

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Places where Jesus was found: The Pinnacle of the Temple - Matthew 4:5

Samuel Jones was a self-made man. He had built up his engineering business to a first class standard but needed someone to follow him with greater knowledge of the engineering needs. So his son went to university to learn details which the father had never had the opportunity to learn. Through the university course he was required to pass tests of various kinds in order to reach the standard needed to obtain his qualification. This fitted him well to commence his involvement with the family business.

It may seem quite wrong to find that the Lord Jesus passed through a period of testing. We find the incidents to which we refer in the Gospel of Matthew 4:1–11, and particularly verses 5–7, speaking of the second temptation, where the Lord was taken to the 'pinnacle of the temple'.

The surrounding circumstances.

At the end of chapter 3, the Lord first comes into the public arena to John for baptism. We then read of the glorious moment, after He had been baptised, when all heaven was aroused. The Spirit of God descended like a dove, settled upon the Lord Jesus and the voice of the Father said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased', verse 17. There could not be any more distinct and spontaneous confirmation of the Son of God, as a Man in this world, than these words. Here is God, made flesh, now seen in this world, the delight of the Father. Let us spend a moment relishing that scene and note the evidence from the Father Himself to men.

This is followed by a remarkable statement at the beginning of chapter 4: 'Then was Jesus led (or, literally carried) up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil'. Mark's Gospel adds to the force, by saying, 'Immediately the Spirit drives Him into the wilderness', 1:12. It is truly remarkable that, having received such acclaim from heaven, it is the Spirit of God that now drives Him out to be tempted of the devil. So we ask the reason for this. If the Lord Jesus is ever to be sufficient to satisfy fully the purposes of the Father for this world, the Man Christ Jesus must display conclusively that He can withstand the rigours of every test, even by Satan himself. So it was that the Lord was carried up into the wilderness by the Spirit for this purpose.

Now we need to understand that the devil is a real person, not an influence. The word 'devil' means slanderer and this is the great work he does. The devil, or Satan, has many guises. In Genesis 3 he appears as a serpent. The book of Job, chapter 1, describes him as a person. He even had entry to the presence of God. We learn from the Bible that the devil was at one time an angel who rebelled against God. Isaiah 14:12-15 tell us of the time when, as Lucifer, or daystar, he proudly determined to raise himself above God, but his rejection is clear, 'thou shalt be brought down to hell'. Sometimes he is transformed into an angel of light, 2 Corinthians 11:14, but in the end we learn from Revelation 12 'that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world', the accuser of the brethren, was cast out, verses 9-11. The end is certain.

The temptations

The Lord Jesus was to be tested by the devil himself. For forty days the Lord fasted and was tempted of the devil and, of these times, we are told nothing. We can understand that by the end of this period He would physically be at a very low ebb, very weak. It was at this point that the devil, the tempter, came to Him with three tests which went to the heart of His divine nature. In the first two how true to form as slanderer the devil is when he says, 'If Thou be the Son of God', verses 3 and 6. Here is the first challenge. It is a challenge to all that has just taken place to which we have referred in the end of chapter 3. Can the voice of the Father from heaven be trusted? But if it is, then the power is there to be used and so prove it for physical blessing. The devil will bring in doubts. 'Hath God said?', he said to Eve, Genesis 3:1. Now that doubt is directed to the Lord Himself. One of the chief means of attack the devil uses is to doubt the Word of God, to doubt its validity. He will do this today. Does God really mean what He says in the Bible? It has been suggested that Jonah's being swallowed by a fish was impossible, or that some New Testament passages are not meant for our day. 'Doubt the Scriptures', the slanderer says, and some will doubt the virgin birth, the resurrection and other key truths that the Scriptures give us. Let us be very careful that we do not give an inch of room to the devil who will challenge us in the same way. Let us guard against misuse of the Word of God. God has given us His Word; it is there to be believed and followed.

Now let us understand the meaning of these three tests very briefly.

1. The first one concerns the Lord in His personal circumstances of hunger. It raises the question for us if we really trust the Lord in all our daily circumstances and needs. The Lord puts the Word of God before every other matter. When that priority is settled, we can rely on God for every detail of our daily life. Do we really trust Him like this?
2. To take the third one next, the Lord was offered all the possessions of the world by bowing to Satan. Sin came into the world when Eve gave way on similar grounds. The fruit was of more value to Eve than the possession of life in obedience to God! All things belonged to the Creator and He did not need outward power and possessions for the work He came to do. Failure in this test would have prevented the work of salvation. This trial also raises the question, Are the things of this world received from Satan or from God? 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning', James 1:17 tells us.
3. The second temptation, like the first one, is also personal but is connected with religion. It is testing God Himself; cast Thyself down and see if God will really be true to His word? It immediately raises a doubt in any mind, in place of an unwavering trust in God, as is the purpose of the devil. It is on this temptation that we will spend some more time.

The temple – the place.

In this second testing the Lord is brought to The temple – the place. Let us try to understand the situation. The Lord was brought to a pinnacle of the temple. We easily think that this must have been at the high point of a tower or spire but this meaning is not inferred. The word pinnacle is derived from a word meaning 'wing'. The temple had two wings. The southern wing was built above the Kedron valley below and, from the grand roof of this wing, provided a view of great height when looking into the valley below. Jumping off this pinnacle would provide a spectacular view for all to see.

The proposal

With a further challenge to His Sonship, the Lord is now told by the devil to cast Himself down. Now Satan quotes Psalm 91:11 and 12. In effect, the devil was saying, If you really are the Son of God this can be demonstrated by leaping down because the Bible says, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee ... What a disaster this would have been! The Lord did not need to prove that He was the Son of the Father, particularly to the devil!

However, if this were to have taken place, would not those who were watching see a miracle of such power that many would have turned to the Lord and He could seize popularity in the nation and perhaps even the kingdom? The Lord would have none of it. He says elsewhere, 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work', John 4:34. That work could only be done in a simple, humble and trusting way.

It can be argued that the devil was only using Scripture to make his point. Let us look briefly at that. Psalm 91 reads, 'He shall give His angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee in all Thy ways'. These last words are missed out, so the devil does not even quote Scripture accurately! These ways evidently speak of the ways of God. The Lord had just claimed, in answer to the first temptation, that every Word of God is of vital importance. Now the devil is saying, Here is the Word of God, why not follow it? This Psalm clearly speaks of the Messiah and in the second verse we read, 'in Him will I trust'. So effectively the devil is bidding the Lord to do what He wants rather than to trust in God. How often we are tempted, too, with the need to change or twist Scripture, to take what we choose of Scripture, rather than follow what it says. How careful we must be to guard against every misuse of Scripture!

Yet another thing becomes clear. By following the suggestion of the devil, the Lord would be acting quite independently of His Father. By casting Himself from the temple, His action would be personal and independent from communion with the Father. The whole of the life and purpose of the Lord in this world was followed in total communion with the Father who had so recently said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'. The Lord Himself could also say, 'I do always those things that please Him', John 8:29. In one brief moment, by acting on this devilish suggestion, that whole communion would have been broken; the Lord would have been shown to be unfit to suffer and die for sinners. Independence and disobedience would bring tragic consequences to the work in hand. This also reminds us that, as followers of the Lord Jesus, we also need to maintain the fullest communion with complete obedience to God and to His Word. The apostle Paul writes to the Romans in chapter 8:31, 'If God be for us, who can be against us?' Let us be sure to remain true to the love of God and His ways.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves also if we want to use Scripture, as the devil did, for the purpose of making ourselves doubt God. Do we challenge God to act in unnecessary ways? Paul reminds us: 'He that spared not His

own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?' Romans 8:32. Let us not distrust Him.

The Triumph

How does the Lord respond to this challenge by the slanderer? By again using the Word of God. 'It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God', verse 7. What direct words, quoted from Deuteronomy, the book of obedience! In dealing with these temptations, the Lord uses the Word of God exclusively and directly, exactly touching the point of the problem. We see the Lord Jesus over-riding every suggestion of the devil by standing firm against his wiles. May we also be as firm when the suggestion of doubt comes to us.

The answer given by the Lord stresses a further point. Let us be clear to understand that the Lord Jesus is God. This is beyond doubt, and as Man, He is God even to the devil and everyone else. In the eventual work of the cross, He proved Himself to be, not only Man but God, and the only way for salvation was for the Lord Jesus to give Himself. As we think of the Lord Jesus, let us always honour and reverence Him for who He is.

Let us stress again that this quotation from the lips of the Lord Jesus emphasised that God is not divided. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit are one in total communion and all that has been done is through a totally united God. There is no independency in the Godhead.

The Lord succeeded in withstanding these temptations. The apostle writes, He 'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin', Hebrews 4:15. He came through all temptation quite unscathed. It is not just that in His temptation He did not sin, but that there was never any question of sin within Him at all. What a Saviour we have! But this experience helps us also to realise that He can be 'touched' and reached by us in our infirmities. He knows what we go through; He understands our concerns. So we can come to 'the throne of grace' at all times 'and find grace to help in time of need', Hebrews 4:16.

We will now briefly consider our response to testing.

We all come into temptation or testing. All testing is not just on the part of the devil and we need to be clear ourselves. We can think of this in the following ways:

1. Let us be sure it is the devil who is testing us. Sometimes God tests also. The devil tempts us to cause us to sin; God tests us to strengthen our faith. We read in Genesis 6 that God saw the wickedness of man was great...the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' verse 5. He challenged man by the work and preaching of Noah for 120 years and none came into the ark but Noah and his family. In chapter 18, He said of the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah, 'I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it...and if not, I will know', verse 21. So God applied His test. In chapter 22:1 we read, 'God did tempt (or test) Abraham'. This was for Abraham's good. We need to ask ourselves if, in fact, God is speaking to us and seeking to draw us closer to Himself by His testing.
2. Sometimes self-examination is required. Perhaps we are troubled with our circumstances which are part of our natural limitations. Paul had a problem with what he called a 'thorn in the flesh', 2 Corinthians 12:7. How was he to deal with that? He turned to the Lord and asked for help. His prayer was heard and answered. But God did not remove Paul's difficulty. Rather God gave Paul the promise, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness', verse 9. In similar circumstances it is better for us also, to have the strength of the Lord with us than to have only our own strength and fail.
3. Weakness brings humility and how necessary this is in the Christian pathway. The Lord displayed humility throughout His life here. He said to His disciples, 'As My Father has sent Me, even so send I you', John 20:21. We need to act humbly rather than have our pride tested.
4. Generally, real temptation comes from outside ourselves. This is what affected the Lord Himself. We have already quoted Hebrews 4:15, He 'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin'. How do we react when temptation comes along? Let us follow His example and walk as He walked.

We find that the Lord Jesus used at least two of the weapons we have in our armoury to use when we are tested by the devil. These are described in Ephesians 6:11-17. The first to note is:

The shield of faith.

We have continually said that the Son and the Father were in complete communion and walked together. There was complete trust. The Lord, when tested by the devil, was completely dependent on His Father and totally committed to

pleasing Him. We need to have the same faith in the Father as our Lord Jesus Christ had. We fully trust in what He has said and done. We raise the shield of faith to all doubts raised, for the devil will raise those doubts.

The Sword of the Spirit.

The Lord used it each time with great effect. The slanderer was rebuffed three times. Let us get to know the Word of God better; let us use it for full effect when the devil comes.

There was a clear reaction to the Lord's use of the Scriptures. We find first that the devil left Him. The Lord had triumphantly demonstrated that He is God and was fully able to carry out the will of the Father. Secondly, angels ministered to Him. What sustenance He received from heaven! So we, too, will have the necessary encouragement when we succeed, in the power of the Spirit, in overcoming the temptation of the devil.

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