

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Matthew 4:1-11

Intro: In reading and studying a subject such as comes before us tonight in the temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am reminded that we today ought to be thankful that we live in days when we have all of the revealed Word of God. We are not waiting for additional revelations from God; we believe that we have in our hands the completed revelation of God. There is much more that God could have revealed, truth that we will learn when we get to heaven, but for now He, by the Spirit, and thorough various writers, has given us, as the Apostle Peter said at the beginning of his second epistle, “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). Let me explain what I mean.

We have just finished in our Sunday School lessons on Ephesians a very important passage about the Devil. And many of us have committed to memory Ephesians 6:10-18. Now when Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote about the temptation of our Lord, they were not able to profit from Ephesians because Ephesians had not yet been written. The Apostle Paul who wrote Ephesians may have been living at that time because many feel that he was born about the same time that the Lord Jesus was born. But he was not saved until after the ministry of Jesus Christ was finished and the Lord was back in heaven with the Father.

I believe that it can be said as a fact that as more books of the Bible were written, the better the people of God were able to understand what had been written previously. So we today have truth which Moses did not have, or which David did not have, or which Matthew did not have. The Apostle John was the only writer of Scripture who had the same privilege that you and I have because he was the one who wrote the last books of the Bible. Even the Apostle Paul who was greatly blessed of God to give us much of the NT did not have the Gospel of John because he was in heaven before John wrote his Gospel. And with the Apostle John’s writings toward the end of the first century, the Bible was completed. And how blessed has every generation of believers been from that day until this.

Now this does not mean that we know more than they did, or that we are more godly than they were. Often when I read the story of Abraham who lived about as long before the time of Christ as we live after, I can easily see that there is a lot that I can learn from Abraham and what he knew

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about God, and how he used what he knew. And I could say the same about many of the people of God that we read about in both the New as well as the Old Testaments. But how we should treasure our Bibles! We ought to read it far more than we do, and we should be constantly praying that the Lord would help us to understand more of the Word, and then to live the truth that we know.

Now this person who tempted our Lord was older than any person that has ever lived on the earth. He was created by God as an angel. The Bible tells us about how he rebelled against God and led a rebellion among the angels which is still being carried out today. The Devil is Satan, and he has countless numbers of angels who joined with him in his rebellion. They are the demons that we read so much about in the Gospels. We are unable to see them. That is one thing that makes them so dangerous to us. They do not die. But the book of the Revelation tells about the terrible, eternal judgment that awaits them in the end times. Don't think of this temptation as something that people could have witnessed. The Lord remained visible, but if men could have looked upon this scene that we read about in Matthew 4 and Mark 1 and Luke 4, only the Lord could have been seen.

But now I want to raise a question about the temptation and that is this: Why did the Devil tempt Jesus because he had to have known Who the Lord was? The Devil knows that God cannot sin. He knows that the Holy Spirit cannot sin. And he knows that the Son of God cannot sin? Then why would the Devil seek to get our Lord to commit sin? My answer to that question is that the Devil who is not omniscient, that is, he doesn't know everything, but he wanted to find out if in coming to the earth as a human being there was any way in which our Lord had ceased to be God!

Down through history this has frequently been a question which men have raised about Jesus: If He is a man, then He can't be God. And as you read through the first eleven verses of Matthew 4, you read that the Devil preceded his temptation with the word, "If Thou be the Son of God," then do such and such a thing. And right here following the ministry of John the Baptist, and then the baptism of our Lord after which the Father spoke from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased," the Devil was out to prove that the Lord was no longer Deity, and so put an end to the ministry of our Lord before it got started. The Devil felt that he was certain to get the victory over God right here.

But now I want to point out another very unusual thing about this event. And I am going now to a revelation that was made later although OT saints, I am sure, knew that God could not sin. And when I say that God could not sin, I mean not only God the Father, but God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They would not have been God if they could have sinned. True theology teaches not only that the Members of the Godhead never did sin, but that it was impossible for them to sin.

Now let me cite a very important Scripture in proving this point. It is found in James 1:13. Listen to what James wrote. Most of you are familiar with these words:

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

Now the object of temptation is always to get a person to sin. For James to say that “God cannot be tempted with evil” is the equivalent of saying that God cannot sin, nor does He ever tempt us to sin. But then James went on to tell us why we, mere human beings can be tempted to sin.

And he did so with these words in the verses that follow: James 1:14-15:

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Now it is fact that every human being with the exception of our Lord, has sinful lusts. And these lusts make us receptive to temptation, and they draw us away and entice us to sin, and we do sin, and the wages of sin is death. This does not mean that we are not sinners until we sin, but we sin because we are sinners. We were born in sin, born sinners, and therefore under the sentence of eternal death. The Devil knows that our sin nature makes us so receptive to temptation that all he usually has to do is to set some temptation before people, and they foolishly follow the temptation to sin.

But now let me remind you of another statement that the Lord made while He was here on earth that helps us to understand the sinless of our Lord. These words are found in John 14:30. These were our Lord’s concluding words to His disciples in the Upper Room where He has taken them. Our Lord knew that death was near for Him, and so He said,

30 Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.

“The prince of this world” is the Devil, but the Lord said that he “hath nothing in Me.” This means that the Lord had no sin nature that would be

responsive to the wiles of the Devil.

Now we see from Scripture that God cannot be tempted to sin because He has no sin nature. And His becoming a man did not change that. The Lord Jesus had no human father, but as Scripture teaches us He was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. All of us have had human fathers, but that was not true of our Lord. He can't sin. It is impossible for God to sin, and it is impossible for the Lord Jesus to sin because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

But now let us take these facts about the Godhead to Matthew 4:1. Who led the Lord Jesus into the wilderness, and why? It was the Holy Spirit Who led Jesus into the wilderness "to be tempted of the Devil." The Spirit of God led our Lord into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil to show the Devil, and everyone else who reads this passage, that Jesus in His humanity not only would not sin, but that He could not sin, and so was the only Man Who had ever lived on the earth Who was qualified to be our Savior. If the Lord Jesus could have sinned, but just didn't sin, then we would have no security in our salvation. But the Holy Spirit has demonstrated to all men that the humanity of Jesus Christ made absolutely no change in His Deity, and therefore our salvation on an eternally secure foundation. Our sins were laid on Him at Calvary, but He paid our debt to God in full by His death on the Cross.

Now as we look at these temptations which the Devil set before the Lord, have you ever asked yourself why there were only three? What did the Devil quit after three? Why did He not go on to four or five, or even a dozen? The book of Proverbs tells us that wicked people work on people until they make them fall. Why wasn't the Devil that persistent with the Lord?

Most of us have been told over and over again that we as the Lord's people have three chief enemies: they are the world, the flesh, and the Devil. We live in a sinful, fallen, evil world. We all have a sinful nature with which we were born. Nobody had to teach us to sin. The most normal and natural thing for any of us to do was, and is, to sin. And the Bible teaches us that we have a real enemy. He is not omniscient, that is, he does not know everything (as our text shows us). Nor is he omnipresent like the Lord is. Neither is the Devil omnipotent, although he is very powerful, more powerful than we are. The world is our enemy. The flesh, our old sinful nature, is our enemy, and the Devil heads it all up in

opposing God, the ways of God, the will of God, and the people of God.

One of the last books of the Bible to be written was 1 John. It is short enough to be called an epistle rather than a book. But it is a very, very important document, and it tells us many important things. Among those things is what the Apostle John said about the world. And I am referring to what we find in 1 John 2:15-17. Let me read those verses to you even though many of you know them by heart:

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Now the Devil tempted the Lord in three ways. Did you notice what the Apostle John said is in the world, and he said that these three were all that is in the world. What are they?

- 1) The lust of the flesh.
- 2) The lust of the eyes.
- 3) The pride of life.

Now let me take you back to the very beginning of the Bible where we read about the first temptation and the first sin that was ever committed by a human being. Remember that the Devil had already sinned. What had God told Adam and Eve that they were to do, and what they were not to do?

The Lord did for Adam according to Genesis 2:8-9:

8 And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

9 And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

And then we read in Genesis 2:15-17 what the Lord did with Adam, and why, with a specific command as to what he could eat, and not eat:

15 And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree

of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

It did not take the Devil long to fly into action, and he chose to approach Eve. He questioned the goodness of God, and then told her why the Lord had told Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

What did Eve see when she looked at the tree? Three things. She “saw” three things about the fruit:

- 1) It was good for food.
- 2) It was pleasant to the eyes.
- 3) It was desirable to make one wise.

Now all of this has been recorded for us as a safeguard against sin.

The temptation of our Lord is recorded only in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Mark’s account is very brief – only two verses: Mark 1: 12-13. Luke account is more like Matthew’s, although he reversed the order of the temptations. In Matthew it is the bread, then what the Devil told the Lord to do from the height of the temple. And the last was from a high mountain where the Devil showed the Lord all of the kings of the earth.

In Luke’s account it was the bread first, then from the mountain, and third from the pinnacle of the temple.

So the order is not the significant thing. But it was how the Devil sought to tempt the Lord in these three ways. But I think that you can see in the three temptations how this can be applied to us in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. But the results for man were far greater and more destructive than Eve, or Adam, could have imagined.

“The lust of the flesh” speaks of the fact that when Eve, and then Adam, ate of the fruit, they immediately died spiritually, and became the bond-servants of sin. Lenski defines this as the sinful desire [which springs] from the flesh or depraved nature which seeks sinful gratification” (his volume on the epistles of Peter, John and Jude, p. 426). I think I would state Lenski’s definition even stronger saying that the flesh *demand*s satisfaction. What are the lusts of the flesh? See Gal. 6:16-17, 19-21. Now this is not the only passage which helps us on this, but this is more

than we can handle. Remember an unbeliever has no safeguard against the sinful nature which can manifest itself in different ways. Obviously those that are in the flesh cannot please God. See Rom. 8:8. What originally appeared to be simple bread which the Lord provided for people on at least two occasions, has resulted in a human race enslaved to sin.

What about “the lust of the eyes”? This is what we can certainly call the Devil’s most successful method. Read about Achan in Joshua 7 and the defeat of Israel at Ai.

Or read about David’s sin with another man’s wife, Bathsheba. The story is told in 2 Samuel 11, verse 2, which simply tells us that from the roof of the king’s house David “saw a woman washing herself.” This was what started David on the pathway to adultery, and then murder.

Think of all of the filthy novels that are available today, the pornography, many programs on television, and the general moral breakdown of our society. Adultery and homosexuality and abortion have become a way of life in today’s world. Man has taken over in deciding what is right and what is wrong, and the result has been practically no moral standard at all.

Solomon wrote in Prov 27:20 that “hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.”

What is “the pride of life”? Again let me express my indebtedness to Dr. Lenski. He says that “the pride of life” is “that hollow arrogance which presumes that it can decide and direct the course of life without God, determine what it will do, gain, achieve, enjoy” (*Ibid.*)

This is what is in the world, and that which in our generation has invaded more and more aspects of our life. It is now on the internet.

What is the answer to all of this? What did our Lord Jesus Christ do when he was face to face with the Devil? *In every instance he answered the Devil with the Word of God.* As I have said many times before, our Lord had the right to say whatever He wanted to say because all authority is in Him. But it was of the greatest help to us that he quoted what was “written.”

What result did it have? Read Matthew 4:11. Why didn’t the Devil go on

with another temptation? Because he had attacked the Lord on the basis of “all that is in the world,” and the Lord defeated him on the only grounds that the Devil had to approach the Lord to make Him sin.

What is the lesson for us if we are to live victoriously over sin? It is not to discuss and argue with ourselves or anyone else. We must do what our Lord taught us to do in this instance in His life. *He stood firmly upon the living, written Word of God.* Cf. Psalm 119:11.

Every child of God needs to be taught how vital it is that he read the Bible every day. But it is not just learning correct doctrine as important as that is, and as foundational as that is. But we need to apply the Word to our lives each day we live, and usually many times a day.

In Psalm 40, verses 7 and 8, it is written what the Lord would say when He came to earth:

7 Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me,

8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.

I close with these words from James 1:21-25, written by the Lord’s half brother some time after the Lord Jesus had gone back to heaven:

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

I once heard a servant of the Lord say that we can’t live in this world without seeing evil, but you don’t have to keep looking at it, or even look at it a second time.