

MATTHEW 4:1-11
CHOICES, CHOICES!

Who do you listen to? We listen to our friends, or we listen to the bullies and there are two very different results! We listen to social media and what people say to us or about us there and for lots of people, especially teenagers, that becomes the place that shapes their understanding of themselves, good and bad. We listen to TV or radio; we listen to people writing in newspapers and these shape our view of the world. We listen to the blog-writers online, the places that we like to go to hear opinions about the issues of the day, political opinions, social issues, and our views are shaped by what we read and hear. There are all kinds of voices out there clamouring for our attention and not all of them are good for us to hear. There are political opinions of every hue, some mainstream, some at the fringes of reality. There are religious opinions, all kinds of views that call themselves Christian. There are atheist voices that tell us God is dead; or secular voices telling us that the church is irrelevant. Who do you listen to? The people we listen to will shape our view of ourselves and of the world in which we live.

We talk about listening to God. Now is the time for us to read and know our Bibles. God speaks to us through the universe He has created; He shows us something of His glory and power. God speaks to us in Jesus, and shows us how much He loves us and cares for us. God speaks to us in the Bible, His Word to the world, to help us understand God, Jesus, life, faith. This is a time when knowing the Bible seems to be more important than ever; this is the way by which we test these other voices that we hear; which voices should we trust? Which voices are good for us to listen to? Which voices will corrupt us and our world? For Christians, the Bible has always been that testing place, the place where we test what we hear. More than ever, for the good of our faith and our world, we need to read and know the Bible. How can we test what we hear if we don't know the bible?

That is what Jesus does in His testing time in the desert. He has gone from the high point of His baptism, that moment of grace when the Father declared *"This is..."* (Matthew 3:17) and the Spirit is poured out on Him – He has gone from there into the desert for 40 days *"Led by the Spirit"* (Matthew 4:1) God is in this time in the desert; God is there; this is part of God preparing Jesus for His mission, for ministry. We don't know what Jesus has been doing for these 40 days, except that He has been fasting, eating nothing or very little; usually fasting goes alongside prayer and Bible reading. Maybe for these 40 days, Jesus has been reading Deuteronomy and praying about what He's reading, letting the Bible shape His view of life, shape His mission and His understanding of what God wants Him to do.

Then along comes the devil, with his voice, trying to insinuate his way into Jesus' head. *"If you..."* (Matthew 4:3) *"If you..."* (Matthew 4:6) *"All this..."* (Matthew 4:9) He is trying to insinuate his way into Jesus' head; he is trying to disturb Jesus' sense of calling and mission; he is trying to unsettle Jesus and persuade Him that there is a better way than God's way. The first test is about becoming a magician, turning stones into bread; the second test is about Jesus' relationship with God and forcing God's hand in some kind of artificial situation; the third test is about power and to achieve power Jesus has to give up His loyalty to God. This is all about Jesus as Messiah – what has He come to do? How will He achieve what God wants? Let's bypass the cross and short-circuit the path to obedience, to be a king without suffering! (par Green) Jesus says no!

His answers are all from the Bible, indeed all from the book of Deuteronomy: *"Man does..."* *"Do not..."* *"Worship the..."* (Matthew 4:4,7,10) Jesus' view of God, the world, mission, faith is shaped by what He reads in the Bible. Had He been reading Deuteronomy during these 40 days? Is that why it was fresh in His mind? He quotes these verses because here is a better way. He is not a magician, but someone who listens to and depends on God; He will not force God's hand but trust Him; He will remain loyal to God and worship Him because that is the

best way! For Jesus, life, faith, His relationship with the Father, His mission – all are shaped by what He reads in His Bible. He will listen for the voice of God and He will test everything else by what He reads and so the devil's voice trying to insinuate its way into His head, is rejected.

Jesus has a choice to make: who will He listen to? He listens to God by reading His Bible and that settles His mission and settles His faith. We have a choice about the influences that shape our lives; the best choice we can make is to listen for God and we do that by reading the Bible. I said earlier, it seems to me that the time is now for Christians to read and know their Bible, more so than ever. If you consider that it is too late for you, think about what legacy you can leave your children or grandchildren – what voices will they listen to? How can we embody listening for God as a model for them to follow? Yet, the statistics tell us that very few of us actually read the Bible regularly. We make available notes to help you; there are all kinds of other ways, online, or to buy from SU amongst other places, that will help you engage with the Bible, no matter where you start. Bible reading is not meant to be a minority interest among a select few; it is a crucial part of every Christian's life as a disciple of Jesus.

There are lots of voices out there that will try to influence us and the choices we make and the kind of life that we live; the best influence is to discover Jesus' values for life; Jesus' take on what faith means; Jesus' understanding of the mission of the church. How do we do that other than by reading the Bible. Listen for God, read the Bible, pray, engage with what you read; stand firm in the faith and persevere in faith. *"Man does..." (Matthew 4:4)* Who do we listen to? We have a choice to make; choose to read the Bible and listen for God!