

THE TEMPTATION

Text: Matthew 4:1-11

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

Today, we shall read and study together another of the great interviews of the Master teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. The last two Lord's days we have considered the case of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. We have every reason to believe that Jesus enjoyed talking to these two for He was able to teach them the way of truth. These two just mentioned were never the same after a talk with the Master, for Nicodemus heard about the "new birth" and how it was related to his own personal salvation; the woman at the well in Samaria learned of "living water" and how it could spring up in one's heart unto everlasting life. Jesus could see how He could help these two and so He enjoyed talking to them. But Jesus did not enjoy this interview which He had on the occasion which we read of today, for He was dealing with the prince of darkness, Satan. After the interview, Christ may have felt a great sense of satisfaction for having overcome the tempter, but it is safe to say that He did not enjoy this experience at all.

WHY WAS JESUS TEMPTED?

He had just returned from the Jordan where He was baptized by John. Immediately after His baptism, the voice of God came out of heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." These words from heaven were a distinct challenge to Satan. Several thousand years before, he had met another favorite of God and had successfully tempted him.

In the beginning of the human race Adam had been tempted and fell. In the beginning of His great work to reclaim the earth and redeem humanity, Jesus was tempted. Jesus presented the greatest barrier to continued rule in the world that Satan had ever faced. He recognized in Christ a worthy adversary. Never for a moment think that Satan did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God. He knew Him to be the Messiah, but the same spirit which had led Satan to oppose God throughout time led him to redouble his efforts and try in his strongest possible way to crush this new opposition.

Christ doubtless had been tempted before. During the thirty years which He spent in Nazareth He must have suffered various temptations; but now as He enters into His public work, Satan renews his attacks with increased energy and force. He does all that he can to thwart the purpose of God and to defeat Jesus in His mission of Salvation.

Also, the temptation was a preparation for Jesus in the flesh for His great work as the Messiah; for He must meet every difficulty and conquer every foe. He is not the Saviour of men and He cannot establish His spiritual kingdom, if He yields on a single point. Satan must be overcome at his strongest, or else Christ will not be able to succor all who are tempted. So in answer to the question: "Why was Christ tempted?" we answer:

(1.) That He be tempted in all points as we are.

(2.) That he prepare Himself for His earthly work. By in
once resisting the strongest temptations, He would
better be able to overcome future temptations.

(3.) That He subject Himself to the severest of trials in order that He might be better able, in His role as Mediator, to sympathize with the weaknesses of the flesh.

(4.) That He might serve as an example to us in showing how to overcome temptation by reliance upon God and a proper use of His word.

THE TEMPTATION OF HUNGER

Satan attacks Christ at a time when his resistance was the lowest. This is the way he always works. He hunts for the most vulnerable spot and strikes there. Jesus had been in the wilderness for forty days without food. He was hungry. People have been known to do some terrible things because of hunger. In II Kings 6, we read of the siege of Samaria by Benhadad, king of Syria. During those days of starvation inside the city, two mothers became so desperate for food that they cast aside the last vestige of civilization and decided to eat their babies. One mother boiled her child and they ate him. Then she complained to the king that the other woman hid her son so that they could not eat him. During the passage of the Donner family from Ohio to California, they were trapped by the snow in the high Sierra Mountains. They were civilized people, but when their food gave out they cast aside the last link to their former life, for as they hungered they fed upon each other. Truly the power of hunger is a driving force and one to be contended with. Jesus was without food for forty days and now he was hungry. Satan came to Him with words about food--food for his starving body. "If thou be the Son of God, command that

these stones be made bread." (Matthew 4:3) There were stones lying all around, some of them may have already been in the shape of the round loaf. All that Jesus had to do was speak the word and they would become bread. For Jesus was the Son of God and He had the power to turn them into food for his body. But he did not cast aside all of His training; He did not forget His purpose in life, just because He was hungry. He turned to the tempter and said: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Surely the Man of Galilee had to call upon the utmost of His strength to throw off this temptation. He could have thought, "I must live! Surely my Father does not intend that I starve. I will have food, lest I die." This is what a lesser person might have done, but not Jesus. Jesus saw the evil intent which Satan had in taunting Him.

This temptation was dual in nature. Notice that Satan said, "If thou be the Son of God." This was a challenge to Jesus to prove Himself able to work miracles. There seems to be a taunt in the suggestion..."You are not the Son of God ...if you were you would not be hungry...you would go ahead and turn these stones to bread. The Son of God would do that ...He would not starve...God ahead Jesus of Nazareth, prove yourself as worthy of the claims made for you..." These are the same kind of words that were hurled at Him a few years later when He hung upon the cross, "He saved others: let him save himself, if he be the Christ, the chosen of God." (Luke 23:35) The devil never lost an opportunity to try to make Christ forget his purpose in life. He struck Him at the times

when most men would be the weakest, but he was never able to change the course or the plans of Jesus. Jesus overcame the temptation of natural hunger and also the appeal to His vanity in the questioning of His power. Christ was able to overcome because He never lost sight of His purpose of life and because He stood behind the word of God as His shield against sin.

THE TEMPTATION OF PRIDE

Satan has tried the Master on the matter of gratification of the natural bodily appetite and has failed. Now he appeals to another side of His nature. Satan does not give up easily. Jesus had found refuge in His reliance upon the word of God. Now Satan is going to test His reliance upon God. They go now to the Holy City (Jerusalem) and up to a very high pinnacle of the temple. It was overlooking the valley, and according to Josephus' description, this was six hundred feet above the valley floor. There are many people walking in the valley and they will be awed by any great demonstration which takes place. So, with the scene set, Satan says: "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."

Let us look at the possibilities in such a proposition. Jesus was just beginning His ministry. All that He could see ahead in life was work, hard and constant, opposition, desertion by friends and a shameful death. If He could engineer a great event like this in the sight of the people below, they would come in great numbers to see, hear and proclaim

Him as the Son of God. It was a short cut to recognition that Satan offered. Jesus knew that He could cast Himself off the temple and call upon the angels to rescue Him and they would come and catch Him before He reached the ground. What a temptation to show off His power and gain a following. How many times have you heard a man or woman say, "I did that just to show them that I could." Jesus could have done this just to show Satan and the people below that He could do it, but He did not succumb to this temptation either, for he said, "It is written, again thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Satan had quoted scripture to Jesus in an attempt to carry out his unholy purpose. Men do that sometimes today. To quote scripture to carry a point or to sustain error is like Satan quoting to Jesus. Satan did not quote his scripture correctly. He left out part of it. Jesus did not take another course because Satan was misusing the scripture, he stuck with the Word and used another scripture to put Satan to rout.

THE TEMPTATION OF AMBITION

Satan now shifts to another approach. He knew that Jesus was come to establish a kingdom, and that the people were looking for a kingdom when the Messiah came. So he takes Jesus to an exceeding high mountain and in a flash showed him all the kingdoms of the earth. There are those to the East with their tremendous wealth, fine silks and countless servants. There is the Roman empire with its great power, there is the culture and refinement of Greece...and Satan says: "Here they are...they are all yours, if you will fall

down and worship me." This was a great temptation. The love of worldly power and glory is one of the strongest, if not the strongest, of human passions. Satan could do this for he was the "prince of this world." (John 14:30) Christ's battle was with Satan over the rulership of the world. He had to go about the battle in His own way. If He would have given up His purpose Satan could have put Him on the throne right away, but this was not the will of the Lord. Jesus felt the power of the temptation, for He said, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

Again Christ's defense was the word of the Lord: "It is written." This is sufficient. God is the Creator and Ruler of the Universe and to worship and serve Him is man's only and greatest good. To turn from Him is ruin forever.

Satan has done his best. He has presented all his temptations--"the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life." (I John 2:16)--and he has presented them in his most subtle and most artful manner, and Jesus has resisted them all. Satan recognized his defeat and departed from Him for a season.

When Jesus had fought off the devil, angels came and ministered unto Him. In all probability they brought Him food and drink. They came not to fight His battles for Him, but after He had won the victory.

All must be tempted. (Matthew 18:7) Everyone is tempted through his own lusts. (James 1:13-15) None are tempted above his ability to bear. (I Corinthians 10:13) Temptations prove all and strengthen those who resist. (James 1:2-4)

"Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation."

Radio Sermon by Warren Morris