

Tempted in the Wilderness

Call to Worship: Psalm 96

1st Scripture: Deuteronomy 8

2nd Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Hymn Insert- *10,000 Reasons*

Hymn #690- *Jesus Paid it All*

Hymn #195- *Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed*

Introduction

Last time, we trekked into the beginning of our Lord's earthly ministry, where He was baptized by John the Baptist. And as He then prepared to begin that most glorious work, which would lead to the redemption of His people, by means of His own death, burial and resurrection, both the Father and the Holy Spirit, were likewise, present to the senses, providing Him with the greatest affirmation and anointing that would prepare and encourage Him onward in His journey. The Spirit, we are told, descended upon Him like a dove, and the Father, loudly and audibly, declared His delight and pleasure in the Son.

This morning then, we find, that immediately following His baptism, our Lord does not return to Galilee. Rather, He treks into the inner depths of the wilderness, living amongst wild beasts, where no other human being is present, for forty days, to encounter another very significant prerequisite to His public revealing and ministry, namely, temptation by the devil himself. And so, our Lord's temptation in the wilderness will be the topic of our consideration for this morning.

To this end, brethren, we will consider the following four things surrounding our Lord's temptation:

- 1) The Necessity. 2) The Preparation. 3) The Temptations. 4) The Restoration

I. The Necessity (vs. 1)

We begin then, by considering the *necessity* of our Lord having to endure these temptations from the devil. In verse 1, we are told, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." And so, immediately following His baptism, after having received the special anointing of the Holy Spirit, we are told that the Spirit then led the Lord into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

We find here then, two important factors surrounding our Lord's temptation.

1) It was intentional. That is to say that, it wasn't simply the fact that He was "happening along," preparing to engage in His public ministry, when the enemy just showed up and attacked Him with all kinds of temptations. No, in accordance with the will of the Father, the Spirit compelled and drove Him into the wilderness, so that He would ultimately face the onslaught of the devil's temptations. This was intentional.

2) It was necessary. If the Spirit drove the Lord to be tempted by the devil, then obviously, it was necessary for the Lord to endure these temptations, before He would be suited to engage in His public ministry. This battle with the enemy was absolutely necessary. And brethren, because it was absolutely necessary, we can presume that Christ's death on the cross, alone, would have been insufficient, had He not first undergone this time of trial and temptation. Do you see that, here? In some way, this act of obedience to the Father, was a necessary means of obtaining the righteousness that was necessary for our Lord to be a legitimate and legal sacrifice and High Priest on behalf of His people.

Now, before we move toward examining the event itself, there are two additional key things that we must take note of, which will help us further understand the necessity of our Lord's enduring the devil's temptations here.

a- This encounter with the devil, which our Lord, as a man endures, is, in a very real sense, meant to recreate the testing ground, which our first father and federal head, Adam, had himself entered. Only, it is much more difficult, and our Lord was expected to overcome, where Adam had failed. Remember, it was in the Garden of Eden, where Adam was commanded not to eat of the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil." Adam was to exhibit faith in his Creator by withstanding any and all temptations to eat from that tree. And of course, he failed, and as our federal head, he plunged all of mankind into the fall, bringing the curse of sin and death upon us. Well here, the Last Adam, who would be the new federal head of all who are united to Him by faith, had to overcome, where Adam had failed, so as to become a faithful and worthy representative (and a High Priest) on behalf of all of His people. And by faith, His people join in His victory of faith, over the devil. Again, this affirms the necessity of our Lord, not only dealing with our sins on the cross, but also procuring a positive righteousness for us.

b- This encounter with the devil, which our Lord, as a man endures, is, in a very real sense reflective of the testings which the Israelites had to endure in the wilderness (after they had been brought out of Egypt). But, once again, the Israelites, like Adam, had failed. That said, as we work through the text, we will discover the relevance of this, and it will help us further unlock the importance of the overall event.

Suffice it to say for now, that, our Lord having to endure these temptations, was both intentional and necessary.

II. The Preparation (vs. 2)

In verse 2, we are told, “And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.” There are differences of opinion as to whether or not the Lord was tempted throughout the entirety of the forty days that He spent in the wilderness, based upon some of the wording in the other Gospel accounts. I would simply state that, if He was tempted throughout the course of the whole forty days, His intensest and fiercest temptations came, when the devil had actually appeared to Him, at His most vulnerable state, at the end of the forty days. Our text definitely implies this. Here, we find that the Lord had fasted for forty days and nights, leading into the devil approaching Him, with the three temptations that are documented in our text. Now, brethren, when we consider our Lord’s time of testing and temptation, it is important to note three of the profound disadvantages that He had, going into His temptations, which Adam did not have.

1) Perhaps, the most obvious disadvantage is that our Lord had not eaten anything for forty days. Adam had access to all of the other trees in the Garden, anytime he desired. Adam did not face his temptation with a languishing body, full of hunger and exhaustion. Our Lord did. And certainly brethren, we can all testify to the fact that the state of our physical condition does indeed affect our soul. When we are hungry, when we are tired, when we are suffering in some physical sense, temptation is a lot more difficult to endure, isn’t it? Well, try not eating for forty days.

2) Adam was in the comfort of the familiar and beautiful Garden, within which, God had placed him from the beginning. Our Lord was in a barren, wilderness region for forty days, accompanied only by wild animals. This brings us to another important disadvantage.

3) Adam enjoyed the accompaniment of Eve, and the Lord walked with Him in the Garden, regularly. Our Lord was completely alone, enduring dark and lonely nights, and quiet, lonely days, in one of the most desolate places on the earth.

And so, as our Lord prepared to face the great tempter, He had to patiently wait, alone, until He was extremely hungry, weak, and most vulnerable to the strength of the temptations that He would face. To this end, He would be a suitable Redeemer for fallen man, bringing glory to God, even in a far greater way than Adam would have done, had Adam obeyed God in the Garden. Needless to say then, this was the setting and battleground, upon which, our Lord would face the devil. [Note: the parallel to the Israelites, waiting forty days for Moses to come down from the mountain, at Sinai. Only, they caved into temptation, making the golden calf and rebelling against God, who had delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians, with many powerful signs and wonders]

III. The Temptations (vs. 3-10)

All of that said, let us then move on to examine the temptations that our Lord had faced. Now, notice first, that the devil does exactly what he had done with Eve, in seeking to bring the truthfulness of God's Word into question. We recall that with Adam and Eve, God had assured Adam that he would surely die, if he ate of the forbidden fruit, and the devil went after them, by challenging God's Word, in this regard. "Has God indeed said...you will not surely die, but God knows that your eyes will be opened, and you will become like Him, knowing good and evil." "You see, God is hiding something from you, Eve, and he wants to prevent you from gaining further wisdom. He's holding out on you, don't you see that?"

Well, here, the enemy cunningly brings into question the statement which the Father had audibly made at our Lord's baptism. And he does this so subtly and craftily in the first two temptations that he brings forth, relating that public statement to our Lord's present circumstances. Notice, verse 3, "If You *are the Son of God*, then do this." And again, in verse 6,

“If You *are the Son of God*, then do this.” Now, let’s move on to consider each of the temptations individually.

1) [Read verse 3]. “You’re the *Son of God*. And yet, you are suffering from extreme hunger. Surely, this doesn’t have to be...unless the statement is not really true? Why would your Father allow you to suffer like this? Is there no power within the Son of God to alleviate His own hunger pains? Turn these stones into bread, and prove that that title belongs to You! Come on, let’s see the offspring of God live up to His privilege. Would God want His Son to suffer in this way. You are hungry, aren’t you?”

Now brethren, when we consider the weight and gravity of this temptation, we might be tempted to think, “Why was it necessary that our Lord not eat? In what way, was His lengthy fast a moral necessity, and how would eating anything have brought about any moral compromise?” Well, for one, at the very basic level, the Lord was to do all that was in keeping with the will of the Father, and obviously, it was the Father’s will for Him to refrain from eating for the duration of this trial. That said, there is another critical message attached to our Lord’s fast, which relates to the testing that the Israelites had faced in the wilderness. And to this end, our Lord was going to highlight something with the brightest highlighter; He was going to plant a sign for humanity, with the largest dimensions, seeking to show the level of trust that mankind ought to have toward his Creator. And it comes out in our Lord’s response. [Read vs. 4].

And so, what message was the Lord highlighting for all to see, which He exhibited par excellence in His own Person, as the Son of *Man*? Namely, that the Word of God ought to be trusted and kept, at the expense of any and all material and earthly things, even those things that are necessary for our physical well being. And in this sense, Jesus is showing that the “bread” of God’s Word that nourishes and secures the health of the soul, is to be more valued than the bread of food, which nourishes and secures the health of the body. And if such is the case with food, brethren, then what of all of the lesser, non-essential material things that we enjoy? And so, it is not to say that neglecting bodily desires is necessarily “spiritual” in any way, but rather, God and His Word ought to be given the priority even over them, when necessary. And so, by resisting the devil here, Jesus glorified God, and exhibited the highest level of obedience that a man could exhibit toward God, by entrusting His starving physical life into the hands of God, while denying

Himself that which could satisfy His hunger pains, as a means of adhering to the will of God. And to this end, as we are told in Hebrews, He grew in His obedience, by the things that He suffered. [Note: An appeal to a lust of the flesh]

Now, as we read in our first Scripture reading, this was the very lesson that God was seeking to teach Israel, after He had brought them out of Egypt, and into the wilderness. And while the Israelites lacked food and drink for far less time than our Lord did here, they failed often, always grumbling and complaining, never grasping the fact that God was seeking to teach them the blessing of depending upon God for all things, including providing them with their next meal, and sustaining their lives, even through the pains of hunger and thirst. And when Moses went up on Mount Sinai for forty days, the fact that the Israelites eventually caved, and made a golden calf, showed that they did not attain to such faith. And that generation ultimately perished in the wilderness. In spite of all that they had witnessed, by and large, they never really trusted God. The consequences of their not getting this message are seen throughout their wilderness journey, as recorded in the Pentateuch. [See Deut. 8:1-5]

And so, our Lord, clinging to God's Word, overcomes the first temptation, prospering where both, our first parents and the Israelites had failed miserably.

2) [Read verse 5-6]. This time, the devil takes our Lord up to the pinnacle of the temple at Jerusalem and seeks to tempt Him unto the sin of pride, "the pride of life." And again, he appeals to the words of the Father, but this time with a shift of emphasis, in keeping with the direction of the temptation. Yes, the Lord was willing to forgo His own hunger, entrusting Himself to the care and power of God, but what about pride? Surely, if a man will fall, pride is one of the greatest tripping stones.

"Ahh, it's great that you trust your Father for your hunger, but let's see how well you do, indeed, trust Him then. Throw Yourself from this pinnacle, and certainly, if you are indeed the Son of God, in truth, He will shield You from any harm. Oh, and You like to use Scripture to support Your case...well, here You go. Do not the Psalms, which speak of You, boldly declare that He will give His angels charge over You, and that they will bear You up in their hands, such that, even your toe will not graze a stone? Come on then, Son of God. Declare Your great

position of honor, by flaunting Your Sonship in this way. Your willing to starve your body, but will you show your true confidence, by casting yourself wholesale from this temple pinnacle?"

And of course, our Lord, once again, responds to (and overcomes) the devil with a proper use of the Scriptures [Read verse 7]. And so, here our Lord, using the Scriptures, exposes the devil's deceptive, misuse of Scripture, by showing that we are to take God at His Word, and never to test God by seeking to force His hand in any way. We are to walk by faith and not sight, and attempting to force God to manifest His presence and power in any way, is to be presumptuous and to attempt to compel Him to prove Himself in some way (that's faithless).

And again, this relates to the way in which the unbelieving Israelites sought to test God in the wilderness, by calling His faithfulness into question. Although, God had already proven Himself through many visible signs and wonders in Egypt, the Israelites failed to use those signs as a means of strengthening their faith going forward. And instead, they pushed God to further prove Himself to them. [See Exodus 17:1-7]

3) Finally, Matthew records a third temptation, which our Lord endured, seeking to draw Him into a "lust of the eyes." [Read verses 8-10]. Once again, the devil takes our Lord to a very high place, but this time, it is at the top of a very high mountain, which would enable Him to view many of the kingdoms of the (then known) world and their splendor and glory. He has sought to appeal to our Lord's hunger cravings, and has failed. He has sought to engage pride in our Lord, and he has failed, and now, he deceptively offers the Lord a way to rule over the world, without having to endure the suffering and agony of the cross. "Bow down to me; worship me, and all of these glorious kingdoms, upon which, I exercise power and dominion, will be given over to You."

Now, while the devil here deceptively offers something that does not truly or rightfully belong to him, it is important to understand that, as the prince of the power of the air (and as the one who deceives the whole world), he does exercise some significant level of "permitted" dominion over these nations. Indeed, it was Christ who had come to free lost souls from that very dominion. But, the power of this particular temptation, again, was that it offered an alleged short cut, as it were, granting the Lord a doorway to a worldwide kingdom, apart from having to suffer the shame, misery and agony of the cross. Now, of course, such a kingdom could never

stand, especially since it would be in defiance of God, but the temptation was real nonetheless. But, once again, our Lord overcomes, by use of the Scriptures [Read verse 10].

“Even if all of the nations, and indeed, the entire universe were not already Mine (which they are), I would not claim such a prize, if in doing so, I must worship anyone but My God! Now, depart from Me, Satan, you fading deceiver, that I might finish My work, conquering you, delivering all of My people from your power and their curse, while bringing all glory to My Father!” And here again, our Lord overcomes, where Adam and the Israelites had fallen utterly short. [Read Deut. 6:13-15]

IV. The Restoration (vs. 11)

Now brethren, lest we would presume that our Lord’s suffering here, were in mere appearance alone, or that His temptations were soft (and not of the most extreme kind), take careful note of what we are told in verse 11 (Read verse 11). Our Lord required aid and care from angelic beings, so as to recover from His suffering here. Indeed, He entrusted Himself to the Father, willingly choosing to cling to God’s Word, even over His own life, and God preserved Him, and did not allow Him to succumb to the death that His human nature would have brought upon Him. Our Lord was fully man. His suffering here was real. The temptations that He faced were real and strong. But, He overcame...for us. And as we are told to pray to our Heavenly Father, “Lead us not into temptation,” our Lord was led right into the worst form of temptation, for us, so that, we would overcome through the success of His enduring these highest forms of temptations, for us! Hallelujah, what a Savior! Hallelujah, what a Friend!

IV. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) Recognize the importance of our Lord facing and overcoming these temptations, brethren, for us. What Adam failed to do in the Garden, and what we’ve failed to do in Adam, Christ has done for us. He had to overcome the enemy. And He did. Indeed, He crushed him at His greatest disadvantage. Consider your own life. Look back and see how often, we have betrayed our Creator, giving heed to the temptations of the devil, in far less taxing and difficult situations. Like Esau, we sold our natural birthright for a single, warm bowl of porridge. Like

the Israelites, we set up our golden calves and we've delved into all manner of lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes and the pride of life. We've fallen short of the glory of God, far more than we even realize. But, our Lord, fulfilled all righteousness for us! He exhibited unadulterated faith in His God, and He did it for us. We received the glorious benefit of His victory. He did all the work, He endured all the suffering, and by faith, He gave us what was rightfully His!

2) But brethren, this should all the more motivate us to strive against sin and temptation in the present. We don't strive because God is testing us unto securing His righteousness, but we strive because the God who so loves us (the God who sent His Son to suffer and die for us), loves righteousness! And while we can never merit His favor, we can glorify Him by remaining faithful, and patiently enduring temptation.

3) If we are going to endure temptation, brethren, we have to cling to the foundation; to the solid foundation of God's Word. We must read it. We must meditate upon it and study it. We must settle all of our strongest convictions upon it. Because brethren, as we've seen with our Lord, the enemy generally attacks when we are most vulnerable and weak. And when we are weak physically; when we are suffering from any kind of trial that lags for a time, when we are providentially placed in a period of waiting, the physical senses can grow weak. But, if we have the Word of God in our hearts, we will have a stronghold that has no single crack in its foundation. We will have a sure place to rest our hearts, when every other place seems to be sinking. If we are going to overcome, then we must be a people of the Word. For, it is there that we will find Christ, and the will of God, and access to every weapon which the Holy Spirit supplies for the battle. And we must know the Scriptures well (embracing sound theology), because, as we've seen, the devil will even seek to distort and twist the Scriptures, as one means of deceiving us (much of this goes on in our day). Theology/doctrine matters! [Your faith is more precious than silver and gold which perish. God could care less about rare gemstones and metals. He is glorified by a rare faith!]. [And we have a faithful High Priest who can identify with us, in our sufferings, trials and temptations, brethren! Hebrews 2:17-18; Hebrews 4:14-16]

4) The Gospel!!!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25