

**Matthew 3: 13 – 4: 4; “Christ Engaging our Enemy”, Sermon # 1 in a series entitled –
“These Sayings of Mine”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
February 3rd, 2019, in the Morning Worship Service.**

From the verses which I just read to you, I want you to take notice of the fact that our Lord Jesus was very deliberate in His undertaking our salvation. He was particularly deliberate about going to John the Baptist to be baptized at this particular time. And, He was very deliberate, following His baptism, to go up to the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. He was particularly deliberate because the Holy Spirit was leading Him into this great spiritual battle against the Devil so that He could defeat Satan’s schemes to hold us captive in bondage to sin and deception. In describing all that our Lord did at this critical time at the beginning of His public ministry, I also want to show you how important it will be for you to be deliberate, not in a self-determining way, but by your being willing to follow the leading of the Spirit in how you engage your enemy the Devil. It says here in chapter 4, verse 1 that Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. From this I gather that God does not want us to be passive in our spiritual battle with Satan, thinking simply that it is something that will sometime come to us out of the blue. But I believe that our Lord would have you to know that He Himself, by His Spirit, will lead you at certain critical points in our Christian life, to engage in battle with the Devil yourself.

1st of all – Our Lord engaged our enemy at the time of His Baptism.
(chapter 3, verses 13-17)

It is important that you see the connection between baptism and temptation in these verses. You will recall that John the Baptist was the forerunner of our Lord Jesus. He was the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, he said; Make His paths straight. So John, as the forerunner of Christ, came preaching a baptism of repentance. He was telling all sinners, religious self-righteous people and immoral people both, to turn away from their sins. He was warning them to flee from the wrath to come. He was telling them that they should bear fruits worthy of repentance in the way that they lived their lives. He was saying that they should not think that just because they had Abraham as their father that they were safe, spiritually speaking. Many people from Jerusalem and all the surrounding areas of Israel were coming out to John, to hear him preach, and to be baptized in the river Jordan. Upon their confession of their sins, and upon their confessing that they would need the grace of the Christ to be forgiven of all their sins, he would then baptize them. John was not only calling for them to repent, he was also calling them to believe in the One who would come after Him, who was greater than him; even Jesus Christ our Lord.

And then one day, not too many months after he began his ministry, the Lord Jesus Himself came out to the river Jordan. John pointed Him out to the people and said – “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1: 29) And what was amazing to John was that Jesus asked him to baptize him. John said – “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” You see, John knew what the Pharisees and the Sadducees did not know, about Jesus. He knew that Jesus did not have any sin that He needed to confess; that He was the one man in all the earth, in all generations of men, who had no sin. Jesus though, convinced John that he should baptize Him with these words – “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” And then it says – “Then he allowed Him”.

Our Lord’s having been baptized by John the Baptist shows us how He entered in to His Public Ministry. He entered into His ministry by being baptized in the place of all the sinners who needed a Savior. He had come to take the place of sinners in His fulfilling all righteousness on their behalf; of His fulfilling all the righteous requirements of God’s holy law on behalf of the person believing in Him. But in saying this, we should understand, Jesus was declaring war on Satan and his kingdom of darkness. He was declaring war on Satan the one who holds captive all men in his kingdom; the

one who intimidates them spiritually through the fear of death, in making them know that they are not righteous enough, in themselves, to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus came that He might destroy the one who had the power of death, even the Devil, and deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage, and being held in his kingdom. (Hebrews 2: 14 and 15)

The Lord Jesus, in the process of learning to fulfill all righteousness in our place, was declaring to Satan that He would not succumb to these temptations from the tempter that we find in chapter 4. He knew that He would have to succeed in resisting all the temptations to sin, where our first forefather Adam had failed. He knew that Adam was the representative Head of all mankind, and therefore He would have to do battle with Satan's temptations; He would have overcome on our behalf, because we are all fallen creatures in Adam. Adam did not stand in his original righteousness, and so the Lord Jesus, the Second Adam, must come to fulfill all righteousness in Adam's place, and in our place too; we who are descended from him. The Lord Jesus must do what Adam never succeeded in doing; to resist the temptation to act independently of what God has commanded in His holy word. You and I must, by the grace which He supplies, learn to do the very same thing; face the temptations of the Devil and overcome him by the word of God.

But you will notice that the Devil did not come to Jesus to tempt Him until He had heard the declaration of what Jesus intended to do; that is, to fulfill all righteousness. He heard it that day when Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan. He was no doubt, standing nearby, in the spiritual realm, observing there, in the heavenly shadows, looking when Jesus came up out of the water. He was there watching when John saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him. And Satan heard the voice which came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And he said to himself and to the other demons – We shall see! We shall see whether this is the Son of God when I come to tempt Him. We shall see what He will say, and what He will do. I will tempt Him, and I will prevail!

So, I want you to take notice of the timing here; that it was only when Jesus had declared publicly what He intended to do, that just following this was the very time when Satan decided to tempt Jesus. Take notice, my brethren, because, it will be the same for you as well. It is when you as a Christian make public profession of your faith in Christ that the tempter is sure to come. It is when you are baptized, and when you state publicly that you intend to walk in obedience to the teaching of the word of God, by the grace which Christ supplies. That is when the Devil will come to test and to tempt. It is when the Christian determines that they will repent of their particular sins and then declares to others around them that it is their express intention, it is their resolve to become a thoughtful, purposeful, serious Christian; that is when the Devil will come to tempt. But we must also learn the difference between water baptism and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Listen to the Puritan William Perkins in his *Treatise on the Combat between Christ and the Devil Displayed*: "In that Christ is no sooner baptized, but He is presently tempted, we learn that all those who are truly baptized into Christ must make account to be tempted and prepare for a combat with the devil, even through the whole course of their lives: for if Satan durst be so bold as to encounter with Christ Jesus the Head of the Church after His baptism, then doubtless he will not spare any of His members who are but weak and sinful men." "Again, in baptism a man gives up his name unto God, promising therein forever to renounce all service to the devil, the flesh and the world; and contrariwise to believe in God, and to serve Him; and this vow being thus made, it is the will of God he should be tempted, that in the school of temptation he might learn to practice his baptism." "But here most men will say, they never felt by experience in themselves the truth of this doctrine; for they have not perceived any such combat in themselves, though they have been baptized many years ago."

"Answer – Such never yet received the inward Baptism of the Spirit; they wear Christ's livery (his emblem or insignia), but as yet they do service unto Satan; and though they have been made partakers of the covenant, yet still they abide within the kingdom of darkness; for Christ here

teaches by His own example, that all those who have received the inward baptism of the Spirit, whereby they have effectually put off sin, and put on the Lord Jesus, are as sure to be tempted by Satan as Himself was.” “Therefore let such persons as never yet felt in themselves this spiritual conflict, now begin to reform their lives, and to perform their vow of baptism, and they shall undoubtedly find in themselves the truth of this doctrine, that all that are baptized into Christ, shall be tempted of the devil.” (*William Perkins Works, Vol. 1, Page 88*)

Brethren, this is the truth of the matter. Therefore, if we would be serious Christians, and faithful to Christ, we must expect to do battle with the Devil; he tempting us to see whether we can overcome him, or he can overcome us, and keep us holding on to some sin, or in some way deny our only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let us remember that it was the Lord Christ who bought us with His blood, and died to deliver us from the Devil. He is the Captain of our salvation and He leads us into battle with the Devil. Even though we as Baptists would not affirm infant baptism to be sufficient as a ceremony to place a child into the covenant of grace, nevertheless we agree with William Perkins in the distinction that he makes here between water and Spirit baptism. All true Christians will reform their lives and perform their vow of baptism, to forever renounce their service to the Devil. This is a part of your initial sanctification, dear Christian. Indeed it is a part of your progressive sanctification as well. See to it that you pray to pass the test and have the grace and fortitude of spirit to be able to stand in the evil day.

2nd – Our Lord engaged our enemy the Devil, by means of fasting.

Chapter 4, verse 1 says, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” “And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.” “Now when the tempted came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’” Let us see from these words something which is of immense importance to every Christian; that it was the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. It is the Spirit’s good work to lead the Christian into all the truth about the devil’s wiles, and into the truth concerning the spiritual weakness or strength of our hearts, as Christians. Yes, I know that it is true that it says in the Lord’s Prayer – “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” But we should understand that although the Holy Spirit will not lead you directly into a confrontation with temptation normally, that there will be certain times that He will lead you directly into combat with the Devil in order to destroy his works and defeat his schemes, and make you strong unto victory in Christ’s service.

That is what the Spirit was doing here with the Lord Jesus, the Captain of our salvation and the forerunner of our faith. The Spirit was leading Christ forth to obtain victory over the Devil, on behalf of sinners everywhere. The way that the Spirit led Him was to bring Him into a wilderness setting, and to have him fast 40 days and 40 nights. This was to be a temptation not in a garden of paradise, but in a waste land. Adam was given the best of settings for his temptation, and he was given every incentive to obey God and not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. “Of all the trees of the garden you may eat, except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” And yet, he failed. Christ, on the other hand, was brought into the worst of earthly settings; everything spoke of desolation, even as the thought of bearing the sins of another person would feel. The Lord Jesus went there, to that place, to engage Satan in spiritual battle, for us. He went there to face the temptations that He would be given by the Devil, the one who had brought desolation to all mankind. He had nothing to eat and nothing to encourage Him there from a human standpoint. Adam was given all things necessary for life and godliness in his setting. Christ was given nothing, but then as we think about, He needed nothing except the Spirit, and the word of God.

But let us notice that, even though this was true, it still took 40 days of preparatory fasting in order for Jesus to be ready to face the Devil on our behalf. It was no doubt a miraculous fast, and it should not be attempted by any person, Christian or otherwise, now. But still it is true that you as a Christian should learn to fast as a part of your following your Master. Why? Because at certain

points in your Christian experience you will need both greater than normal humility, and greater than normal power, in order to face and to overcome the evil one and his schemes. But during those times, you should also know why you are fasting, even as Christ knew why He was fasting. He was fasting, from the standpoint of His humanity, in order to facilitate His experiencing the deepest humility. The thought that humbled Him was of undertaking to suffer for the sins of the world. And so He fasted in order that He could also take on greater spiritual power from the Holy Spirit, to be able to do battle with the Devil. In His Deity, the Devil was no match for Christ. This was because, as God, He could not be tempted. In His humanity, we know that He was upright and He had no sin. He was a perfect man concerning all of His human nature. And yet, still He knew, that at this time of His being tempted, He would need a greater inner strength, a greater spiritual strength than even He would normally have had, as a Man. This is something that is not normally considered by us, as Christians, I think; that our Lord Jesus had times when He humanly needed extra physical and spiritual strength. This was one of those times.

This is also how you and I are to look upon fasting, even as our Savior did. There will be times in our Christian experience where we will need to fast in order to be able to have greater power to defeat the Devil's schemes. The disciples of our Lord were curious about why they were not able to cast out a demon in Mark 9: 28. Jesus had been up on the Mount of Transfiguration, and He had come down from that display of His glory to the great commotion of a demon-possessed young man. He was able to rebuke the demon and cast it out. "Why could we not cast it out?", the disciples say. And Jesus said to them – "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." This answer implied that Jesus had been praying and fasting about doing that very thing; casting out a demon which had been afflicting a young man since he was a child.

There may be times in your life as a Christian when you realize that some of your children have been taken captive by the Devil in the way that they think and the way that they act; so much so, that you know that Satan has gained a foothold in their lives. This is the time that it will be wise for you to set aside times to fast and to pray. There will be times where you will need to deny yourself for a time; times when it would normally be your fleshly habit to eat food. And you will realize at that time, that even though you have no commandment to do so, that it will be good for you to abstain from food; perhaps for a day or part of a day. This would be the best thing for you to do. Why? Because you love the people who Satan has deceived, and you hate the fact that they are being held captive to do his will.

According to your flesh, it would not be your choice to change anything at all in your eating habits. No one will be forcing you to fast, but you will know when the time is right, if you are sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. You will realize that this fasting may be somewhat inconvenient and wearisome to your flesh. But the Spirit will show you, the Holy Spirit will lead you, to consider fasting as the very best way to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. During that time of fasting you will spend time praying for wisdom and for the power to address the difficult and devilish things that have come into your experience, and the experience of the one that you love, that you are fasting for, and about. They are disobedient; they are in unbelief, but you are not. And when you have Christ's power, through the Holy Spirit, you can do battle with him, the Devil, and prevail. Yours will not be 40 days of fasting, like Jesus did, but it will be certain days, or specific times of fasting. Perhaps for you it will be fasting in the morning instead of eating breakfast. Perhaps it will be fasting all day and then breaking your fast at dinner. Perhaps it will mean even fasting the whole day if that realistically can be done by you.

But while you are fasting you will be praying for the wisdom that you will need on how you can give help, counsel, exhortation, and advice, in a Christ-like way, to the one who you love, who is being held captive, and being deceived by the Devil. You will pray to God to know how to help others to see the truth of what Christ came to do; that He came to destroy the works of the Devil. He came in order to free us from the deceptions of the evil one. He came to accomplish redemption so that sinners everywhere would see their need of Christ, and find the key to come out

of the prison of sin and unbelief that Satan has placed them in. This is why the apostle Paul speaks in the way that he does in 2nd Timothy 2: 24 – “A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. Let us see that the tool of fasting will be a means in the hand of the Lord by which we can engage our enemy Satan and by God’s grace, prevail.

3rd – Our Lord engaged our enemy by using the Sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

Verse 4 says – “But Jesus answered *Satan* and said, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’ Brethren, we have a very great need to be clothed with power from on high if we would engage the Devil on his own ground. Our Lord did this, we are seeing here, at the outset of His ministry. And we have need to fast as well, sometimes; to do this as well, as an act of self-denial, for the purpose of humbling ourselves, and learning to cry to God on behalf of those whom we love. Listen to the apostle Peter’s message to Cornelius about what our Lord Jesus did in the days of His earthly ministry. In Acts 10: 36-38 Peter was preaching and he said this – “The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ – He is Lord all – that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”

This is what you and I so desperately need to find as well; the power of the Holy Spirit so that we will go about doing good and attempting to bring healing of mind, soul, and body through sharing the gospel of Christ with those around us so that those oppressed by the Devil would be oppressed no longer. Well, how do we get to that place where we can truly be of help to others? It is when we will look to how we engage our enemy the Devil, in spiritual battle. In Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1, it says – “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

What was Jesus’ joy all about, as He looked forward to the shame of rejection and the difficulty of being reproached with what He was doing for sinners everywhere? What was His great joy during the time of spiritual engagement with the Devil? His joy was found in His humbling Himself in obedience to God to the point of death, even the death of the cross, for our sakes. He knew that He would purchase us by His obedience; that He would set us free from our bondage to sin and to the Devil. And so, it was because He knew that. He was purchasing for you dear Christian, the power to be able to think about, pray, and even to fast, when necessary, for the answer that only God can give. It was thought of your being able to this; this is what brought Christ joy. Even so, we are told in the book of James, chapter 1, that we are to “count it all joy when we fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” In the King James version it says, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” Temptations for the true Christian are to be seen as trials and testings of their faith; to bring about a sure and good result; even of our learning to be patient, our learning to wait upon the Lord, and our learning to stand up against all that Satan is trying to do to make us out to be weak and insincere people.

We need to understand that God’s purpose is a good one, when He permits us to be tempted by the Devil. It is not His intention to test us to prove that we have no faith, if we are indeed a true Christian having been born again by the Spirit of God. It is His intention to build our faith and to make us eminently useful in destroying the works of the Devil, and in promoting Christ’s kingdom

and His righteousness; and your righteousness, as well, in Him. Listen to Joseph Benson the commentator. “The proper meaning of the original word here, and in other places of the Old and New Testaments, translated to tempt, is to try.” “Hence we sometimes, as in Genesis 22: 1, read of God’s tempting men, as well as of the devil’s tempting them.” “But there is this difference between the temptations, or trials, that are immediately from God, and those that are from Satan, by God’s permission.” “We are tempted, or tried, by God, that our righteousness, our faith, love, patience, and every grace and virtue, may be manifested, approved, and further increased: and therefore, as James says, “Blessed is the man who, in this sense, endureth temptation.” “But the devil tempts, or tries us, in expectation of finding us insincere, or unstable, and with a view to lead us into sin by his subtlety and power; in which sense God, who cannot be tempted with evil, or see anything desirable in it, tempteth no man.” (end of quote)

It is in this good and holy sense that the Holy Spirit led the Lord Jesus into this combat with the Devil. He knew that the Lord Jesus would not fail to overcome the Devil’s temptations. Nevertheless, we must see that these were very real temptations which the Devil presented to Jesus. This temptation, at the Devil’s suggestion that the Lord Jesus command stones to become bread, for instance. Certainly Jesus had the power to do this. And He could have done this if He had succumbed to the temptation to use the power of His Divine Nature independently of how the Father would have Him use it. He was, after all, very, very hungry. But He said to the Devil. – “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” He was saying that there is the life of the body which is sustained by the food of bread, and that is good. But there is something that even is more significant and important to remember and to consider, as the primary means of being sustained and strengthened in this life. It is – “every word which proceeds from the mouth of God”.

This is how we really come to live spiritually and how we take on the spiritual life and strength to do battle with our enemy the Devil. We live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; that is, every word that we find in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. In Matthew 17: 20 Jesus told the disciples that they could not cast the demon out because of their unbelief. He said that if they had faith as a mustard seed, they would be able to say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move; and nothing would be impossible for them. He was not talking about their having faith in themselves. He was talking about faith in God, and faith in Him and His word. However, He adds – This kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting. In the Scriptures we have every word that we need, to do battle and to overcome the evil one. Let us follow the example of our Lord in the way that He fulfilled His ministry on our behalf. Let us be continually feeding upon the word of God, so that we become strong. And then we will find that we will have the spiritual fortitude to engage the Devil when he comes to tempt us.

Well, our Lord Jesus resisted the Devil’s suggestion to command those stones to become bread. His bread, His food was to do the will of God at all times, and not compromise doing the will of God in order to satisfy his body’s legitimate desire for food. It was the Devil’s desire was to get the Lord Jesus to take these matters into His own hands, commanding that the stones become bread, and in doing that, He would supposedly prove to the Devil that He was the Son of God. Let us learn from this that we do not have to prove anything to the Devil. God knows our heart and God knows what we need. This commanding stones to become bread would have been a sin on Jesus’ part, and that one sin would have compromised the outworking out of our whole salvation. Just as one bite from the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil affected our whole race, so Jesus’ commanding the stones to become bread, would have made our salvation not possible at all. It could not have come to pass. He had to pass the test.

Our whole salvation depended upon His rendering a perfect obedience to God the Father. And that perfect obedience could only be attained if He did God’s will in God’s way, and at the time that the Father would have it to be done. And the Lord Jesus knew that. And so He quoted this marvelous Scripture from Deuteronomy 8: 3. “Man shall not live by bread alone”, and since this

was true, He would not live by bread alone. Man lives by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God. This is something which each of us must remember if we would spiritually grow and become strong in our own faith and obedience to God. Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Do your obedience by feeding spiritually on the word of God every day. And whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.