

Strong Crying and Tears

"Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness" Luke 4:1.

Matthew adds, "to be tempted of the devil"—the *diabolos*. He was led there for this purpose by the Spirit of God. This testing and trying and proving was an essential part and step in God's purpose in and through him. Now these things are written for our admonition. Temptation is our great problem. Paul felt this keenly—

*"I find a law in my members that when I would do good, evil is present with me."
"O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:21-24.*

The more we learn about temptation, the better equipped we are to combat it.

In our reading today is the most important temptation that has ever occurred—the typical temptation, the typical defense, the typical victory—that of our great Forerunner and Example.

We **must** realize its **reality**—the realness of its effort, its attraction and appeal. The more we can see the basic principles and significance of this temptation, the better we shall be able to cope with all temptation.

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We NOTE from verse 2 that Jesus was tempted, or tested, not just at the end of the 40 days, but throughout the 40 days. We note, too, that this testing fittingly occurs at the beginning of his ministry, just after he had been announced to the nation as the Lamb of God, and had received the power of the Holy Spirit without measure. This temptation gives clear testimony and emphasis to a vital aspect of Truth—that Jesus was a real man, subject to human weakness, and not a "co-equal" part of an omnipotent divinity, as the doctrine of the "Trinity" teaches. *It is the very essence of the Truth that Jesus suffered under the burden of the same defiled nature, the same law of sin in his members, the same pulling of the flesh, as his brethren.* The whole meaning and value of his work and victory was his *real*, complete, perfect, continuous unyielding overcoming.

He never sinned. He never failed. Truly he was strengthened and helped for the tremendous work he had to do—the work of **completely**—perfectly—without one flaw or failure—resisting and overcoming and crushing, by the power of the Word of God, every moment-to-moment tendency of the flesh during every moment of his responsible lifetime. Truly he was strengthened, because what he accomplished is—as are all other things—in the ultimate, the work of God. Jesus said himself, "I of mine own self can do nothing."

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Here, in this account of the temptation, are the inner workings of how he overcame. And we note that there was no prolonged or complicated argument—just the clear, simple and ideally appropriate quotation from the Word of God. *One passage of Scripture is worth more than all human writing of all ages combined.* There is a great lesson here in dealing with temptation. The closer we can get to the **simplicity** of the Word, the closer we are to the way of Christ and the mind of the Spirit. We are clearly warned that—

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9).

If we give the flesh any scope to twist and argue and confuse the issue, we are lost. There is Scripture for every occasion. It is our wisdom and our life to devote ourselves intensely to seeking these and knowing them as a shield against all temptation.

"If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread." The utter simplicity of this temptation is deceptive, for actually the principles involved are very deep and embody **all temptation**.

John speaks of the *lust of the flesh*—the desire to enjoy things; the *lust of the eyes*—the desire to get things; the *pride of life*—the desire to get power admiration. He says these things are all of the world and not of the Father. We may be surprised to learn that the principle word for "lust" in the

New Testament is translated "desire" when applied to the feelings of Jesus and the angels, and "concupiscence" and "covet" when use in a bad sense elsewhere. The point is, *there is no sin in desire or lust itself*; it can be good or bad. The sin is in **what** is desired and **why**.

The reason why the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life are of the world and ungodly is because they are all aspects of **selfishness**—desires to *get*, and to gratify self. We must get at the **root** of the desire. Is it a desire to GET, or a desire to GIVE?—a desire to gratify ourselves or a desire to please God? We must desire to give, seek opportunity to give, center all our pleasure and satisfaction in giving, be thankful of any opportunity, however small and insignificant, of giving, for—said Jesus—it is more blessed, more happy, more satisfying, more enjoyable to give than to get.

We must put aside all desire to get as evil, deceptive, self-destroying misdesire. Temptation, if traced to its roots, always works through the desire of getting something—wanting something—not being satisfied—not being willing in thankfulness to accept God's way and God's provision.

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"If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread."

This is so simple that it almost seems childish, but let us not be deceived. Here are the lessons of life. Remember the simplicity of the temptation of Adam and Eve. Like any other study, we must learn the basic facts of simple examples. All complications and secondary details must be eliminated so that the basic principles stand out. It is put in childish form for us because we are but children, for all our assumed maturity and wisdom. Only as simple children can we find the simple, childish way of life. *Worldly wisdom and knowledge and learning and education are a tremendous—almost an insuperable—obstacle in the discernment of the narrow, simple way of life.*

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WE MUST first realize that Jesus was physically exhausted, and experiencing the continual pressure of the pangs of hunger in its extremest form. He had been 40 days and nights without food—40 days and nights in a wilderness, among wild animals, sustained only by faith and prayer. We must endeavor to fully realize the reality, the extremity, the intensity of the temptations—not just as bald and obvious invitations to disobedience, but **subtle, disguised enticements** to deviate from the narrow path of faith and obedience and seek right ends by wrong means. Jesus was the Son of God, of quick understanding, yet these temptations were real and powerful. What then of ourselves, in our own waste, howling wilderness filled with all the pitfalls of the dark deceptiveness of the mind of the flesh? What safety or hope is there in any course short of constant prayer and study?

Hunger was a constant, gnawing pressure upon him, and he knew he had at his fingertips unlimited power to satisfy it—he possessed without measure the power that sustains the universe. Only a moment's effortless willing would have produced bread before him. *One small loaf of bread.* Was he being wise or foolish, reasonable or unreasonable, to just do nothing for himself, and leave everything to God? Had not God given him the means of sustenance? Shouldn't he use it, at least put to the extent of bare necessity—just a little plain bread? Why all this fuss, this pantomime of self-denial about such a simple little thing? So the temptation would be presented—*You are being stubborn, you are being foolish, you are being 'holier-than-thou' about trifles. You need the bread to do God's work. The Spirit was given for this work. If you follow this course, you'll be hurting and restricting the very work you were given the Spirit to do.*"

Jesus, a mortal man, a man subject to all the natural weakness of mortal flesh, had been entrusted with the Spirit without measure. He had to be perfectly clear in his mind and in his determination as to the use of this power. Carrying the burden and responsibility of this awful power, he had to work out his salvation with fear and trembling. He had to see the picture with perfect clearness and not deviate from it to the right hand or the left. He had to clearly discern the motions of sin and the deceptions of the *diabolos* in all their dark variety and confusion. He had to discern right down to the finest points the distinction between right and wrong—thou shalt and thou shalt not. We are, in all this, being taught *the absolute necessity of as much knowledge and comprehension and discernment of the Word of God as we can possibly acquire* within the limits of our capacity and opportunity. Jesus, the Head, required this discernment to the utmost degree for the work he had to do.

We have just finished reading together the 119th. Psalm. One hundred and seventy six times, in one hundred and seventy-six verses we have read the same message, in one hundred and seventy-six different ways—

"O how love I Thy Law!"

"Thy Law is a light to my path."

"Give me understanding, and I shall keep Thy Law."

"Teach me Thy statutes."

"Through Thy precepts I get understanding, therefore I hate every false way."

This same simple (yet profound) thought - over, and over, and over again. Our *only hope* lies in constantly seeking a FULLER UNDERSTANDING of God's Word. The answer, too, is repeated over and over - "It is my meditation all the day." "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

This is the beautiful lust of the Spirit, that lusteth against the flesh - the righteousness of God - the good and perfect gift from above - the lust to *give* - to give *love* - to give *goodness*, to give *comfort* and *help*, to give happiness and pure divine measure.

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"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." What bearing does this answer of Jesus have on the suggestion to make a loaf of bread to satisfy legitimate hunger? The tempter did not suggest "living by bread alone." Couldn't Jesus have found a scripture more to the point?

We know that this scripture must be the one above all others that is most truly and deeply to the point, and it is our wisdom and our life to try to find out why. What is the *background* of this scripture? On what occasion was it recorded? What does it apply to? We find that Jesus is quoting from the words of Moses in Deut. 8:2-3, and we note throughout how *perfectly* it applies to Jesus' circumstances, and the purpose of them. In fact, it helps to explain them. These portions are providentially related as type and antitype - "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these 40 years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart. "He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." And verse 5 - "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee."

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"He learned obedience by the things that he suffered." Wasn't he obedient before? Did he have to *learn* obedience? He was never disobedient, but he had to learn by trial and testing and experience the full and beautiful depths of faithful, trusting obedience under tribulation and suffering. How - in the face of this clear picture of the loving purpose and operation of God - how could Jesus presume to make bread on his own by the Spirit-power, and spoil the whole arrangement of God's operation?

This whole chapter 8 of Deut. is so much to the point. See verse 18 - "Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power." Jesus must never forget that the power he had was of direct divine gift, and for divine use only. Dare he then use it to sustain himself directly, and thus cut himself off from the sweet dependence upon God that he shared with all his brethren? "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." - and Jesus was the steward of an infinitely greater treasure than any man has ever held. How careful, then, must *we* be, as faithful stewards, to 'Render to God that which is God's.' And *all* is God's except for the little which - for the present - He instructs us to give to Caesar for the accomplishment of God's purpose. Caesar's part is very specifically defined by the law of the land in which we live, and we must take care in the sight of God that we give it honestly and in full measure. Beyond that, all must go to God.

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THE ORDER of the next 2 temptations is different in Matthew and Luke. There must be a reason. We know that God does not make mistakes. We know He does nothing without a reason, and we know that this is the Word of God.

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It has been suggested that this variation of order is to indicate that there was a doubling of the temptation series, and that actually there were six - first the 3 recorded by Luke, then the 3 by Matthew. This is not unreasonable, for we know the whole 40 days was a period of temptation.

And there is a certain fitness in this suggestion, for doubling is a significant aspect of important divine things, to signify certainty and establishment. It would lay, at this vital crisis in Jesus' ministry, a broader basis to his victory, showing that he was unmoved and unshaken by repeated assault. It would introduce, too, the very fitting symbol of 6.

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"And the devil (the diabolos) taking him up into an high mountain, showeth him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and saith, "All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them; for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore will worship me, all shall be thine." *The 'diabolos' is sin-in-the-flesh, in all its forms and manifestations -- from within, from without, personal, social, national, political.* The particular identity of the diabolos - tempter - deceiver - in Jesus' case is not revealed, and it is not in the very similar case of Job. Therefore it is not important that we know. The value of the record for us lies in other aspects of the matter, and God leaves out the unimportant parts that our attention may not be distracted from that which is important. Bro Thomas and bro. Roberts were both firmly convinced that there was an external, personal tempter, whoever he may have been. We believe that the more we study the matter scripturally, the more we will be convinced that this is the soundest and safest view. When God's purpose requires it, He can make sure that the necessary adversary is in the right place, as in the case of Adam, and Moses, and Job and so many others.

We know Jesus had to battle and overcome the diabolos *in himself*. This was the whole essence and power and meaning of his victory. Bro. Roberts points out that the mere impulse to do something God had prohibited is not in itself transgression. But the slightest entertaining of, or giving in to, that impulse - even only in thought - *is* transgression. And Jesus was absolutely sinless in thought, word and deed. That basic fact we must preserve inviolate, and *no interpretation can be entertained which even hints at undermining it.* The idea is abhorrent that Jesus would ever voluntarily entertain, or toy with, or soliloquize within himself upon a course of sin, even for a moment. To his pure mind all sin was repugnant and hateful, immediately upon recognition. He had to examine all suggestions and desires and impulses in the light of God's Word, immediately rejecting them without thought of compromise, as soon as their unscripturalness was perceived - "Get thee behind me Satan, for thou savorest not of the things of God, but of man.

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WHAT a jump from a loaf of bread to all the glory and authority of the kingdoms of the world! What a vast range temptation covers! The *first* was the desire of the flesh in its simplest and most harmless-seeming form. *This* is the pride of life in its fullest and highest possible attainment. The first was plausible, but we may wonder how this offer of the kingdoms of the world could in any way be a temptation to him who knew the mind and purpose of God so well.

Let us fully realize that there is much we do not understand, much we shall never understand during this day of weakness and of "seeing through a glass darkly." But *this does not bar us from getting the practical guidance and instruction and comfort and warning and mental transformation that these things are designed to give us.* Even Paul said: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Let us extract the utmost value we can from the vast amount that *is* revealed, and not speculate or be troubled about what is not revealed. There is always danger and division in hazy speculation in the secondary areas, where the light shines only dimly. Let us keep our minds out in the safe bright middle of the beam.

Let us consider a few facts that will help us understand this temptation a little better - help us realize that the battle Jesus fought and the victory he won were very real indeed.

5

First consider some of his sayings during his ministry: "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straightened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). ("Straightened" here is the same word as "sick" in "sick of a fever" -- Acts 28:8. It means to be "pressed down," continuously distressed and afflicted). Jesus said (Matt. 26:39) -"Father, save me from this hour" (John 12:27). "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Again we read (John 11:33) - "Jesus groaned within himself, and was troubled." "In the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications with strong cryings and tears" (Heb. 5:7). "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou so far from helping me?" "I am a worm, and no man, a reproach of men and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn" (Matt. 27:46; Psa. 22:1-7).

Truly we must realize the greatness of the struggle. *He learned obedience by the things that he suffered.* And these 40 terrible days in the wilderness stand out with his crucifixion as the beginning and ending of his sufferings for men, two great crises of struggle and affliction. He was the second Adam, being tested to the uttermost. Once again mankind stood at the crossroads of life and death, and all their destiny was laid upon the shoulders of this one man, alone in the wilderness, famished and physically exhausted after 40 days and nights and privation.

The tempter suggested an *easier way* of establishing the kingdom -of beginning Christ's reign on earth. The essence of the temptation seems to be the questioning the necessity, yea, questioning the rightness and justice of the struggle and sorrow and suffering involved in *God's* appointed way. *Why* must this terrible suffering be? Let us not forget that even 3 years later in Gethsemane, on the eve of his crucifixion, he pleaded - "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." These things are recorded to show us the terrible reality of the struggle and the glorious magnitude of the victory and sacrifice. "And Jesus answered and said, Get thee behind me Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

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"And he set him on a pinnacle of the Temple, and said unto him, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: for it is written" - "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee." *"It is written."* Here was a new and subtle approach - "It is written." We can always find Scripture to justify anything that the flesh wants to do.- "Shall we call down fire from heaven as Elias did?" (Luke 9:54). "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die" (John 19:7). *They quoted God's law to condemn God's Own Son.*

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WHAT IS the temptation in this case? Why should it be a temptation to Christ to cast himself down from a great height? We get light on this from the answer Jesus made -"*Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*" The Rev. Vers. has "Make trial of." From the beginning, men had said in their weakness and frailty - "Whereby shall I know this . . ." "How can the thing be? . . ." "We trusted that it should have been . . ." "Art thou he that should come? . . ." God is patient and gentle with weakness of faith and perception, but Jesus tells us that -"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." And - "Where much is given, much is expected." Jesus too, must be tested, and made strong in the testing.

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"*Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*" What is the lesson for us? Do we tempt God? Put Him to the test? Question anything He does? Presume to force His hand? Set conditions for Him to meet? This is a common presumption, rooted in the pride of life, as if He were our private God, bound to do our private bidding. How common it is for men to question His ways, and set their own standards to measure Him by! Judge Him on the basis of what *they* think He should do!

"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh a sign, and no sign shall be given it." The signs that God Himself has provided according to His own judgment and wisdom are all-sufficient. If they cannot stir us to obedience and zeal, nothing could. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

6

"*Moses and the Prophets*" - there is the key. All the power of salvation is there, if we will make the effort to acquire it. We cannot expect God to work a special miracle for us, and save us from the final "casting down," if we do not lay zealous hold on the means He gives - constant study of His Word.

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"*The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.*" The Jews wanted something spectacular to glorify their nation, and lead them to triumph. They laid down the course that God should follow, instead of humbly seeking God's way. They wanted to put God to their test. This casting himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple would be just the kind of thing that would have appealed to them and impressed them. Should he use some means like this of gaining notoriety and favor? It would be so easy! The Greeks, on the other hand, wanted everything explained to their satisfaction, to gratify *their* philosophy and glorify their wisdom. They set down their rules for God. "But, says Paul, "We preach Christ crucified in weakness," the scorn of the worldly wise, "unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them that are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." "*Christ tempted, Christ suffering, Christ mocked, and rejected, Christ crucified - the power of God, and the wisdom of God, and the love of God, and the righteousness of God, and the salvation of God!*"

G.V.G. -- Nov. 1960

