

The Mind of Christ

The Temptation of Jesus – Part One

INTRODUCTION:

- I. As Jesus grew to manhood in the city of Nazareth, the Scriptures tell us he was preparing Himself for the task that lay ahead.
 - A. We're told, "*He grew in wisdom, stature, in favor with God and with man.*" **(Luke 2:53)**
 1. In other words, Jesus developed intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially.
 - B. But when He reached the age of 30, Jesus embarked on His divine mission as the Messiah.
 1. His first step was to be baptized by John in the Jordan River.
 2. Jesus was NOT baptized because He needed forgiveness of any sins, but because He needed to fulfill all the righteous requirements of the Law of Moses, including those requirements that pertained to ceremonial washings and baptisms.
 - C. Following the baptism, we are told that "*Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness. . .*" **(Matthew 4:1)**
 1. He needed time to be alone with God and to fast and pray, and to contemplate the WAY He would take in becoming the Lamb of God that would take away the sins of the world.

2. The WAY Jesus needed to take had already been predetermined by God – but it was a WAY that was completely different from what the Jewish world was expecting of their Messiah.
- D. The popular picture of the Messiah was a triumphant liberator of the Jewish people, the conqueror of Rome, the victorious Lord over all the earth.
1. This is what the Jews in the days of Jesus were expecting of the Messiah, and it would be easy for Jesus to fit into this popular mold if He had chosen to do so.
 2. However, if Jesus had taken THIS way, He would have taken a way that was NOT in keeping with God's WAY.
 - a. It might be the POPULAR way – the WAY that would be in keeping with the hopes and aspirations of the people.
 - b. But it would NOT be God's WAY.
 3. Therefore, to contemplate the WAY He would take to bring mankind back to God, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where He would spend the next 40 days fasting and praying.
- II. But here is where we run into some issues that may confuse our understanding.

- A. The Scriptures don't merely say, "*Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness,*" but that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness "*to be tempted by the devil.*" **(Matthew 4:1)**
1. Why would the Holy Spirit, Who was obviously operating under the direction and approval of God the Father, deliberately lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil?
 2. And why would Jesus allow Himself to be tempted in this manner?

BODY:

- I. Before proceeding any further into the story about the temptation of Jesus, we need to some time to understand some things about the word "temptation."
 - A. The word temptation can be used either one of two ways:
 1. In a bad sense, we generally understand "temptation" to mean a deliberate and vicious attempt to seduce or entice someone into sin, or to maliciously test one's faith, virtue and character by enticement to sin
 2. However, in a good sense, the word can also refer to a "test" or a "trial" that strengthens our resolve and increases our faith, or to assay, examine or prove someone.
 - a. More specifically, it's a test or trial for the purpose of proving our character and the steadfastness of our faith.

B. In the story of the temptation of Jesus, we see that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be “tempted.”

1. If this means that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to deliberately place Jesus into the hands of the Devil where He would be seduced or enticed to sin, we have a real problem.
2. However, if this means that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where He would encounter a trial or test where He would be strengthened and come away with an even greater resolve, then the story becomes even more important to us.
 - a. Why? Because this kind of “testing” is in keeping with the way God deals with each one of us.

II. In the book of James, we learn a few basic facts about temptation that will not only help us understand the temptation of Jesus, but help us in dealing with the temptations we face daily in our own lives. **(James 1:13-15)**

A. Perhaps the most important fact we learn about temptation is that it is never directed by God.

1. James begins by saying, *“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.”* **(James 1:13)**
 - a. James use of the word “tempt” has the idea of “soliciting to do evil” – temptation in the BAD sense.

- b. This is in contrast with our being “tested” by God – the GOOD kind of testing – where God will test us to stretch our faith and develop our character, as shown earlier in this same chapter of James.
 - (1). *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (James 1:2-4)*
 - (2). This kind of testing is from the Greek word, “dokimazo.”
- c. The word “dokimazo” was used two ways in ancient Greece.
 - (1). It was stamped on the bottom of clay pots that had been through the kiln and had not cracked – they were given a seal of approval that they had been “tested.”
 - (2). It was a word that was used to describe the smelting process where precious metals, like gold and silver, were placed into the fire to allow all the impurities to be separated and rise to the surface where they could be discarded – only the pure metal was left behind.
- d. In the same manner, this kind of “testing” is designed to do two things for us:
 - (1). Make us approved – proving that we’ve been through the fire and our pots haven’t cracked.

- (2). Purging out all the impurities – the impurities that will interfere with our walk with God.
- c. God doesn't traffic in the realm of the immoral – therefore, while He “tests” us, He never “tempts” us to do evil or to sin.
 - (1). The Scriptures tell us God “tempted” (tested or tried) Abraham. (cf. Genesis 22:1)
 - (a). Not in an attempt to seduce or entice Abraham into sin, but rather to strengthen his faith in God even more.
 - (2). The Scriptures also tell us God tried or tested Job.
 - (a). The purpose was not to weaken Job, but rather to strengthen his faith and give him an even greater resolve to remain faithful to the Lord.
 - d. The trials God brings to us are not for the purpose of seducing us into sin either, but rather for the purpose of strengthening and encouraging us to rely on Him even more.
- B. Going back to verses 13-15, when James said, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’” . . . James had two choices when he used the Greek prepositional thought “by.”
 - 1. One encompasses the idea of **DIRECT AGENCY (HUPO)**.
 - a. This would have implied, “*Let no one say, God DIRECTLY led me into sin!*”
 - 2. The other conveys the idea of **INDIRECT AGENCY (APO)**.

- a. This would imply, *“Let no one say, that God, even INDIRECTLY, led me into sin!”*
 3. Which one did James use?
 - a. **INDIRECT AGENCY** -- the stronger of the two! (**APO**)
 - b. God is not even INDIRECTLY involved in leading us into sin.
 4. The bottom line is that our response to temptation (either resisting it, or giving in to it) is strictly a matter of our own PERSONAL responsibility.
- C. However, while God does not entice us to sin, He ALLOWS or PERMITS us to endure temptations that DO entice us to sin.
1. For example, we know that God allows Satan to tempt us, but He doesn't allow Satan to tempt or try us beyond what we are capable of bearing.
 - a. *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”* (1 Corinthians 10:13).
 - b. There are two key truths here we need to understand:
 - (1). First, God knows our limitations and will not allow us to be tempted beyond that limit – and these limits are different for each one of us.

(a). Therefore, when it comes to the Devil tempting you, God knows the point at which you would no longer be able to resist the temptation, and He limits Satan's power, preventing him from tempting you beyond your breaking point.

(2). Second, God will always provide a way of escape.

(a). Not only does He limit Satan's power in tempting us, God also provides a way of escape – a way out of the temptation itself.

(b). This WAY could be different for each and every one of us.

D. TEMPTATION is always a TESTING. But the PURPOSE for that testing depends on WHO is doing the testing.

1. If it's Satan who's tempting or testing us, the purpose is to lead us AWAY from God and into sin.
2. However, if it's God Who's testing or trying us, then the purpose is to strengthen us and make us more fit for the kingdom of heaven.

III. To understand the story of the temptation of Jesus, we must first understand something of the METHODS Satan uses.

A. When writing to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul warned these first-century Christians about the methods Satan uses to tempt us.

1. He said they needed to always be willing to forgive those who genuinely repent of this sins, “lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” (2 Corinthians 2:11)
 - a. The word “devices” is from the Greek word, “*methodia*,” which is the word from which we get our word “*methodology*” – which also means Satan has a whole storehouse of methods to get us to sin.
- B. What are some of the “methods” Satan uses? Let me suggest three.
 1. First, Satan may ask us to do things that, by themselves, may not appear to be inherently evil – not at first, anyway.
 - a. Satan is very subtle. He begins by asking us to simply take one small step – nothing really obvious, just a tiny step.
 - b. He doesn’t lead us directly into fornication or adultery. He only asks us to allow our eyes to linger just a little longer on that beautiful young woman or that handsome man, and rationalize that we’re only appreciating their God-given beauty.
 - c. He doesn’t lead us directly into covetousness. He only wants us to buy just one lottery ticket, then think about all the good we’ll do for the Lord if we win.
 - d. Next week, when we look closer at the temptation of Jesus, we’ll see that there was no great evil in turning stones into bread, nor was there anything inherently evil in allowing the

angels of God to bear Him up if He cast Himself down from the Temple.

(1). On the surface, the first two things Satan was asking Jesus to do, did not appear to be sinful. But that's the METHOD Satan uses.

(2). Satan appeals to us in subtle ways.

(a). They may not appear evil or sinful at first.

(b). But then, we're not shown his ultimate purpose.

2. Second, Satan always tempts us where we are the weakest.

a. His attack will always be in at least one of three areas, which are described by the apostle John in a small letter tucked away toward the end of the New Testament.

(1). *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:15-17)*

b. Satan will attack us with the:

(1). Lust of the flesh – a desire to satisfy the wants and needs of our flesh. Physical or emotional desires or needs.

(2). Lust of the eyes – a desire to have what we see.
Covetousness.

(3). Pride of life – an inordinate desire for recognition.
Drawing attention to oneself for the purpose of enhancing
our own self-esteem.

c. When we take a closer look at the temptation of Jesus next
week, we'll see that Jesus was tested in these areas as well.

(1). Lust of the flesh – the desire to turn stones into bread to
feed His desire for food.

(2). Lust of the eyes – the desire to have all the kingdoms of
the world, everything His eyes could see.

(3). Boastful pride of life – the desire to draw attention to
Himself, and to make all men see WHO He really is – by
casting Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple.

3. Third, Satan may challenge us to PROVE our relationship with
God.

a. He may challenge us to make some kind of display of our faith
– to place ourselves in a situation where we are in essence
putting God to the test to prove that we are really one of His
children.

b. Take, for example, the man who quits his job, believing the
Lord will bless him with a better one – doing this because he
believes he's been given some "sign" from God.

- (1). I know someone who actually did this – and when he couldn't find a better job, he ultimately went into a financial downspin and lost his faith altogether – blaming God of deserting him.
- c. Or, rather than challenge us to make some display of our faith, Satan may cause us to begin having DOUBTS about our relationship with God.
 - (1). During some trial of our faith, Satan may cause us to wonder if the trial is a sign from God that we have somehow lost favor with the Lord – that He's angry with us for something we've done.
 - (2). Or when we've been tempted and failed – Satan may try to convince us that we're not really worthy of being a Christian after all.
4. Finally, in the end, the result of every temptation or trial of Satan is to lead us to make **him** the lord of our life – to obey **him**, and become **his** servant to obey, to become a servant of **unrighteousness**, and to finally “bow down and worship” **him**.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Do you feel yourself coming under Satan's attack?
 - A. The story of the temptation is in the Scriptures for one very specific purpose – I'm going to tell you that purpose now, and I'm going to

remind you of it once again next week when we conclude our lesson on the temptation of Jesus.

1. In his letter to first-century Christians, the apostle Paul wrote, *“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* **(Hebrews 4:14-16)**
 - a. Jesus is able to *“sympathize with our weaknesses”* because He was *“in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*
 - b. He knows what we go through. He knows how powerful Satan is in “buffeting” each and every one of us.
2. This is why we are able to *“come boldly to the **throne of grace,**”* (not to a throne of **judgment** or **condemnation**) *“that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* **(Hebrews 4:16)**
 - a. We are able to “come boldly *confidently* to the throne of grace”. . . to “obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” because WE know He knows what we go through.
 - c. Jesus didn’t endure temptation so HE would know what we go through – He is God the Son (an omniscient, all-knowing God) –

therefore, there was no need for Him to learn anything about temptation.

d. Rather, He endured temptation so that WE would know He knows – the Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan so that WE would know we have a Lord who truly understands what we go through.

3. That's why the story of the temptation is so wonderful.

a. Jesus endured Satan's attack to show us that He truly understands and has compassion on us in our struggles of doing battle with the Devil.

b. No wonder the writer of the Hebrew letter calls the throne of Jesus a "throne of grace."

B. Depending on where you are in your relationship with Jesus, you can come to that throne of grace this very moment in one of two ways.

1. Either in obedience to the gospel, or. . .

2. As a child of God, needing forgiveness of past sins.