

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST (part two)

Luke 4:5-8

We will continue today our study of the temptation of Christ, as we explore more deeply the meaning of the temptation.

A failed attempt

The last time, I pointed out that the temptation of the Lord Jesus came immediately after His baptism. And we began to see the plan of Satan's attack. I mentioned to you that one avenue of approach that Satan uses to reach our heart is through the flesh. It is through appealing to our needs and desires that Satan tries to tempt us. And these appeals can be perfectly legitimate ones. What Satan does is to use them by distorting them into something that can ensure our ruin.

As Christians, we must all be aware that we are engaged in a spiritual warfare. The enemy has his tactics and we must understand them. These tactics are very subtle and very clever. The first one is an appeal to our physical needs and desires. If the attack doesn't work, you can be sure that he will find another way to make us stumble because he has many means at his disposal. As he goes on, he refines his approach.

A second attack

Today we want to look at the second principle which he uses in order to attack us. Let us read this passage that deals with the second temptation of Jesus by Satan.

*Luke 4:5. And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.
6 And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.*

7 Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours."

8 And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'"

Here we see that the devil showed the Lord Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. The kingdoms are not just nations. They are the powers, the authorities of the world. This was not a holiday travel like tourists going to Europe or Asia. Jesus was not getting a guided tour through all the countries of the world. No, no. Notice these words at the end of v. 5, *in a moment of time*. Satan showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world *in a moment of time*. That means to say that it was done in one flash, in one vision. There is an emphasis on the fact that it was instant. So we are not talking about a guided tour as such. It is all in a vision.

You know, Satan can give you some pretty good spiritual experiences. He can take you up into a high place and give some good experiences or visions. Be careful with spiritual visions. Be careful with any mountain top experience. Not every spiritual vision comes from God. Not every mountain top experience comes from God. Satan can certainly offer all that to you too. Can you tell the difference?

Let me give you an advice here: approach every spiritual experience with caution, especially those that offer you instant up lifting. Take for example the experience of speaking in tongues. There is nothing wrong as such to speak in tongues. The apostle Paul describes it as a gift of the Spirit. What worries me is when people are looking for tongues not because they want to edify the church, but because they want some reassuring up lifting spiritual experience for themselves. If you are just looking for a lift, watch out. Satan might take advantage of that and give you one.

The same is true about healings. Again, there is nothing satanic as such about healings. The Bible tells us that God can use people in healings. The problem comes when all that you are looking for is simply a spiritual up lift. You want a lift? Satan can give you that. He is very ready to provide you with that and you might have some trouble knowing which is the genuine one and which is not. Not all tongues are from God, neither are all healings from God. Beware of this.

The vision: divine or satanic?

So Satan gives Jesus a vision, a vision of the kingdoms of this world. And as I said, not all visions are from God. Some visions are from God. Some are not. How then do you tell the difference? One important thing that we have to know is that when we have a vision from God, the vision is a vision of God's glory, not the glories of the world. And we have to ask ourselves this question: When I get a spiritual up lift, is it a boost to my flesh or is it a boost to my spiritual communion with God? There is a fundamental difference between the two as you can see. Is it a boost to my flesh or is it a boost to my spiritual communion with God?

Don't confuse emotional excitement with a genuine spiritual experience. There can be certainly emotional excitement in a genuine spiritual up lift. But it is not just that. Look into the substance of it. In fact, you can be so emotionally moved, that the experience is merely an excitement of the flesh. And here I am thinking for example about the context of big meetings. This is not to say that mass meetings are wrong. But know that a person can easily be carried away in a mass meeting. Emotions have this characteristic of being contagious. When a crowd becomes emotional and you are in that crowd, its effect on you can be pretty impressive. It is relatively easy to lift a person up through the flesh with the emotions. And Satan knows that very well. He is the master of playing on your emotions.

So be on your guard that nobody works you up emotionally, either in a private setting or in a mass meeting. Distinguish carefully between the flesh and the spirit, between the world and God. The vision of God that Isaiah saw is a vision of the glory of God, not some glories of the world that draw your heart after the world.

Destroying the works of the devil

Then notice this. In the next verse, Satan says to the Lord Jesus, 'I will give you all authority and their glory. I will give you the whole thing ... with one condition of course. Let's make it easy. We will strike a bargain between You and I. All that I ask of You is that You just worship me...'

Hmm. What do you think of that proposal? Let's examine what is happening here. Let's think back a little bit. Satan is no fool. He knows why Jesus came into the world. The Word of God in 1John

3:8b has told us plainly. *The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might **destroy the works of the devil**.* That's why He came for. Satan knows very well that Jesus didn't come into the world in order to have a holiday. He came to destroy the works of the devil. So with that in mind, imagine the discussion going on between Satan and the Lord Jesus. All this is given to us in a very condense form. If you want to know what leads up to Satan's proposal, here is the reasoning.

Satan says, 'I know why You came into the world. It is in order to fight, to destroy my power in the world. And You know that I am not going to take it lying down. I'm going to fight. And you and I are going to get hurt in the process.' Jesus also knows why He came into the world. *For this cause*, the Lord Jesus said, *I came to this hour* (John 12:27). What cause? To destroy the works of the devil. And there is only one way this can be done. By laying down His life on the cross. But Satan was trying to suggest that it could be done otherwise.

Worshipping the devil

So Satan is saying to Jesus, 'Look, You and I know what all this is about. And both of us are going to suffer in the process. You are going to get hurt because I am going to fight. And I'm going to get hurt because I know that You have power. So, why not make a deal? I give You the whole thing, without a fight. On one small condition of course. One small condition. And it is that You recognize that You received it from me. That it was in my power to give it to You, and I gave it to You without a fight. And the way I ask you to recognize it is that up to this point, I had the authority. And that You got it from me. So acknowledge my kingship, worship me, and it will be all yours.' Very subtle, isn't it?

Now, it is very important to understand accurately the meaning of the word 'worship' in v. 7. *If you will **worship** before me.* This is not to be understood as meaning worshipping Satan as god. That wouldn't make much sense. I mean, not even an immature Christian would do that. Satan is not that stupid. If Jesus is to worship Satan in the sense of Satan being god, that wouldn't be a temptation. There would be no deal. There would be nothing to discuss in such a temptation.

When Satan says, 'worship me', it means to pay him homage as king, to acknowledge him as king. That's all that is being asked. It is not to treat him as god. He is saying, 'Acknowledge me as the king of this world and pay me honour as the king.'

We can make this conclusion when we look at the use of this word 'worship' elsewhere in the Bible. Take for example its first occurrence in the NT in Matthew 2:2 where the same word is used. Matthew 2:2 makes reference to the wise men who wanted to find baby Jesus in order to worship Him. There it says, *Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to **worship** Him.* So here we also have the word 'worship'. It is the same Greek word that is being used. These wise men were said to worship baby Jesus. They didn't worship the baby as God because they didn't know that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh, neither did the angels reveal to them that He was God. They came to worship Him as king, the king of the Jews. They wanted to pay homage to Him as king. And that's what Satan wants Jesus to do for him when he says, 'If You will worship me.'

The trickery

This is important to know because you see, Satan does not ask you to do something that you wouldn't dream of doing. As I said, not even an immature Christian would think of worshipping Satan as god. That is not the point of the temptation. That is not even a consideration. No, no. Satan is only asking Jesus to honour him as king.

And you know, that seems to be a reasonable thing to do because a king, he certainly is. The Lord Jesus does recognize that Satan has kingly authority. We see this for example in Matthew 12:26 where Jesus speaks of Satan's kingdom. If Satan has a kingdom, that implies that he has kingly power. Jesus there acknowledges that Satan has kingly power and that this satanic kingly power stands in opposition to God's kingly power. And in many other places, Jesus speaks of Satan as the ruler of this world. So in that sense, Satan is certainly a king and the Lord Jesus does acknowledge that.

But notice Satan's crafty reasoning. What he is saying to Jesus is this. 'You know that I'm the ruler of this world. And I know that you acknowledge that. You want the kingdoms of this world? I can give it to you. It's easy. Since you already acknowledge that I'm a king, all that I'm asking you to do now is simply to bow down before me. Pay me homage.'

'Listen Jesus, I'll make it easy. You and I don't have to fight. You don't even have to go to the cross. It's easier on you. It's easier on me. It's easy on everybody. And I'm not asking for much. Just go a little bit further than recognizing me as king and honour me as such. I mean, you can recognize someone as king but that doesn't mean that you honour him. So just honour me and I will give you all the kingdoms.'

'From now on, I'm finished. Because once the kingdoms are handed over to you, I don't have the kingdoms anymore. But it's okay. I'll be satisfied with the fact that you recognize that I gave them to you, that I have the right to give them to you.'

The easy way

Do you see the danger of Satan's temptation here? Without looking at all the many implications involved in it, it is sufficient simply to recognize the principle involved: choose the easy way. A little bit of compromise is all that it takes. 'Choose the easiest way out. Choose the path of least resistance. I mean, if you really have your own interest at heart, you are not going to make things hard for yourself, aren't you? You will choose the path of least resistance. Don't take the narrow road. The narrow road is difficult. Take the broad road. It has no resistance. Join the crowd. Who wants to be one against many?' What Satan was trying to do was to tempt Jesus in taking the easier road, a road that leads Him away from the path of the cross.

So understand spiritual warfare. Understand the subtlety of the enemy. Satan's attack can be exceedingly subtle. When Satan comes to you in a sympathetic manner, beware. There can be a very dangerous trap. That frightens me, certainly much more than any more obvious and dramatic manifestation of Satan. I'm much less afraid of head on attack than falling into a temptation without knowing that it was a trap set by Satan. Satan's influence in the world is most of the time hidden and subtle. It has more to do with your thinking, your motives and your actions than being demon possessed. When I hear people say that Satan is less active in North America than in Africa for example, you can be sure that these people have not understood the nature of Satan's attacks. What worries me the most in spiritual warfare is the soft manipulation. That is scary because then you fail to see through what is really behind it.

When Satan starts to get sympathetic, that's when you should start to worry. Look at the first temptation. 'Are you hungry my friend? It seems that God has neglected you. You are His Son, right? Why don't you just turn the stone into bread. I mean, you are sitting here hungry. Where is God right now? I am concerned about you being hungry. Come on. Let's turn this stone into bread. You can do it.'

Or, look at the second temptation. 'Let's not fight. We are going to be friends, all right? I'm going to give you the kingdoms. You will have it all. Just give me a small favour in return. It just takes one moment. You will have the kingdoms forever and I ask only for one moment. You just bow down

before me for a moment. That's it!' Satan is so sympathetic, so understanding, right? So dangerous also...

God only shall I serve

Finally, notice how Jesus answers Satan. Jesus says in v. 8, *...It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.* In other words, the Lord Jesus is saying, 'You see, Satan, you got the principle wrong. The word 'serve' here is synonymous of worship. To worship Him is to serve Him. True worship involves serving. When the OT says, *You shall worship your God*, it means *you shall serve God*. And you don't serve anyone but God. My allegiance is to God and God alone.'

Here Jesus answers with the answer of total commitment to the Father. He proved His total commitment first by refusing to turn the stone into bread. Now He proves it again by refusing to worship Satan. God only I shall serve. No one else. And there is not going to be any compromise.

The Lord Jesus has given us an example to follow when temptation comes. Let us resist the devil by imitating Jesus in renewing our total commitment to God and God only.