

Matthew 4:1-11

What was your favourite TV programme of last year? Downton? Strictly? Homeland? Mine Borgen – but probably 2nd was The Wrong Mans. Anyone see that? Dark comedy – mistaken identity. Sam Pinkett is a Town Planning and Noise Guidance Advisor for Berkshire County Council whose biggest achievement in life was dreaming up the slogan: ‘Bracknell – small town, big future’. Sees a car accident and picks up a phone that police miss. Dragged into a roller coaster of mistaken identity. Who is Sam Pinkett? A gangster and drug baron, or a Town Planning and Noise Guidance Advisor for Berkshire County Council?

Very funny – others funny too. Guardian article Twitter cases – John Lewis – constant bombardment by people thinking he’s John Lewis the retail giant. So if contacted he says something like: "I am an awesome cook, thanks. But you might have been referring to the retail store."

Identity goes to heart of our passage too. What first few chapters of Matthew are all about. Jesus been baptised, and voice from heaven says ‘You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased.’ So key question: is Jesus son of God? Or is it a case of mistaken identity.

If you’d heard someone was God’s son – what would you expect him to do? Good question – how would he prove it?

- Later chapters does all things you would expect – teaching no-one had heard before, miracles – ultimately resurrection from dead
- First thing he does is quite strange, isn’t it’ READ v1. What does divine Son do? Goes off on own into desert and fasts. What is going on? Look first at what it meant for Matthew. And then what means for us.

So what’s going on here? The thing is, we often preach on this passage in terms of how to resist temptation – and that’s fine – I’ll look at that in the second half of the sermon – but second half, because only 2nd most important question.

Key question – that identity thing again. Who is Jesus? The thing about Matthew's gospel is that he's trying to show us something, a bigger story than just this guy arrives and it turns out he's God's son. Jesus is more than that – fulfilment of all everything God promised in OT. In fact, he's the new Israel. In other words, everything God promised to Israel in OT is fulfilled in Jesus.

So first few chapters re-tell story of Israel – but now fulfilled in Jesus. Clue in Matthew 1:1 READ. Starts with journey of spiritual seekers from East to promised land (OT Abraham; here it's wise men). Then flight to Egypt (like Joseph and brothers) and return – includes biggest clue 2:15 READ – Hosea = Israel, here = Jesus. That's ch2

How Israel get out of Egypt? ASK. Judgment of oppressors and journey through water – now look at Matthew 3 – judgement of spiritual oppressors (Pharisees) and Jesus own journey through water (baptism) – just like for Israel, profound discovery of identity.

But big question: how prove he's the True Son? Where did Israel go next after Red Sea (ASK). Into desert – and what happened? (ASK) Disobedient, faithless. So where does Jesus have to go? And what does he have to prove?

You see, this isn't just random stuff. Jesus has a specific call and a specific task. He is fulfilment of all God's promises. First way he can start to prove that is by re-living the story of Israel but proving he can remain faithful. He is the True Son. That's why Jesus was 'led by the Spirit' into desert. Wonder if that has ever struck you as strange? Makes sense when you realise the bigger story going on here. This is part of the plan. Jesus is ultimate Spirit-led human being – and Spirit takes this new son, the True Son into the desert. It's not a blind alley, a distraction – it's absolutely part of the plan.

As an aside – Spirit sometimes takes us into desert too. Maybe that's you at the moment. Tim Dakin B. Of Winchester (4 years as head of CMS); Mother Teresa – 25 years largely of darkness even while venerated as greatest living Christian. If it can happen to them, it can to us – God is in the desert. So

often he meets people there. Deserts are hard times, but don't assume God won't meet you there. Be encouraged if that's you this morning.

Another label for Jesus already in Matthew – king (wise men). Something else going for Jesus in desert. Not just what sort of Son will he be, but also: what sort of king will he be?

- 3 temptations are all ways of being king: Roman empire 'bread and circuses' – that's first two – the food-giver and the provider of distractions. Last probably also chimes with RE – desire for empire. One isn't enough is it - do you want all the kingdoms of the world?
- Or to put it another way, these are all ways Jesus can abuse his power: to end his fast early by getting bread for himself; to use his power for pointless miracles; to surrender his identity by making a deal with the devil.

It's about identity again, isn't it? How will Jesus use his authority? What sort of king will he be?

And each time he proves faithful. No surprise that he quotes the OT from Deuteronomy, that moment in the desert just before the original Israel entered the promised land. It's that transition moment before Jesus starts the next part of his calling.

So this is first and foremost a passage about Jesus' identity. It's big picture stuff. **But what can we take away from it?** Well, there's no harm in reminding yourself that Jesus is the true son and the true king. He's the real deal. Even in the desert. Even being tempted by the devil. He's the main man.

But we can also learn from Jesus in how he resisted temptation. (Promised I'd get there eventually.) Couple of simple things:

Recognise the lie. Devil has lots of strategies – not exist; or too scared of him. But v popular one – false promises. Adam and Eve – ‘like God’. Here – dangles things in front of Jesus. Sin usually makes false promises, doesn’t it? Especially temptation.

- Gambling – ‘you’ll win’ – maybe this time, but what about overall, how much do you lose?
- Or anger – if take revenge, make me feel better, get it out of my system. Double lie – usually leads to retaliation in return, and often makes you feel worse towards person.

Temptations rely on their power to deceive us. Recognise the lie and it gets a lot easier to resist.

Defeat it with truth. Truth always overpowers a lie, doesn’t it? Especially truth of God’s word. Jesus quotes Scripture at devil. God’s word has power. Truest truth of all – let’s not rely on our strength, but God’s. Don’t take devil on – let God do that for you. Use his word. Use prayer.

And finally – **keep worshipping.** ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’ (v10) Best place to remain true to God is when we’re regularly worshipping him. Obviously here on Sundays, but can worship God all time. Arrow prayers, songs in your heart. Don’t limit God to Sundays – worship him through the week. James – ‘resist devil, and he flees’ but what’s the order?: submit to God – then resist devil. Worship is submission and that gives us the power to overcome.

So maybe some of you are struggling with something today. Take these simple lessons to heart – recognise the lie; defeat it with the truth; and keep worshipping God. And we can do that knowing who we worship: the true Son, the true king. He’s the real deal and he has the power to help us overcome.

Amen.