

The Temptations of Jesus (Lesson 13b)

Introduction:

We read of the temptation of Jesus in Chapter 4 of the Gospel according to Matthew.

Matt. 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Matt. 4:2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Matt. 4:3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” Matt. 4:4 ¶ 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.’ ”

Matt. 4:5 ¶ Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, Matt. 4:6 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.’ ” Matt. 4:7 ¶ Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’ ”

Matt. 4:8 ¶ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Matt. 4:9 And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Matt. 4:10 ¶ 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.’ ” Matt. 4:11 ¶ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

As we read about the temptation of Jesus, let us first take note that it was the Spirit that led him into the desert to be tempted. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray: Lead us not into temptation. There is reason why Jesus wants to keep his disciples from temptation. Yet, although Jesus was in the wilderness, tempted by the devil, he was not alone. The Spirit of God was with Him. We too, when we are tempted, let us remember that the Spirit of God is with us in those temptations and we are not alone.

Secondly, we notice that it was not right away but after a time of fasting that the temptation starts. Obviously, someone who is hungry craves for food. From our last lesson we remember that James says that God does not tempt us but our own desires are the cause (James 1:13). So, the tempter uses our weakness and even our natural desires to tempt us. In this moment of weakness, faint from fasting and desiring bread, the first temptation comes.

1. The first temptation.

The first temptation deals with a natural need. As humans we have basic needs that must be fulfilled. The need for food, water, sleep, and shelter is something we all have. After these needs are filled, other natural desires will also become evident. There is nothing wrong with natural desires, but the urgency to meet them may lead to the temptation to meet them in ways which are not right.

Therefore in Proverbs, Agur prays:

**Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me;
Lest I be full and deny You, And say, “Who is the LORD?”
Or lest I be poor and steal (Proverbs 30:8-9).**

How does Jesus overcome the first temptation? He overcomes the temptation by using scripture. **“Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).** He emphasizes what is most important. It is the word of God. God gives and sustains life. If we are preoccupied with something, the desire for it and the importance of it increases. It is then that we need to put it into perspective and remind ourselves of what is most important, lest we give into temptation. Use the word of God to overcome temptation and direct your focus away from the desire or the thing you are preoccupied with.

Notice also that the tempter starts his temptation by saying: If you are the Son of God. In times of weakness the tempter will try to get you to question the obvious. The first temptation noted in the Bible also starts with the questioning of what God said. **“Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’”? (Genesis 3:1)**

Although it is good to question, let us be careful not to ignore the answers God has provided for us. Although it is good to make sure we are on the right path, let us not make a U-turn and go back to the start, if we are already traveling on the right road.

Ephesians 6:17 says, **“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”** That is exactly the weapon Jesus used in his temptation, the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit. Let us learn from that. Would it have been wrong for Jesus to have turned stone into bread? Yes. First, he would have misused the power that God had given him, using it for his own purpose, and secondly he would have obeyed the tempter, knowing this was the tempter. God has also given us privileges. I think first of all of the power of prayer. How do we pray? Is it only a wish-list for our own purposes? Or do we include others in our prayers and bring them to the throne of grace? Do we pray that God’s will be done and that his name be glorified? Or are our prayers more self-centered?

2. The second temptation

Christ was victorious. He overcame the temptation. But what happens next? The tempter tries again. He does not give up. He does not stop just because he has suffered defeat. He comes again. The second temptation deals with a different sphere. It is the temptation to pursue honour and glory. We all like to be honoured. Some of us would like to be in the lime-light, and most of us would like to be held in high esteem. Here the tempter suggests

showmanship to Christ. The temptation starts the same way, questioning the obvious. He questions the sonship of Christ and says, “if you are the son of God?” We do not know if this is meant to invoke doubt, or whether it is a taunt for Jesus to prove it. Perhaps it is meant to encourage Him to try what the tempter has suggested, because as the Son of God, why should it not succeed?

God has given us many talents. Let us make sure that we give him the honour and glory for our achievements. Without Him we would have neither the talent, nor the health and opportunities needed to be successful. To God be the glory. In our church services make sure we sing or preach or fellowship to the glory of God. If the purpose becomes entertainment or to show off or to display what we can do, then we have fallen into the second temptation, not overcome it.

Note that this time the tempter also uses scripture. Since Jesus puts such emphasis on the Word of God, the tempter uses it for his own means. Paul writes:

For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

Let us be careful. Not everyone using scripture uses it correctly. As we see in this example one can even be tempted through the misuse of scripture. Let us make sure that we use scripture in context. A verse taken out of context can be made to mean something completely different. For example, in order to convince people to hold the Sabbath, an Adventist tract asks, which is the Lord’s Day? The answer it gives is, “**The Son of man is also Lord of the Sabbath**” (Mark 2:28). However, when the verse is taken in context, we realize that Jesus was defending his disciples for doing on the Sabbath, what the Pharisees claimed was breaking the Sabbath. The Pharisees said what the disciples were doing was forbidden on the Sabbath, and accusing them of not holding the Sabbath.

And He (Jesus) said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2: 27-28).

The Bible verse quoted actually is meant to express exactly the opposite of what the tract uses it for.

As a general principle: “**Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world**” (1 John 4:1).

As a defense against the second temptation, Jesus once more uses the scriptures.

Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God’” (Matthew 4:7).

3. The third temptation

The third temptation has to do with riches and the glory of this world. The tempter **“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’” (Mat 4:8-9).**

To have riches and the glory of the world – what a temptation this is for many! How many have ruined their lives and sold out their souls and their conscience in pursuit of the treasures of this world. A young man, dying of aids came to the school I taught at and told the audience that although his parents were Christians, he turned his back on their lifestyle and started to live a life that they totally disagreed with. In the course of activities he had been warned against and told they were wrong, he contracted this disease, which he died of a few months later. There are many innocent people who have aids. Our hearts especially go out to the poor children who are suffering from it. In this young man’s case however, it was a desire for the lust of the world that led to his death. How many entertainment stars have died of drug overdoses? We cannot generalize and put all into the same boat. However, we see the futility of riches and success, when we see how some of those who have obtained it, have ruined their lives, and how their addictions cause illness and early death.

The tempter says: I will give you the riches of the world. He is a liar. He is seeking your demise. **“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).**

The tempter promises to give that which does not even belong to him.

**The earth is the LORD’S, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell therein (Ps 24:1).**

The kingdoms of the world belong to God, not to Satan. Once more Jesus uses scripture. What does that tell us? We too should use scripture and be well versed in it. Daily Bible reading or at least a habitual Bible study program is a great help into acquiring proficiency. Memorizing scripture is also a good idea. When my grandmother was tempted, she would often sing hymns. The words of many of our hymns are also powerful and can be a help in temptation. Finally, let us not forget that the power of prayer is vital in overcoming temptation. Even if we are driving, walking, or working, we can silently lift up a prayer to God for help. **“Ask and it shall be given unto you” (Matt7:7).**

If you are in a situation where you feel spiritually threatened you can pray a prayer similar to this: “Lord, in your name I withstand every spirit that is not from you. Through the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for me, I withstand and ask for your protection.” The blood of Jesus Christ has a tremendous power. Jesus was victorious. Through his power, we too can be victorious. Jude tells us:

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our

Savior, who alone is wise, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever (Jude 24-25).

And Paul reaffirms this by saying

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Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:37-39).

The tempter must flee. The temptation will end.

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (James 4:7-8).

Some people confuse temptation and sin. Temptation is not a sin.]Jesus was tempted, but remained without sin.

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin (Heb 4:15).

Even if temptations are constant and severe, we need not give in. They will end. We read that after the temptations of Christ, the angels came and ministered unto him. We too will experience a time of reprieve.

Questions

1. How are we tempted?
2. What kind of temptation was the first temptation?
3. How did Jesus overcome the first temptation?
4. Why would it have been wrong for Jesus to turn stone into bread?
5. What kind of temptation was the second temptation?
6. What can we learn from Christ's second temptation?
7. How did the second temptation differ from the first/
8. What kind of temptation was the third temptation?
9. What lessons can we learn from the third temptation of Christ?
10. How did the temptations of Jesus end?