

Here's another one in John 10, Jesus is talking about the people who don't believe in him at all. And he's like, they're not my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and they follow me and I will give them eternal life. So there's this hearing and this listen, this doing and following, and the result is life. God's words are life to us. So whose words do you listen to? You know, do you know God's word so that you can follow it? It's a good question to ask yourself, I think.

Psalm One speaks both to our need and also to the benefit. It's an illustration of two ways. You know, we each have two paths that we can choose between. You have to go in one or the other. You can listen to the word of God and follow him. Go this way, you can listen to the word of the world and the flesh and the devil and go that way. One leads to life, one leads to death. But you got to choose, where you're going to be on one of those ways.

Psalm 1

So we are going to spend a little bit of time with Psalm One. If you can please get out your Bible and turn to it, I think you'll find that helpful. And I will read it once and then we'll go through and reflect on it a bit and then we'll pray with it together. So Psalm one, I'm reading from the RSV Catholic Edition. So if you have a different one, NAV or something, that's fine. It's probably similar enough that you can follow along. Psalm one,

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the council of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord. And on his law, he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by the streams of water that yields its fruit in its season. And its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff, which the wind drives away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish."

Breaking Down Psalm 1

I love this image, especially that of the fruitful tree. Anyway, let's walk through it kind of bit by bit. *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the council of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers."*

Remember that question I asked a minute ago? You know, whose voice do you listen to? This starts out by describing someone who's listening to other voices. Okay, notice the progression also. He starts out simply walking with the wicked, kind of listening to their advice. Then that leads to standing with, hanging around with people who are sinning and then finally sitting in the seat of the scornful. That's like a way of saying he's actually being like them. So listening leads to observing, listen leads to doing. And that's a progression that happens whether we're listening to, observing and doing the word of the wicked, of the devil, of the world, of those tempting voices, or whether we are listening and observing and doing the word of God, which is of course what the blessed man does.

This is verse two, he stays away from the wicked, et cetera, and instead delights in the law of the Lord. And on his law, he meditates day and night. Law might need a little translation here, because to us, law is rules and regulations, the thing that you have to follow where you break the law, right? And that is part of this. But in Hebrew it's a little bit more expansive. It's the word Torah, so it's teaching, it's instruction. It also refers to the first five books of the Bible, which happened to be the beginning of God's revelation of who He is, His greatness, His love for us, the plan that He has for our blessing. So all this knowledge of who He is that we get from His word, from His revelation, and also the way that He tells us to live so that we can find life.

"Blessed is the one who delights in the law of the Lord." He delights in the law of the Lord that you might want to think about it a little bit. How might you delight in the word of God? How can you delight in it? You know, in this case, one of the things that the psalmist does is he meditates on it, thinks about it. And so on day and night, it's always with him. You know, when something delights you, you just can't get it out of your mind. You think about it, you talk about it, you wonder about it, you bring it to mind. That's the kind of delighting that this is talking to. You know, something good happens, you just can't stop thinking about it. Meditating on it day and night. Like maybe like when you're in love with somebody, you start dreaming about them.

Meditate isn't just a random thinking though, or calling to mind, and it's not like, you know, oh, letting it sort of float around in your head. It's doing nothing, the meditate in Hebrew, it's "Hagah", it's a very strong verb that means to chew, masticate, kind of like a cow chews cud. And the image here is like say you have something in your mouth that is very flavorful but takes a lot of chewing and you just, you chew it and you chew it and you chew it and it keeps releasing more and more flavor, more and more goodness, more and more nutrients, all of which are going to make your body more healthy. And they're contributing toward your delight in what you're tasting.

So in the same way you can chew on God's word, turn it over and over in your mind, try to extract all the essence of the meaning of it until it starts to actually speak into your life. And you actually hear the voice of the Lord coming to you. When you do that and you think about

something that deeply, you'll find that it does come back to you during the day. The Holy Spirit will bring it to your mind when you need it, and you'll find yourself meditating on it even during the night and unknown to you, just like food, it starts to work inside you. It plants itself like a seed and then sets down roots and starts to grow and form you in itself.

It's a beautiful nutritive side effect, I guess, of chewing on and digesting the word of God. This really describes the process that we go through when we pray using Lectio Divina. So lots of ways people say to do that, but basically it's just reading the word of God until it turns to prayer. You know, you read it, you think about it, you meditate on it, study it, finally it starts speaking to you. You answer the Lord or you ask Him questions about it, you determine to go forward and do what He's told you to do. This is Lectio Divina in a nutshell, right? And with that, when you go through that process, it becomes life.

And I love how the psalmist describes that *"this person who does, who meditates on God's law is like a tree planted by streams of water."* So in the holy land, in any kind of wilderness setting where there's not a lot of water. You need, if you want to plant a tree and get it to bear fruit, it's got to be by a stream of water so that the roots can go deep down in and get a source of nutrients because it's not going to rain very much, so surface, there's not going to be a lot of rain, but the roots need to go down into water.

So we have this *"tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither."* So it's fruitful. And then when the heat of the summer comes, when the wind comes, you know, even hail or something like that, it can withstand that because the roots are deep. In all that he does, he prospers. So beautiful picture and then contrasted to the wicked.

"They are not so, but are like chaff, which the wind drives away." Of course chaff being the part when you're threshing wheat, you lift up the wheat and let the wind go through it and all the chaff, the sort of dried up bits just blow away into nothing. That's what you're like when you don't have your roots planted deep into the word of God. Maybe another thing would be to visualize a tumbleweed, you know, as opposed to the tree planted. This is just a dried up bunch of branches that just rolls around with the wind and eventually disintegrates. It's nothing, no life, no fruit, no prosperity.

Therefore, because this is all they're made of, right? The wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. So we can fight temptation, we can stand strong in faith when we're rooted in the word, the word made flesh. And in His word, the, you know the word that's in the words, we need to know the word of God in both senses.

There's an interesting passage related to this in Luke chapter 19. You know, the story of when Jesus drove the merchants out of the temple and as a result of him doing that, the Jewish leaders start plotting to kill him. And verse 48, *"they could find no way to accomplish their purpose because all the people were hanging on his words."* I love that, you know what if the devil could find no way to accomplish his purpose in you, because you were hanging on the Lord's words. I like that thought.

Closing Prayer

Anyway, let's pray together with Psalm one, and I hope you'll do this afterward also. But let's pray with it together. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Lord, open our hearts to listen to your word deeply, to drink it in. I pray that it will drop like rain into the wilderness of our hearts, that we will be able to soak it up through the roots of our soul and that it will bring life and protect us from the wiles of the devil. Psalm one.

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the council of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And on his law, he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season. And its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff, which the wind drives away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

What word do you hear spoken to your heart? Which way are you on today? How can you be like a tree planted by streams of water? What can you do in your life to achieve that? Take a minute to respond to the Lord. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, amen. I encourage you this week to maybe right now, just take a few minutes and think, how am I planted in the word of God? How can I sink my roots more deeply this week into His word? And maybe also probably at some point during lunch, you're going to be going to confession. And something that I like to do is to think, you know, how can I use God's word to battle temptation?

So maybe there's a specific sin that you keep struggling with again and again. Maybe ask the priest if you can't think of something, but what's a word of God that you can take to heart, memorize even. And that way the Holy Spirit can bring it to mind when you need it. So that to help you to battle temptation as Jesus did in the desert.

And then I encourage you, if you have some time to spend at adoration, maybe before the blessed sacrament, or just to go earlier to Mass one day this week, to take with you Psalm one or the beginning of Matthew four, and just do your Lectio Divina, pray with the account of Jesus facing Satan in the wilderness or with Psalm one, and make it your prayer and allow the Lord to speak to you through it. And may God bless you as you read His word.