

Temptations in the wilderness

In Luke chapter 4 we read about the time when after His baptism and affirmation from His Father in heaven Jesus was led to go into the wilderness to fast for 40 days and to face various temptations from the devil. What actually happened in the desert at that time is very rarely spoken off in full but now we shall look at what happened in depth and then we can celebrate all the more the victory that Christ Jesus has won for us.

The latter part of Jesus experience in the desert, His temptations by the devil are recorded in Luke chapter 4 verses 1 to 13. “Jesus being full of the Holy Spirit returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted by the devil. During those days He ate nothing: and when they were ended, He was very hungry. The devil said unto him, if you are the Son of God, command this stone to be made bread. Jesus answered him, saying, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

Then, the devil, taking him up into a high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. The devil said unto him, all this power I will give to you, and the glory that goes with them: for that is delivered unto me; and I can give it to whoever I desire. If you therefore will worship me, all shall be yours. Jesus answered and said unto him, get behind me, Satan: for it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.

The devil then brought Jesus to Jerusalem, and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, if you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you: and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone. Jesus answering said unto him, it is said, you shall not tempt the Lord your God. When the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from Jesus for a season.”

It is said by many preachers that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are today, but you and I are tempted daily to do things that on the face of it Jesus would not have been tempted to do because such things were not available to people in His day. So how then can they say that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are? That question is very easy to answer.

In the first letter of John to the churches, chapter 2 and verse 16 we read the following: “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.” Adam and Eve suffered these temptations in the Garden of Eden so Jesus would have to face them and come out victorious. We shall look at Genesis chapter 3 and see how they match with Jesus temptations in the wilderness.

Genesis chapter 3 verses 1 to 7 are the verses we need to study, to save repeating them when we come to a point that needs to be made it will appear on the study sheet in brackets and show which one of the three temptations it refers to.

“Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field that The Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, has God said: you shall not eat of every tree of the garden? The woman said unto the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God has said, you shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. The serpent said unto the woman, you shall not surely die: for God knows that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, (lust of the flesh) and that it was pleasant to the eyes, (lust of the eyes) and a tree to be desired to make one wise, (pride) she took of the fruit thereof, and ate it, and gave some to her husband with her; and he did eat. Then the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.”

Now we shall look at the temptations of Jesus to see how they compare to the temptations that Adam and Eve faced. “Jesus being full of the Holy Spirit returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted by the devil. During those days He ate nothing: and when they were ended, He was very hungry. The devil said unto him, if you are the Son of God, command this stone to be made bread (Lust of the eyes). Jesus answered him, saying, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

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The first temptation is clearly lust of the eyes, after all that time He had eaten nothing so it must have been a temptation to turn the stone into bread, but whatever the devil came up with Jesus knew that He must not yield to temptation, everything depended on it. The second temptation was to gain power and authority the short and temporary way round rather than going through all the suffering for eternal glory, therefore it was lust of the flesh because this is a fleshly way of thinking. The third temptation was to prove to the people who He is which would be the sin of pride, Jesus did not have to prove anything to anyone – including Himself, all He had to do was obey God and avoid those things He knew His Father hated and through His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave He would be victorious over Satan.

Notice in the second temptation, the temptation to gain power and glory without the pain, when the devil told Jesus that all those things had been given to him and he could give it to whoever he chose, Jesus did not call him a liar or question what he said. Why do you think this was? Surely the answer is that when Adam and Eve sinned through disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden they forfeited their authority over the earth that God had given them in Genesis chapter 1 v 28 which reads “God blessed them, and said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

If you follow the sport of boxing you know that somebody can hold the world title only as long as there is nobody who can beat them. As soon as one comes along and challenges their right to such a title then there has to be a fight arranged with the World Championship belt and title are at stake. If the holder is beaten the winner takes the title and the belt until he himself is defeated.

Because Jesus did not yield to temptation throughout His life and ministry on earth He won back for mankind the authority they lost in the Garden of Eden. During the whole of His life until after His resurrection Jesus had to live life limited to the restrictions of mankind. This is made clear in Philippians chapter 2 verses 5 to 11.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The act of trying to overthrow God and take over from Him was an act of supreme arrogance, however, Jesus humbling Himself and becoming limited to what mankind could have done from the beginning, before sinned entered creation was the greatest act of humility which overcame the act of arrogance.

Because Jesus never committed sin and was fully obedient to God, even to the death on a cross Jesus won back for mankind the authority that was lost to them in the Garden of Eden. One of the last times He spoke to His disciples after His resurrection it is recorded in Matthew’s gospel chapter 28 verses 18, 19 and 20 that Jesus told them: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.”

Some translations of the gospels say “authority” rather than power, but if you check out the word that is used here in this verse you will find that the original word means both. Jesus still has that authority that He won from the evil one all those years ago and will keep it for all eternity. However, because He won it on behalf of man and He won it from the enemy as a man this means that as Christ Jesus lives in us and we in Him this power and authority is available to us as well but only if we act in His name and not presumptuously.

For what seems like centuries the church has failed to emphasize the power and authority we have over the enemy, but everything we see that Jesus did we can do if so commanded by Father. Sadly because this part of the gospel has been played down so much the enemy has been allowed to get away with far more than he should have done and has led to the church appearing weak and irrelevant to the people of today.

We should not pray that the power and authority should be restored to the church because it was never lost, it is just that people failed to preach it. What we should pray is that the revelation of the fact that in Christ Jesus we have that power and authority over the enemy be restored to all churches that have not at this time had that vision, and that when they receive it they should go out and demonstrate it to an unbelieving world.

There is the story which illustrates an important point, it is the story of a man who returned home from his day’s work and found that there was a thief in the house who had loaded his bag with treasures that the first man possessed. The thief had been caught red-handed, but he was a large man, probably weighing in excess of 19 stones. How could one little fellow ensure that this thief could steal from him no more? He remembered that in the drawer of the desk in front of him there was a gun. If he could get that gun his problem would be solved.

The thief was unarmed and could do nothing to counter the threat and effect of a gun firing a bullet into him, causing him to stop in his tracks. All he could do was to try to persuade the first man that attempting to get the gun from the desk drawer would not work, and (though the first man knew otherwise) persuade him that the gun was not loaded anyway, so it could not do him any harm even if he did manage to get at the gun in the draw.

After thinking about it the first man grabbed a long piece of rope that was hanging by the door of that drawing room. Setting it correctly he twirled it round his body very quickly and lassoed the thief, eventually tying him to the nearest chair with his hands behind his back. The first man then went round to the other side of the desk and took out the gun from the draw. Pointing it at the thief he then also picked up the telephone receiver and began to dial the number for the police.

By this time the thief had worked loose one of his hands. The first man noticed this and did up the knots in the string even tighter this time to ensure that he could not repeat the process and escape before the police came.

The police seemed to take a long time coming and so the man with the gun decided to untie the thief and send him on his way. This he did pointing the gun at him the whole of the time. The thief rejoiced that it seemed he was going to get away without penalty. However, just as he opened the front door and was physically thrown through it by the gunman the police arrived. Recognising the thief the police apprehended him, took him into custody and appointed a day when he would appear before the judge for sentencing.

This story although complete fiction is very similar to the spiritual position that so many believers are in. They have never been taught that they have the power in and through Jesus Christ to **prevent** the enemy stealing away their peace, their joy and many other blessings besides by binding the enemy and casting him away from any place in their life where he might be able to do them harm, yet this is precisely the power we have in and through the name of Jesus. With such authority we can bind the enemy and cast him far away from us every time he seeks to cause us trouble.

James chapter 4 verses 7 and 8 are verses that we would all do well to remember, they read as follows: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded."

Many of us are not at the stage where we can honestly say amen to what James wrote in his first letter from James to the churches around in his time which can be found in James chapter 1 verses 2 to 4 inclusive, these read as follows: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience do her perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, wanting nothing."