

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST (3)

Luke 4:9-13

Today we will continue and conclude our study of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. If you have heard the first two lessons of this series, I hope that you are beginning to see how Satan can be subtle.

The devil usually comes behind your back and before you even know it, you have already stumbled. And it is precisely because we want to avoid that to happen to us that we are studying these verses of the Scriptures about the enemy. We want to know the tactics of Satan so that we can anticipate his evil influence on us. The moment you give your allegiance to God through baptism, you can be sure that Satan is not going to give you any rest.

Throw Yourself down

Let's read the account of the third temptation in Luke 4:9-13.

Luke 4:9. Then he (i.e. Satan) brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here.'

10 For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you,'

11 and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'

12 And Jesus answered and said to him, 'It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'

13 Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.

So this is what is happening in the third temptation. And the reasoning goes like this. 'You want to serve God? Well, serve Him to the utmost of your capacity. How? Let's go to Jerusalem. You are going to stand on the pinnacle of the temple, on the highest point of the temple. Then you are going to jump down from there into the court below. And people are going to see you. You want to come as the Saviour of the world? Well, you come down now. You descend from heaven right now, down into the worshipping multitudes. How is that for a plan?'

And what is more, Satan knows the Bible. He can quote the Scriptures. He is going to quote a very fine Psalm, Psalm 91. Twice in that Psalm, God is spoken of as the Highest, the Most High. You see, Satan is now taking Jesus' answer and turning it back on Him. Like a good judoka, he knows how to use your strength against you. 'Didn't you say, God only you shall serve, because He is the highest? All right, let's quote Psalm 91 then.' Psalm 91 begins like this, *He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.* The Most High, the Almighty. 'You just said it, Him only you can serve because He is the Most High.'

And in this very Psalm, God makes this promise, that if you jump down from a high point, He will give His angels charge over you. ‘You will not get hurt. So, here is your chance to prove the truth of the Word of God.’

Notice, Satan’s quotation is very accurate. There is no distortion. There is no fault that can be found in the quotation as far as the words are concerned. So, what’s the problem? What’s your objection to Satan’s suggestion?

Interpreting the Scriptures carefully

In this temptation, the Lord Jesus is experiencing one of the most common source of evil in the world, either it is in the church or outside of the church. And it is the problem of the perverse use of the Scriptures. Let me explain what I mean.

Look at Jesus’ answer to Satan in v. 12. *It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’* This is a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:16. Jesus doesn’t deny that Satan’s quotation is accurate. What He says is that in another part of the Bible, there is another verse that says that you should not tempt God. What Jesus is doing here is what experts of the Bible call theological exegesis. He puts one Scripture over another. He counters Satan’s exegesis with a more careful theological exegesis. Satan’s quotation points to the daring aspect of faith in God’s promises. Jesus’ quotation points to the matter of reverent caution before God’s holiness. Satan suggests that it is impossible to put too much trust in God. Jesus says that testing God is not trusting God.

Here, the issue is not to decide which one is true. Jesus believed Psalm 91 no less than he believed Deuteronomy 6. There are times for daring faith as Psalm 91 tells us. And there are times for cautious faith as Deuteronomy 6 tells us. Cautious faith is no less faith than bold faith. The question that the believer must ask himself is this: Is this a time for bold faith or for cautious faith? In my particular situation, which one is the most appropriate and that will bring glory to God?

Or, we can look at this issue from another angle. When I make a decision, do I follow God or do I make God follow me? Who works for whom? Am I following God’s will or am I making use of God? That is the core of the issue here. In the context of Jesus’ third temptation, for Him to jump and expect God to come to His rescue is to demand God to follow Him. And for Jesus, this is not faith at all. Therefore, it was totally inappropriate to do what Satan suggested Him to do.

Making use of God

When I was doing my rotation in pediatrics as a medical student many years ago, I saw this mother who came with her three children. One of them was sick. And as we have learned to do, I asked if her child had been vaccinated. She said that none of her children got their vaccination. Then I asked her why. She said, ‘You might not understand. I’m a believer. I have faith in God. I know that God is good and that He protects all those who believe in Him. So I don’t see why my children should have a double protection against infection by being vaccinated. I trust God and that is enough for me.’ Her reasoning intrigued me and I asked her more questions.

You know, there are people who oppose to vaccination for various reasons that have nothing to do with believing in God or not. And the more I questioned that mother, the more I began to realize that what seemed to be at first a rather spiritual attitude was not that spiritual after all. In my interaction with her, I saw that there was a great concern on her part about the side effects of the vaccines and that she believed that there is a real risk for her children to die from a vaccination. That was more the issue for her. And it seems to me that she used a spiritual language to justify her decision not to vaccinate her children. I don’t deny her belief in God’s protection, but in my judgment, what she did was in fact to make use of God in order to justify her negative view of vaccination.

So I ask the question again. ‘When I make a decision, do I follow God or do I make God follow me?’ The question is not whether God can still protect you from infections even if you have not been vaccinated. Of course, He can do it if He wants to. Can Jesus jump off the pinnacle of the temple and not be harmed? Of course He can jump off the pinnacle. What is there to stop Him from doing that? The real question is: Is this God’s way of doing it? Does that serve God’s purpose or does it serve my personal interest? Distinguish well between the two. Beware of a spirituality of your own making that serves primarily your interest rather than that of God. In the spiritual life of the disciple of Christ, this distinction is crucial.

Knowing the Bible in its entirety

Now, here is another important principle. When we deal with the Holy Scriptures, it is very important to consider the whole of the Scriptures. Not part of the truth but the whole counsel of God. Satan can quote Scriptures and he can quote it very well. If you don’t know the whole Scriptures, it might not be easy to discern how to apply correctly a particular passage in the Bible. And you might end up agreeing with Satan’s way of thinking because you have failed to consider other parts of the Scriptures related to the topic in view. If you didn’t know Deuteronomy 6, you would have thought perhaps that Satan’s suggestion to jump off the pinnacle of the temple was a reasonable thing to do, that it was a proper use of Psalm 91.

Have you ever noticed that almost anybody can quote the Bible to you? And that includes sects like the Jehovah witnesses, the Mormons, the Christian Scientists... They all make use of the Bible. How are you going to evaluate their quotations?

Whenever someone quotes a verse or a passage to you, always check the context of the verse. Then see whether there is another passage or verse which supplements that verse. When you come up with a firm conviction on a particular Biblical point, make sure that it is based on the whole truth, and not just part of the truth. Any part of the Bible is to be interpreted in relation to the rest of the Scriptures.

A balanced understanding of the Scriptures

A mistake that almost any young Christian will make eventually is to accuse of being heretics all those who depart so much as a fraction from their own doctrines. They get irritable and annoyed when they discuss with someone who does not share their personal theological convictions. They want to insist on that little part that they have learned so far, not knowing or not willing to accept that the view that they hold might not do justice to the entirety of the Word of God.

This is not to say that you should accept any opposing view that comes to you, of course. What I want you to grasp is this other aspect of the temptation involved here. And it is the suggestion that you devote yourself to part of God’s truth. Serve God with devotion to only one part of His truth. Serve Him with zeal, but with partisan zeal. And if you do that, you will start persecuting Christians in the name of God. This has resulted in too many shameful incidents in the history of the church when Christians tortured other Christians or non-Christians in the name of God. Don’t let that happen to you. Beware of a carnal zeal, committed only to some parts of the Bible, that makes believers kill other people in the name of Christianity.

The book of Deuteronomy

Now, notice this interesting thing. All of Jesus’ replies to Satan are quotations that come from one book. Have you noticed that? Every reply to Satan comes from the book of Deuteronomy. Why? Is there any reason behind that? Why did Jesus keep answering from Deuteronomy? I don’t think that

it is a coincidence. When you look carefully at the book of Deuteronomy, you begin to understand why.

If you read the book of Deuteronomy and meditate about it, it won't be long before you realize that one of its characteristics is that it emphasizes the kingship of God. Or, to use another term, it emphasizes the kingdom of God. And in my opinion, this is also the emphasis of Jesus' whole teaching. The kingship of God, the kingdom of God.

So all the quotations of Jesus are taken from a book in the OT that particularly stresses the kingship of God. You see, Satan tried hard to tempt the Lord Jesus to do His own thing, to go His own way, a way that was not according to the Father's will. And Jesus' constant reply was this: God is king. 'God is My king. Not you Satan.' That was Jesus' firm reply to every temptation.

I would like to illustrate this on the basis of statistics. A closely related word to the notion of the kinship of God is the Hebrew word *mitzvah*, which means commandment. This word *mitzvah*, you will find it scattered all over Deuteronomy 43 times, a much higher rate than any of the other books of the Pentateuch. By comparison, you will find that it occurs in:

Genesis: 1x
Exodus: 4x
Leviticus: 10x
Numbers: 5x
But in Deuteronomy, 43x.

When you take the related words to this word *mitzvah*, i.e. the words that deal with commands and statutes, you will find the same thing again. You will find a remarkable predominance of these words in Deuteronomy. And what is more, there is no other book in the OT that has this word 'commandment' as frequently as Deuteronomy.

Now, consider this matter of the kingship of God from another angle. The very name Deuteronomy comes from two words, *deuteros – nomos*. The word *deuteros* meaning 'second', and *nomos* meaning 'the law.' It is a second declaration of God's law, a copy of God's law. The Jews sometimes call it *Mishneh Hattorah*, meaning a 'repetition of the Law.' It is a repetition on earth of God's law in heaven. That's why it is called Deuteronomy. It is the book of law *par excellence*.

And it is the king who gives his law to his people. God's people are subject to the law of God. That is why I say that the book of Deuteronomy emphasizes the kindship of God. It is God as King, who gives His law to His people. And Jesus quotes repeatedly from Deuteronomy precisely to say that God is King in His life and that His obedience is to God's law, not to Satan's manipulation.

Anyone who loves God loves His law. He is like the psalmist who says in Psalm 119:42, *I delight in Your law, O God*. He says in the same Psalm, 'I love your Law, O God, because it is more precious to me than gold, than fine gold (Ps 119:127).' A true Christian loves any of God's law. He delights to be under God's law. If you have this attitude of heart, if you live by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of God, then you can have the assurance that Satan will never be able to get you down.

A conditional promise

One last point. Have you noticed the words that Satan quotes to the Lord Jesus 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 you dash your foot against a stone.'*

These are comforting words, very comforting words. In the Bible, there are many passages that give us great comfort. And thanks be to God for His promises. But remember, in the context of this passage, it is Satan who is using these words of comfort. Can anything good come out of the mouth of Satan? There is a lesson to learn from this. An unbalanced insistence on these comforting passages can lead a Christian to be complaisant in his spiritual life. It is possible to use religion to dull one's conscience. It is possible to hide behind these words of comfort when the Word of God should have cut into our hearts and left us under the conviction of sin.

Look at Satan's quotation again. Do you see what Satan is trying to say? The logic of his quotation is this. 'You are the Son of God? Great! Then no matter what you do, you will be all right. You won't get hurt, even if you jump off the pinnacle of the temple. In fact, even if you disobey His word, God is committed to see that no harm comes to you in any way.' Can you see the trickery now? Can you see how such a beautiful passage has been perverted by Satan? 'No matter what you do, even if you sin, God will bear you up with His hands and with the care of His angels.' That's what Satan says. But that's not what the Bible says.

You see, these words in Psalm 91 are addressed only to people who dwell in the secret place of the Most High. It is for such people, who live in utter obedience to God, who recognize Him as the Most High, that God promises such care. But the moment you decide to jump off the pinnacle to do things your own way without regard to God as King in your life, such promises are no longer there for you. Don't expect to be born up by any angel. There is a much higher chance that you are going to be dashed to the ground. And that's exactly what Satan wants to happen to you. Don't make any mistake about it.

The promise found in Psalm 91 is for those who say of the Lord, as we read in v. 2, *...He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him will I trust.* If you walk in the secret place of the Most High, fellowshipping continually with Him, when He is King in your life, you can be sure that if it ever so happens that you trip over a stone, or that you stumble over a cliff, He will bear you up. He will bear you up. And the reason is given clearly to us in v. 9: Because you have made God your refuge, you have made Him the Most High, you have made Him King in your life.

This will conclude our study of the temptation of Christ. There is more depth to it than what we have seen. But I hope that in this series of three lessons, your awareness of the realities of spiritual warfare has increased, that your spiritual discernment has been sharpened, able to see through the lies, the trickery and the manipulation of the devil.