

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 (1)

Luke 4:1-4

I would like to invite you to open your Bible and read Luke 4:1-4. This is what we find.

Luke 4:1. And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness

2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days; and when they had ended, He became hungry.

3 And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

4 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

A practical study of the temptation of Christ

Today, we are going to begin a three-part lesson on the temptation experienced by Jesus as we find it described for us in the gospel of Luke. In this first lesson, we will concentrate on the first of these three temptations. We will look at the two other ones later on.

Let me say right from the beginning that I am not going to expound the temptation of Jesus from a christological point of view. What I mean is that we are not going to examine it in the sense in which we are going to learn something about the constitution of the person of Christ as to His manhood and His Godhead. That is what we call 'Christology', the study of the person of Christ. Rather, we are going to approach this passage from the point of view in which Jesus suffered in the words of 1Peter 2:21 where we read that *Jesus suffered to leave us an example that we should follow in His footsteps*. Here in Luke 4, we are talking about the suffering of temptation. And we want to see what kind of spiritual lessons we can learn and apply to our daily life. What are some of the lessons that we can learn with regard to spiritual warfare?

The reality of spiritual warfare

The first lesson that a Christian learns is that the moment he gets baptized, he will have to face up to the realities of spiritual conflict. When you make your pledge of allegiance to God, and that's what baptism is about, know that you have joined God's army in a spiritual battle. Notice that in all the three synoptic gospels, we find that the temptation of Jesus happens immediately after His baptism by John the Baptist. After baptism comes the temptation. This is going to happen, sooner or later, to any Christian soldier. After every time of spiritual blessing, expect that there will be an attack of the enemy. Be spiritually and mentally ready for it when it comes. This is the reality of spiritual warfare. Every time a blessing comes, don't be surprised that the enemy will attack. Be ready for it. It has to become a second nature in you.

So what happens after the baptism is that the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. This is somewhat surprising when you think about it. The Lord does not protect us in the sense of not exposing us to problems. And we might wonder why God allows this to happen. Why does God allow us to be tempted after baptism? There are many reasons for that and perhaps, one good reason is for the purpose that we may be strengthened. God allows us to be tempted in order that we may learn obedience through suffering. What happens now is that our profession of commitment to God is going to be tested. And it is precisely in battle that we know how strong we are in Christ. It is only when our strength is put to the test that we realize what strength we really have in Him. It is through winning spiritual battles that we grow spiritually. Jesus doesn't want to have a church full of spiritual babies. He wants all of us to grow. And how do we grow spiritually? Through spiritual conflicts.

Knowing Satan's tactics

Let us now consider the nature of Satan's attack. To say simply that Jesus was tempted by the devil is too vague for us to learn anything. We need to see how Satan tempted Jesus. It is when we know how Satan attacks that we will know how to ward off his attacks.

Take for example boxing. One important thing that a good boxer learns as he is being trained is to anticipate what his opponent might do before he does it. It is the training of anticipation. You know what he is likely to do when he puts his body in a certain position. You are then ready to neutralize the enemy, or even to counter-attack him. But if you don't know the art of anticipation, your opponent has the advantage. You don't know what he is going to do. But he knows what he is going to do to you. And that's how he gets you.

So it is not enough just to say that Satan is going to tempt us. It is just as useless as to say to the boxer that he is going to be hit. And obviously, he doesn't need that kind of information when he is fighting. What we need to know is how exactly the enemy will attack. If we know the tactic of the enemy, we will be able to anticipate his attacks. And that will put us in a good position to ward him off.

The first attack

So Satan's first tactic is this. Look at v. 3. He says this. *If you are the Son of God...* Let's stop here for a moment. Notice the word 'if', *if you are the Son of God...* This is not in any way doubting that Jesus is the Son of God. Here in Greek, this 'if' clause is what is called a first class condition. That means to say that the sentence is assumed to be true. It can be translated by, 'Since you are the Son of God.' Satan is not that foolish. Obviously, he knows that Jesus is God's Son. Here, what he wants to do is to draw a conclusion for Jesus. And the conclusion runs like this: 'Since you are the Son of God, I expect that you can do certain things.'

Now, this applies to us precisely by the fact that we are also God's children, God's adoptive children. Let me explain what I mean. In 2Corinthians 1:21, we are told that a Christian is someone who has been anointed by God. Paul says, *...He who establishes us with you in Christ and has **anointed** us is God...* God has anointed us. This anointing happens when we receive the Holy Spirit in our life. All of us who are Christians have been anointed by God through the Holy Spirit.

So what does it mean for the Christian that he has been anointed by God? Well, this can be explained by the fact that the act of anointing has to do with God giving you a certain authority. In the OT, three types of people were anointed: the king, the priest and the prophet. A king was anointed and thereby he receives authority from God to be a king. A priest was anointed and thereby he receives authority to minister at the temple. Again, a prophet was anointed and thereby he receives the

authority to preach God's Word with the power that comes from God. Now, when *you* were anointed as a Christian, what did you get? Among other things, you got the right to become a child of God, the authority to become a child of God. That's what John says in John 1:12. *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right (the authority) to become children of God.* As a child of God, you have an authority. You may exercise that right. And that is exactly what Satan wants you to do, but to exercise it in the wrong way.

There is a right way to exercise your anointing and there is a wrong way. The whole point of Satan's temptation is to get you to do it in the wrong way. Satan says to Jesus, *Command this stone to become bread.* Satan is very specific. He appeals to your eyes, to your stomach. You are hungry, you see a stone, you are God's Son. Just turn this stone to be bread and everything will be all right for you.

Do you see the temptation here? The temptation is that you use your new spiritual status to your material advantage, to your physical advantage. Use your new spiritual power of anointing to your material advantage. Get material benefit out of it. This is a very serious temptation because it is to make the flesh the motivation of whatever you do. If you fall into that temptation, you are back into the world. You have gone back under the control of the flesh.

The subtlety of the temptation

You know, Satan's suggestion is extremely subtle. I wonder if you can see it. The whole trap of the temptation is that it has to do with a legitimate physical need, a legitimate one. There is nothing sinful about being hungry. And if there is nothing sinful about being hungry, there is nothing sinful about meeting the need of your hunger. Who can accuse you of sin if you eat because you are hungry?

Listen to the satanic logic here. We are in the wilderness. You don't expect to find a bread shop around the next corner. So if you are hungry, and since we don't expect to find bread anywhere around, well, here is the solution. Since you are the Son of God, turn the stone into bread!

Notice, Satan is working on a very legitimate line. It is natural to be hungry, and it is only legitimate to meet that hunger. The temptation to sin is not obvious at all. The danger of this temptation is that it is not an obvious appeal to do something evil. It is to use what is not bad in itself and to bring slowly your spiritual life under the control of your physical needs and desires.

A personal experience

On the day of my wedding, as I was shaking the hand of a friend, this friend asked me, 'So in which area of Montreal are you going to buy your house?' When I heard that question, I felt very uncomfortable. The idea of getting a house made me feel like if I was going to sin. Well, what's wrong? Everyone needs a roof. And if you can afford a house, don't waste your money in paying a rent to the landlord. Get your own property. Before I got married, I lived in Quebec City in a property of my own. When Gladys and I got married, we decided to live in Montreal. So for my friend, it simply made sense that I sell my property in Quebec City and buy another one in Montreal. But there was a problem. This idea of buying a house was not in line with the direction of my spiritual life at that point in time. It just didn't make sense.

Since I got baptized, I had been living with an increasing feeling that God wanted to send me somewhere. I didn't know where. I didn't when. I didn't know how. But at the time when I met Gladys, who will become my wife, that conviction was strong enough that I didn't want anything to come in the way of God's plan for me. And to buy a house at that point in time would have been, I felt, to go against God's will. I was ready to go anywhere in the world for God's sake. And it was not the time to make any financial commitment of that nature. I needed full freedom.

I have to admit that it wasn't easy. I had to struggle with that. It was very tempting to take the easy road of buying a house. You know, you don't feel like living in apartment after enjoying the quietness of your own property for years. And besides, money wasn't an issue. There was enough money to buy an ordinary house with no mortgage. So what's the problem? You just got married. You need to provide a roof for you and your wife. You got the money. Chose your house. *Command this stone to become bread*. That, I couldn't do to my Lord. It would have been to fall into Satan's temptation. It would have been to let the desire of the flesh dominate over what the Spirit was telling me. Notice again. There is nothing wrong per se about buying a house. But in the context of my spiritual situation at that time, it would have been to fall into Satan's trap. So for three years, Gladys and I, with our two little children, we lived in an apartment in down town, getting ready for God to send us.

Fasting in the wilderness

The next thing I want you to notice is the context in which this battle against temptation takes place. The Lord Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. During that time, He ate nothing. In the parallel verse in Matthew, it says that the Lord Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights. He was tempted for forty days and He fasted for forty days. That's how He dealt with temptation. Don't you find that strange? When you fast, you become weaker and weaker. You have less and less energy to do things. You might not even think straight. Why would Jesus fast and weaken Himself in this spiritual battle with Satan? In doing so, He seems to give Satan the benefit of attacking Him even more effectively. Don't you think so?

I don't think that's the way we should understand fasting here. Jesus' fasting didn't give Satan some better means of attacking Him. On the contrary, the whole meaning of fasting here was to make Satan's temptation less effective against Him. You see, one way that Satan can use to attack you is through your flesh. He arouses the desires of your flesh. And if you don't have your flesh under control, you will fall right into Satan's trap. And the relevance of fasting in all this is that you learn to bring your flesh under control.

The fact that you are a Christian and that the Holy Spirit dwells in you doesn't mean that your flesh is automatically under control. For Paul says in Romans 13:14, *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lust*. We are to put on the Lord Jesus by faith, but it is our responsibility to cooperate with the Spirit to bring the flesh under control. It is the Holy Spirit that has the power to neutralize the flesh. But we must let Him exercise this power. And fasting is a means by which we can allow the Spirit to take control of the flesh. The spiritual discipline of fasting enhances your consciousness of the influence of your flesh and that puts you in a good position to draw power from the Holy Spirit in order to subdue the passion of the flesh. That's what Jesus was doing in His forty days of fasting, shutting off His flesh to the attacks of the enemy. Remember that Satan can use your flesh to knock you down. But a man of God is hard to tempt because he has learned to bring his flesh under control through the power of the Spirit.

Man shall live by the Word of God

Let us come to our final point. The Lord Jesus answered Satan from the Word of God. He quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3. And it is applied in this way. He says, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God*.

This verse has an important spiritual implication. It means that just as your body depends on physical food to live, so your spiritual life depends on God's word to live. Because you are not just a body; you have a spirit. And here we find that just as you live physically by eating food, so you live spiritually by eating food also. And that spiritual food is the Word of God.

Now, everybody knows that it is not enough just to be born in order to live. If you are going to continue to live, you got to eat. A baby needs food to grow, especially milk at the beginning. In the spiritual life, it is no different. It is not enough just to be born again. That's not the end of the whole business. If you are to grow spiritually, you have to eat. You have to feed on God's Word. If you don't, you will gradually drift away from the presence of God. Remember what the apostle Peter says. In 1Peter 2:2, he says, *as new born babes, desire the pure milk of the word...* What is that milk? The Word of God. *...desire the pure milk of the word...* What for? *... that you may grow up to salvation.* This is how we are going to grow spiritually. We feed upon the Word of God in order to grow up to salvation.

Summary

So let us just summarize. How shall we meet temptation?

Firstly, by being filled with the Holy Spirit. Remember the opening verse of the account of the temptation in Luke 4:1. *Jesus being **filled with the Holy Spirit** ... was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.* We are not going to fight the spiritual warfare in our own strength. We are given the Holy Spirit in order to overcome temptation.

Secondly, bring your flesh under control. Learn to discipline the flesh. And fasting is one useful means to achieve that.

And finally, feed constantly upon the Word of God. Apply its teaching every day in your life.

This is how God wants us to face temptation when it comes.