

4. The Temptations that Jesus Endured

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A space shuttle was explored in the middle of air right after its launch in Jan, 1986. Many of us watched it on TV with horror. Nobody had any idea what could possibly go wrong. After that tragedy, NASA made an extensive examination for the downed shuttle. They found out that a few O-rings allowed hot air to escape and got mixed with fuel and exploded it completely.

It would cost only \$10 for each O-ring, and it seems that it was so insignificant. But it was valuable enough to destroy the entire shuttle that cost over a billion dollars. Temptation is like those O-ring leak. It seems so small, but the result is devastating.

Temptation without opportunity is like a bee without sting. As free agents with choices in our hearts, we are allowed to choose good or evil. God honors our choices, however there is consequences and reward of our choices. Some might say, "If I make a good choice, I get reward. But if I make a bad choice, I get the consequences of my bad choice. That is not much of choices." Bingo! God wants us to make good choices. He teaches us through the Bible what good choice is.

In chapter 3, we've learned why sinless Jesus had to be baptized by John the Baptist. In today's study, we are going to learn why Jesus had to go through the temptations in the wilderness by the devil.

Somehow we think that "temptation" only apply in sensual way. That is not true. It runs from not only sexual temptations, but also goes all the way wanting to be like God.

A. LED BY THE SPIRIT

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Jesus didn't just go out to Jerusalem or any place started His ministry right after His baptism. But by the Holy Spirit, He was obedient to go through the temptation of humankind as a prologue of His ministry on earth.

God allows us to go through trials and tests under His infinite wisdom and providence knowledge. Nothing surprises Him, nothing is allowed without His permission.

1Cor. 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Trials and tests in our lives always happen in our spiritual wilderness where we are physically, emotionally and spiritually worn out, never while we are on the mountain tops close to God. Spiritual victories are often followed by testing. Trials and tests are not there to hurt us, but to strengthen and deepen our faith in Him.

Matthew 4:2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

It is a common thought among many Bible students that Jesus was only tempted by the devil for three times during the forty days and nights. No, He was tempted by the devil from day one until the final temptation by the devil himself. We can find this in Luke 4:2.

The temptation of Jesus was very important because Jesus is our great High Priest. The go-between between man and God. The holy God is unapproachable by unholy man. We need a go-between. The infinite God and the finite man. The distance between the two is so great that it cannot be bridged, except by a go-between, the mediator.

1 Tim 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus

He became a man so that He could touch us, He continued to be God so that He could touch God.

If He is going to really intercede on my behalf, He has to understand my weaknesses, He has to understand temptations I face. He had to suffer in order to understand fully our sufferings.

Hebrews 2:8-10 You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Jesus did not need to be tempted to help Him "grow." Instead, He endured temptation both so He could identify with us, and to demonstrate His own holy, sinless character.

B. PHYSICAL TEMPTATION

Matthew 4:3-4 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

Satan is appealing to the human side of Jesus. Jesus was a 100% human and 100% God, so He felt the same hunger you and I would feel, the same thirst you and I would like to quench with a cup of cold water or a glass of Coke, not Pepsi.

As Satan tried to Jesus, he wants us to doubt the provision of God for us. Satan doesn't want us to depend on our Father who provides all of our needs according to His riches in glory, but to depend on our own capability without faith in God.

But Jesus is telling Satan and us that life is more than eating and drinking and going about our own lives as if there is no tomorrow. Some of us may think, "But I need this one to satisfy my pleasure." Pleasure only lasts short time. But the life in eternity whether it will be in heaven or hell will last eternal life.

Satan was telling Jesus to use His spiritual powers in order to feed His physical need, in other words, let the Spirit serve the flesh. All of our temptations have to do with the life of the flesh and the life of the Spirit. Consistently, the Bible teaches us that the life of the Spirit is superior and more important than the life of the flesh. That means that the body should not reign or rule over our spirits.

When Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, Jesus shows that every word that proceeds from the mouth of God should be more precious to us than food itself.

By relying on the power and truth of God's Word, Jesus was willing to fight this battle as a man. He could have easily rebuked Satan into the lake of fire, but resisted Him in a way that we can imitate and identify with. Jesus fought this battle as a man, and He drew on no "special divine resources" unavailable to us.

We can effectively resist temptation in the same way Jesus did by countering Satan's seductive lies by shining the light of God's truth upon them. If we are ignorant of God's truth, we are poorly armed in the fight against temptation.

Eph. 6:17 the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

The sword of the Spirit is the only offensive weapon we have from the full armor of God.

Many Christians tell me that they cannot handle temptations. After I talk with them, I realize that they do not have the Word of God in their hearts. It is no wonder why they continuously sin against the Lord.

Psalms 119:11 Your Word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!

C. EMOTIONAL TEMPTATION

Matthew 4:5-7 Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

Satan tried to bring out pride from the human side of Jesus. Since Jesus used the Word of God to fight back against him, Satan also used the Word to make his own point, but he used it in an out of context like any typical cults - mixing a little bit of truth with their false doctrines.

In quoting the protective promise of Ps 91:11-12 to Jesus, Satan left out the words "to keep you in all your ways." Satan tempted Jesus to gain public attention through spectacular stunts instead of obedience to the Father and the messages that change our lives.

Do you know that false resides right outside of the boundary of truth? It seems so close to truth, yet it is not truth. There are many people who have built doctrines upon portions of scripture. And so many times when we take a scripture out of its context, we can give it an entirely different meaning.

'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' is coming from Deut 6:16 and it emphasizes that we should not test God. The Lord asked the Israelites to put Him to the test in only one area: "Tithing." By giving to Him they could test whether He would fulfill His promises to bless them.

D. SPIRITUAL TEMPTATION

Matthew 4:8-10 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

Satan is boasting and claiming that he is in control of the kingdoms of the world, the glory of the kingdoms of the world. He claims them as his. And the scripture would seem to indicate that the claim is true.

The world originally belonged to God, He created it. He gave it to man when He created Adam and placed him upon the earth. Because of his sin Adam turned it over to satan, and he became the prince and the ruler of the darkness of this world.

Since Jesus came to this world to get human back from satan's grip, this is rather an attractive offer with a big string attached. If Jesus takes the offer from satan and worship him, Jesus does not have to go through the crucifixion. But the implication is that God Almighty who created angels including satan - formerly known as Lucifer- have to bow down to worship the created being. That means Jesus cannot claim as the King of kings.

This is a revealing insight about satan's intention. Worship and recognition from Jesus God Himself are far more precious to him than the possession of the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

E. NOT OVER YET

Matthew 4:11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

The devil was not over with Jesus according to Luke 4:13. He came back to tempt Jesus to quit His journey to the cross by using Peter, and he used Judas at the garden of Gethsemane.

Just because we resisted and won over a temptation from demonic forces, that doesn't mean that it is going to be a home stretch. When we take our guards down, when we are weak and at least expected, they will come back to us and hit us low.

E. THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY

Matthew 4:12-17 Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned." (1) From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Between v11 and v12, there was a year gap according to the other Gospels' timeline.

Capernaum became, more or less, the center of the ministry of Christ, around the Galilee. Most of the events and miracles that are recorded, were done in and around Capernaum.

It's interesting how that every place Jesus went was sort of a fulfillment of prophecy: born in Bethlehem that the prophecy might be fulfilled; went to Egypt in order that

the prophecy might be fulfilled; brought his son out of Egypt, went to Nazareth in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled, He would be called a Nazarene. Matthew was using this word "fulfilled" to remind the Jewish readers that Jesus is their long waited King.

F. RECRUITING HIS DISCIPLES

Matthew 4:18-22 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

This was not the first time Jesus met these men, and other Gospels describe previous encounters. But this is when Jesus called them to leave their professions and follow Him "full-time." He offers them scholarships in the best "seminary" imaginable.

The immediate response of these disciples is a great example to us. Every disciple is a believer, but not every believer is a disciple of Jesus. We too can be disciples of Jesus Christ if we desire it with all of our hearts. It is available for anyone to have deeper walk with Christ. However, being a disciple of Jesus costs everything to individual like to these men. I don't mean that we have to leave our families and jobs, but we must leave our desires and put God's desire foremost in our lives.

G. PREACHING, TEACHING AND HEALING

Matthew 4:23-25 And Jesus went about all Galilee, (2) teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and (3) healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him--from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

Jesus was first of all preaching. Now He is teaching. These were the three predominant aspects of the ministry of Jesus: the healing, the preaching, the teaching.

There is a place for preaching and there is a place for teaching. The place of preaching is the proclamation of the Gospel to the world, to the unsaved. But for the believer, the necessity is not preaching but the teaching of the Word. And there are too many churches that have only preaching and no teaching. And churches are being preached to death where the saints of God need teaching.

H. APPLICATIONS

1) When we face temptations, we must realize that God allowed the temptations to come in our ways to strengthen us and make us to depend on Him, not to hurt us or giving Him an opportunity to punish us.

2) The only power we have to fight against temptation is through the Word of God, not our willpower which is a joke, not our intelligence which is pathetic.

We must put the Word in our hearts so that we may not sin against God.

3) There are a few things we must notice in this study:

- God wants us to learn how satan works against Jesus and His followers. The devil wants us to misuse our spiritual gifts to serve our fleshly desires. The devil wants us to take the Word of God out of context to meet our pride. The devil wants us to worship anything else but our God.

- God wants us to learn that Jesus' victory in the wilderness is an impending victory on the cross.

- God wants us to learn that Jesus identified Himself in our weakness and suffering as human by being tempted, yet He didn't sin.

4) Following Jesus by being His disciples is not easy, but the reward is heavenly.

If we choose to follow Him, it requires everything from us. But God will replace what is lost with Himself in our lives.