

TEMPTED IN ALL POINTS

“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil” (Luke 4:1-2).

The details of this terrible forty days we do not know, except as Mark records (1:13), he was *“with the wild beasts.”* Forty days of danger, privation and exposure, waiting and enduring patiently until God should open the way further.

“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me” (Psa. 23:4).

How could he find comfort in the rod of God? James says (1:2-4)-

“Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience-let patience have her perfect work.”

When the apostles were beaten by the council of the Jews, they “rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name” (Acts 5:40-41). To the mind of the flesh, this is madness.

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”

(1 Cor. 2:14).

The wisdom of the world would regard rejoicing at trouble as a perverted and psychopathic condition. Let us not turn to them for help and guidance in our problems. Let us turn to the word of God. The record of the temptation of Jesus is a demonstration, for our learning, of the great contrast between the natural mind of the flesh and the divine mind of the Spirit-how, if life is to be gained, the one must be subdued by the other.

“If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread” (Lk. 4:3).

That was reasonable enough. Jesus had a great work to do. He was given the power of the Spirit to enable him to accomplish it. He could not live without food. Surely then there was no wickedness in using this power to create a little plain bread for himself. Did not the Law clearly say, “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn?” (Deut. 25:4)

But Jesus, through the discerning eyes of the Spirit, saw further and deeper than that. Many things look reasonable and harmless to the flesh, but what was God's view of the matter? There is the safe line of thought.

For forty days Jesus had not eaten. Prolonged fasting reduces all the physical and mental powers. It reduces self-control and resistance and balanced thought, and greatly intensifies the tendency to impatience and irritability. He was hungry and exhausted. The previous forty days must have seemed endless. How much longer would be required to sustain this struggle? Seeking strength and guidance, his mind went back two thousand years to a very similar occasion, and to the inspired words spoken at that time. Moses said to Israel in Deuteronomy 8:2-3-

"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart. He suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord."

The great lesson-*by the word of God alone is life*. Had God, the Giver of this power, directed him to use it to justify his own desires? No. Then he would not betray his stewardship. God was proving him, to know what was in his heart. He would wait for God to provide, as He had provided for Israel. He would wait for, and live by, the words of God.

"And the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and said, 'All this power will I give thee, if thou wilt worship me'" (vs. 5-7).

Again the reply, *"It is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve"* (v. 8).

"Him ONLY shalt thou serve"-that is the point. Serve God-not even just primarily but exclusively. *"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon"* (Matt. 6:24). Whenever there was any temptation to serve and gratify the flesh, Jesus answered, *"Get thee behind me Satan. It is written, thou shalt only serve the Lord thy God."* We are not offered all the kingdoms of the world. It isn't necessary. Much *less* temptation is plenty to strain *our* weak faith. But the diabolos continually offers us pleasant and tempting things on the condition that instead of a completely dedicated service to God, we turn in part to the service of the flesh. These two calls, the flesh and the spirit, are always present, seeking our attention. Temptation is a continuous process. Every action is a yielding to either one or the other-either the flesh toward death, or the spirit toward life.

When we read of Jesus' reaction to temptations, we well realize what Paul meant when he said to Timothy, *"The Scriptures are able to make you wise unto*

salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15). Jesus met them all with, *“It is written.”* We must sincerely try to do the same.

God’s law is not a matter of burden or restriction or imposition. Jesus looked upon it as a light, a help, a deliverance and guide through the perils of darkness.

“I delight to do Thy will, O God” (Psa. 40:8).

“Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors” (Psa. 119:24).

“Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage” (v. 54).

Without this frame of mind, there is no hope of life, because this is the Word of God, and it is only by being filled with the Word of God that men can live. Let us learn who are our enemies and who are our allies. When God wishes to destroy a people, He sets every man’s sword against his brother. Instead of fighting the enemy, they blindly fight their friends.

Jesus said, *“The enemy is the devil,”* the flesh, with all its natural thinking, motions and desires. Let us keep that clear. When we fight, let us be sure that alone is what we are fighting. We have a host of allies. They are the testimonies of God’s law. Every one is a true and powerful friend, although often in our wilfulness they do not seem so. Sometimes, like the Gadarenes, we impatiently require them to depart from our coasts, because we fear that while they are destroying our evil spirit, they will at the same time destroy our swine. But they are our real friends and defenders. Jesus called three of them to his aid in resisting the subtle enticements of the devil, the devil of lust, greed and pride. Let us not make the fatal mistake of defending and justifying this enemy, just because it happens to be within ourselves, and of turning against our God-given helpers just because they happen to prick us in the process of coming to our aid.

“If thou be the son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written, ‘He shall give His angels charge concerning thee’ ” (vs. 9-10).

How quickly the devil learns to use our own weapons against us! Twice Jesus had said, *“It is written,”* and the theme of his defence was dependence on, and allegiance to, God. So the third temptation was, *“Give evidence of your faith-it is written. He will keep thee from harm.”* This was a clever attack from the opposite direction, and required to be met with a great balance and self-control.

The first two attacks had caused Jesus to bring forward the forces of his faith and dependence to the limit. The third was a trap to provoke him, in the heat of zeal and enthusiasm, to go just one step too far. This third attack, while apparently a Scripture-backed appeal to faith, was actually an appeal to pride and self-glory. There is no more subtle temptation possible than to give a man an excuse to parade

his pride under the guise of virtue. Only from God can we get the discernment to steer a straight, safe course through the wiles of the devil.

And let us doubly beware when the mind of the flesh comes quoting Scripture.

“And the devil departed from him for a season” (Lk. 4:13). “*Resist the devil and he will flee from you*” (Jam. 4:7). The devil will never depart until he is courageously resisted. *There is no peace in appeasement.*

“All the rivers run into the sea, and yet the sea is not full. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing” (Ecc. 1:7-8).

“Hell and destruction are never full-so the eyes of man are never satisfied” (Prov. 27:20).

It is impossible to satisfy the desires of the flesh. To attempt to find satisfaction and happiness in that direction is merely a weary shovelling into a bottomless pit, and finally we drop into the pit ourselves-unsatisfied.

“Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple” (Psa. 65:4).

Inside the temple of God alone is satisfaction and peace. “In Thy presence is *fulness of joy*” (Psa. 16:11). How could it possibly be any other way? Is there anything good outside of God?

Concerning temptation, Paul says (1 Cor. 10:13)-

“God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

The Spirit declares that, in God’s love, no child of His is ever tempted beyond his power to withstand. If we are wise, we will humbly accept the verdict of Scripture, and not attempt to evade the responsibility for our shortcomings. We will not shift the blame to some other person, as Adam did; or to a supernatural devil, as Christendom does; or to God, as we unconsciously do when we say we just can’t help sinning because we are made that way.

What Adam said was perfectly true, “*The woman Thou gavest me gave to me, and I did eat.*” But the woman was simply part of the circumstances in which God placed Adam, and the divine principle stated by Paul holds true-the man could have held firm if he had sought *aid and guidance in the right place. Otherwise what a mockery his punishment would be!*

Refuge is sometimes taken in a mistaken application of the words of Paul in Romans 7:17, *"It is no more I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me."* Those who reason so fail to follow Paul's exposition through to the end. He is here simply laying the foundation of facts. He goes on in the following verses telling how, through the power of God, those facts must be faced and handled in order to gain life. The first thirteen verses of chapter 8 emphasize the vital necessity of the law of God in the mind overcoming the law of sin in the members, reaching its climax in verse 13-

"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye by the Spirit do mortify (R. V.: put to death) the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

By the Spirit-that is the secret. Chapter 7 shows the hopelessness of his natural evil condition, desiring to do good but unable to. Chapter 8 shows the power by which this is overcome, and *must be overcome*-*"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit on my throne."* The same Paul said-

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:26-27).

Paul clearly recognized that if he did not, by the freely offered and unlimited power of Christ, overcome the law of sin in his members, he would be a castaway. James says: *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God"* (Jam. 1:13).

This is a serious warning. This is what Adam said, in effect, when he said, *"The woman Thou gavest me."* God commands, *"Thou shalt not."* Man replies, *"I cannot help it-it is the way You made me, the circumstances You placed me in."*

James continues-

"Do not err, my beloved brethren, lust brings sin, and sin brings death-you must overcome-every good and perfect gift is from above-let him ask God in faith for wisdom and power to walk worthily and it shall be given him" (Jam. 1:5-6,15-17).

What did God say to Cain? *"Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? if thou doest well, shalt not thou be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door"* (Gen. 4:6-7). Whose door? *Cain's* door. Do not err, my beloved brethren. The command is there. The power is there. The *responsibility* is there. It can be done, and it *must* be done.

There will be failures, but let us not blame anyone for them but ourselves. They are danger signals-flaws that show up in testing. The failures show that we have failed to prepare ourselves-failed to apply our heart aright-failed to draw upon the great reservoir of power and wisdom offered through the Scriptures and the Spirit of God. Let us humbly recognize our failures, and assume full responsibility for them. Then, and then only, is there any hope of overcoming. In whatever circumstances we are placed, let us remember that God is trying us to prove what is in our hearts.

Temptation can be met as Jesus met it-with a simple, powerful, *"It is written."* An impregnable armor, *if we will make the effort required to put it on.* And it is effort-long hours of effort and application as long as life continues. Paul told Timothy that the Scriptures were able to make him wise unto salvation. They were able to provide him with a ready *"It is written"* to each of the endless problems, trials and temptation that fill the probationary period. But Paul also made it clear that Timothy must *"Meditate upon these things, and give himself wholly to them"* (1 Tim. 4:15).

In the 119th Psalm which we finished yesterday, the law of God is referred to in each verse-176 times. Why? Clearly to *impress*-to impress indelibly with its vital importance-its value, beauty, blessing, protection, pleasures and the glorious eternal purpose it was given to accomplish. The mind expressed throughout this Psalm is the mind of Christ which David was inspired to record.

Jesus *"magnified the law and made it honorable"* (Isa. 42:21). He showed its power and value, for by it he quenched the fiery darts of the adversary, and achieved eternal life for himself and all who should follow in his steps. We often point out in our lectures the importance of understanding that Jesus was a representative and not a substitute. This truth is equally important in our exhortations. His obedience and faithful overcoming is no substitute for ours. He opened the way-*we must walk in it.*

Paul says, as he enjoins the solemn ordinance we are about to partake-

"Be ye followers (RV: imitators) of me, even as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

Jesus said-

"I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done" (Jn. 13:15).

And Peter records-

"He left us an example, that we should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

The 119th Psalm shows whence he drew his strength. It shows how he “increased in wisdom and in favor with God.” He did not do this automatically. He increased in wisdom-

“Thou through Thy commandments hast made me wiser than my enemies. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged (RV), because I keep Thy precepts” (Psa. 119:98-100).

He increased in favor with God. God’s own son increased in favor with Him. How? Verse 58 of this Psalm-

“I entreated Thy favor with my whole heart.” - “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, and it shall be given him” (Jam. 1:5-6).

“How much more shall your heavenly Father give good gifts to them that ask Him” (Matt. 7:11).

As we partake of this ordinance, we bear testimony that “man doth not live by bread alone, but by *every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*” We partake, in faith, of him who was the Word of God, the spiritual bread, who perfectly manifested in his own life the life-giving power of that divine Word.

And we declare in symbol, as we partake, our recognition that unless we faithfully identify ourselves with him in heart and soul, and follow the pattern that he has given, we cannot have life. In the seven promises to the seven ecclesias, it is each time only “*To him that overcometh. To him that overcometh, even as I overcame*” (Rev. 3:21).

“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Rom. 11:22).

“I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove-show, demonstrate, illustrate-what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom.12:1-2).

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