

We are so enriched when we study the Gospel accounts of Christ's ministry and teaching side-by-side. With a strong doctrine of Scripture, grounded in the Holy Spirit's ministry in our hearts, we can with confidence and expectation compare Scripture with Scripture at each important juncture in the work of our Lord. May the Lord richly feed us this week as we compare the Gospel accounts of Christ's temptation.

Monday: Read Mark 1:12-13 & Numbers 14:21-23

The Test of Exile

Let's start the week off by with some of the rich themes in the Gospel accounts of Christ's Temptation. First, consider that, in the Temptation, Christ endured privation, loneliness and wandering in the desert – just as God's people Israel did of old. But instead of rebelling, He submitted to His desert trials as from His Father's hand.

For Israel, the wilderness represented sin, unbelief and failure. Having come from Egypt, the prospect of having a land to call their own lay before Israel (Numbers 14). But because of unbelief and rebellion, they were barred from entering the Land of Canaan and were made to wander the desert for forty years as exiles - just as Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden as exiles because of their sin. (See Genesis 3:23 compared to Numbers 14:22-23). But Christ comes to the desert, being led by the Holy Spirit, to wander for forty days without food, *because He was God's obedient Servant, representing God's people Israel in the very place where they disobeyed.*

Satan then approaches Christ in the hope that he will be able to successfully tempt Him to distrust His Father and make His own bread from stones. Satan's first temptation's goal is to plant seeds of mistrust in the Son's reliance on His Father's faithful Providence. Satan wants to suggest, "Your Father may let you die in this wilderness, if you don't take matters into your own hands." In this way, Satan hopes to tempt Christ to substitute self-reliance for faith, personal wisdom for trusting God with all His heart (Proverbs 3:5-6). Eventually, Satan's ultimate desire is to cause Christ to blame God as ill-intentioned against Him. After all, Israel's constant refrain in the desert when they rebelled was: "God brought us out here to kill us!"

But in contrast to Adam and Israel, Christ was content to trust in His Father's provision – something Israel failed to do. Christ chose to put His trust not in pursuing the bread of sorrow and self-reliance, but instead, in relying upon the Word of God's life-giving sustenance: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that our Savior knows what it is like to wander in this world with no lasting inheritance to call our own. Just as Christ answered the longing of His people at the dawning of His ministry by taking His place alongside them as exiles, so He walks with us through every desert trial and heart-breaking disappointment. Most important, He is our Prophet who urges us to trust in every word that proceeds from His Father's mouth. May we love God's Word as Christ did, and may we be a church where that Word is read, marked and treasured. Sing about such a commitment to God's Word in hymn # 141 of our *Trinity Hymnal*:

1 God, in the gospel of his Son,
makes his eternal counsels known;
where love in all its glory shines,
and truth is drawn in fairest lines.

2 Here sinners of a humble frame
may taste his grace, and learn his name;
may read, in characters of blood,
the wisdom, pow'r, and grace of God.

4 Here faith reveals to mortal eyes
a brighter world beyond the skies;
here shines the light which guides our way
from earth to realms of endless day.

5 O grant us grace, almighty Lord,
to read and mark your holy Word;
its truths with meekness to receive,
and by its holy precepts live.

Tuesday: Read Deuteronomy 6:10-19; Exodus 17:1-7 and Mark 1:12-13 He Never will Decieve Me

Any consideration of Christ's temptation should not omit the important theme of obedient trust, rather than testing the Lord. We hear the Lord's clear warning in Deuteronomy 6 that Israel is to take care not to test the Lord as they did at Massah (which means "testing" and refers to the event recorded in Exodus 17:1-7). Earlier this month, we read about this sin:

But what exactly does it mean to test God? To test God means to question His ability to provide according to His covenant promises, as Israel's question in Exodus 17:7 puts it: "Is the LORD among us or not?" i.e., "Has God tricked us or is He truly with us with grace to save and preserve us?" Or, to "test" God means to "require unnecessary proof of what should be believed without it" (Archibald Alexander).

But some may object right here. "If God does not want us to "test" Him with our distrust, why does He put us in so many difficult situations *where we are tempted to test Him*? The answer is to be found in learning to trust God's character – that is our rock which does not change. We simply cannot allow our circumstances to cast us into fresh doubts about God. Faith means trusting *who God is when we can see nothing else clearly*. God must teach us such faith through the very desert trials that Christ shares with us. This is how the Puritan John Owen put it:

Faith empties the soul of its own wisdom, understanding, and fullness, that it may act in the wisdom and fullness of Christ. The only advice for preservation in trials and temptations lies in that of the wise man, Prov. 3:5: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding." This is the great work of faith; it is faith; it is to live by faith. **The great cause of men falling in trials is their leaning to, or leaning upon, their own understanding and counsel.** John Owen, Works, Vol. VI, pg. 146 (my emphasis)

Meditate and Pray: Lord, please strengthen our faith so that we can rely upon you without demanding any additional signs. Proofs are unnecessary when You have already shown us your devotion to us through Jesus, your precious Son.

Wednesday: Read Matthew 4:1-11 and Ezra 3:12-13

The Low Path

The third lesson to heed from the Temptation accounts in all the Gospels is to note how *outwardly disappointing God's work appears to be*. Instead of dramatically throwing Himself down from the highest point of the temple in order to impress the throngs with a miraculous rescue (for this is what Satan deceitfully promises in Matthew 4:5-6) Christ is driven alone into the desert – where no eye sees Him for forty days. He will obey His Father where no eye can see Him. He will follow the will of the Spirit who drives Him away from Galilee's crowds and into a hunger for God's will alone.

The same disappointment in God's "small things" drove many to tears when they saw the newly completed foundation of the second temple in Ezra 3:10-13. Compared to the glory of Solomon's temple, God's subsequent building project for His worship was far less impressive.

But Satan is always impressed with outward show. He scorns the Father's path of rejection, suffering, loneliness and ultimate crucifixion which is laid out for the Son as He begins His ministry in the desert for forty days. Instead, he hopes to prove to God the Father that Christ is a different kind of Son – who wants glory, power and recognition in this world. So, in his second temptation of our Lord, Satan takes Christ to the place where He can instantaneously gain human applause and carnal glory: "Just throw yourself down from the temple – forget the long path of suffering which the Father has called you to walk!" In the same way, Satan deceitfully claims to be able to offer Christ all the kingdoms of the world if He will just fall down and worship him. Satan always appeals to the lust of the eyes and the glory of an earthly kingdom – anything to get Jesus away from the Cross.

But Satan does not realize that God the Father is cleansing and preparing the most glorious temple of all – not one with high spires like Herod's, but in the body of His Son. *That* spiritual temple will be ornamented with the beauty of Christ's holy obedience – not with the tinsel and baubles that this world attaches to its great works of human pride.

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that Christ is determined to go the lowly, humble way of obedience to His Father. That is why He was willing to be our suffering Substitute in the desert -- in order to forge His perfect humanity and then to take it to the Cross.

Thursday: Read Matthew 4:8-11

Christ's Success in our Nature

No amount of temptation from Satan could cause Jesus to trip up. He was determined to follow the eternal counsels shared between Him and His Father right to the Cross. He had absolute confidence that "His Father always heard Him" (John 11:41-42) and so, *even if it was the Father's will* for Him to die in the desert, He would die believing that His Father could raise Him from the dead, just as the Spirit of God moved Abraham to believe that God could raise his beloved son Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). As Job put it, "Though He slay me, yet I will hope in Him." This then is the logic and reasoning of Christ's faith for forty days of fasting in the desert. John Owen discusses this logic of faith – even in the desert:

This is the proper nature of faith, to bring a man to the feet of God ... Will God have me to suffer in my name, estate and family? "It is the Lord," faith says. Will he have me to be poor, despised in the world, of little or no use to him at all to him or his people? "Who," says faith, "shall say to Him, What are you doing?" In any state and condition, faith will find out arguments to keep the soul always at God's feet." (John Owen)

Meditate and Pray: How wonderful that Christ is so determined to fall *only* at His Father's feet to worship in our nature. He therefore tells Satan to be gone when he suggests Christ bow down to him (Matthew 4:10) and instead expresses His absolute commitment to obey the Law in its worship of the One True God alone.

Friday: Read Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:12-13 and Ephesians 1:11**The Angels' Mission**

Jesus successfully resists Satan, sending him packing in failure. Then, as a symbol of heaven's care for the suffering but victorious Son of God, the Father sends down from heaven's throne room angels to attend and minister to Christ - just as the Father sent an angel to strengthen Christ in the Garden as He sweated blood before the Cross (Luke 22:43-44).

Meditate and Pray: What a glorious ending to these forty days in the desert being tempted by Satan! Thank God that His's care for us and his Son is so sure, and that God did indeed "command his angels concerning you" (Psalm 91: 11,12) so that every need and comfort was administered, at the proper time.

Sat/Sun: Read Mark 1:12-13; Matthew 4:1-11 and Hebrews 5:7-9**Title**

Some scholars wrongly worry about why Mark's version of the Temptation *is so much* shorter than the other synoptic Gospels (Matthew and Luke). But there is no need to worry. Consider two key differences in Mark from the following perspectives.

First, Mark contains no dialogue between Christ and Satan, whereas in Matthew and Luke, Satan prefaces his tempting proposals to Christ with the words, "If you are the Son of God" (Matthew 4:3; 4:6). But there is a very comforting reason why Mark's Temptation narrative has no dialogue. Let me illustrate. Theologians often describe Christ's ministry of intercession in heaven as "real" rather than "verbal." What they mean is, that Christ's sacrificial, saving work was *so effective and mighty* in defeating the world, the flesh, and the devil, and in providing eternal forgiveness of sins, that Christ does not need to speak or beg His Father in heaven to receive us by grace through faith. All He needs to do is lift His nail-pierced hands.

In the same way, Christ is so in control of the events of forty days in the wilderness during the Temptation, that He is able *simply by His godly heart commitment to His Father* to resist every temptation – making even days of silence flow in unlimited obedience to His Father. As He says in John 11:42 to His Father, "I know that you always hear me."

Isn't it marvelous? There are worlds of communication being worked out for our salvation that Satan was not able to listen in on! How sure was Christ's victory in the desert since God the Father said, "I will now arise" even for Christ's sighs (Psalm 12:5)!

A second key difference (or addition) in Mark's Gospel, are the wild beasts of the desert in submission to Christ (Mk. 1:13). Like Daniel of old in the lion's den, Christ is able to shut the mouths of every threatening beast in the desert! There is no mention of such beasts in Matthew or Luke. What are we to make of that? Well, the first Adam "gave names to all the animals" (Genesis 2:4-20). He ruled over the creation as God's vice-regent. The animals lived in harmony with Adam and Eve. Before the Fall, there was no fear of death, and therefore the animals lived in peace with Adam.

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that Christ is coming to work out a new creation! Just as the Spirit hovered over the first creation in Genesis 1, so the Spirit at Christ's baptism hovered over our Savior – equipping Him as the new Adam to rule over the new world which His saving work on the Cross would produce!