

I. THE WILDERNESS

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. (Mt. 4:1, 2)

- A. After Jesus' baptism we are told that He was driven into the wilderness to be tested. The wilderness was the notable place of preparation (e.g. Moses, Elijah, Jesus, and Paul). It's also a place that is symbolic of *death*. In the wilderness everything of strength and comfort is removed so that the vessel can be filled with power from God.
- B. The wilderness is a *cross* of sorts. We see a resemblance of the cross in the wilderness through suffering, isolation, temptation, pain, sorrow, hunger, thirst, mockery, the need for endurance etc.
- C. Many times we rely on human strength or wisdom to conquer the mission before us. The mission of Christ was so great and so glorious that He needed to be emptied entirely of any human solution. No human *wisdom* or *strength* could accomplish the mission.
- D. The mission that lay before Him was *the cross* where He would die without a fight. There was only one way to accomplish the cross and secure salvation for the world: to die upon it. Before He challenged death on the cross, He had to be sure that *all short cuts were dead*.

¹⁸For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."^[c] ²⁰Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1 Cor. 1:18-20)

II. THE TEMPTATION TO SHORTCUT

- A. There is an unwritten law across the universe: you cannot win a crown without gaining victory in the struggle. The same is true for the crown that Christ sought. If He were to obtain the *salvation of the world* and become *heir to the throne of David* He too must pass through the clash of conflict to show that He was indeed the victor.

¹²Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)

- B. Jesus is the pattern by which we ought follow and emulate. Through this testing He shows the way through the *battle of temptation* and into holiness. Though sinless, Jesus was tempted so that He was proven able to aid His people in their temptation.

For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (Heb. 2:18)

- C. Enduring temptation includes enduring suffering, not avoiding it. If we give in to temptation our spirit suffers the consequences of sin; if we resist temptation our flesh (natural desire) suffers. Either way suffering is taking place. The immediate suffering of resisting temptation produces long-term good; while giving into temptation leads to short-lived pleasure and long-term problems.
- D. Coming off the bold declaring of the Father, “**You are My Son...**” Jesus now goes into the wilderness where Satan would suggest 3 options to Him on how to accomplish *His mission*. The enemy would craftily seek to undermine the *beloved Son* by giving Him his own advice. The temptations of Satan are his attempt to appeal to *Jesus’ humanity*, just as he did with Adam, in an endeavor to establish *his authority* over Christ (a counterfeit father).
- E. If Jesus’ mission was to *save the world* through men realizing that He was God, then surely the issue at hand (in the devil’s mind) was men. If Christ could convince men who He was, then might He be able to short-cut the cross? Short-cut death?
- F. Peter would later attempt to talk Christ out of the cross; Jesus would rebuke him reminding him that he was only conscious of the things of men, not the things of God.
²¹ From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must ...be killed.... ²² Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him... ²³ But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” (Mt. 16:21-23)
- G. How foolish it is to talk men out of the very crosses that qualify them!
- H. The temptations of Satan are fairly predictable (though not to be taken lightly) when it comes to tempting men. They fall into 3 categories: *the temptations of the flesh* (lust/gluttony), the mind (pride/envy), and *the love of things* (greed). All 3 of these temptations were aimed at avoiding the cross.
1. A note on temptation. They are often aimed at us as a shortcut out of suffering. (i.e. lust is aimed to shortcut the present suffering of desiring physical pleasure; fulfillment comes through the covenant of marriage).
 2. Yet, it is *in and through the suffering* that we are proven and attain the greater reward (see James 1:12).
 3. People can resist temptation. Some wrongly believe that because their desires are so strong that they are unable to resist. We are not the sum of our desires but children of God.
...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 Cor. 10:13)

III. THE FIRST TEMPTATION – FEED THE POOR

³ **Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” (Mt. 4:3)**

- A. The first temptation that Christ face was the desire to be merely a Robin Hood, *social reformer* of sorts. Jesus was Himself hungry and so felt the plight of all people. They were hungry. Many would follow Him simply because they would fed them at various times (see Jn. 6:26).
- B. As God, He had the power to turn stones into bread. Here the enemy tempts Him, “*Get out of the pain of your hunger by turning these stones into loaves.*” Or to put it another way, “*Get out of the pain of the cross by miraculously feeding people so they will accept you.* Had He given in, he certainly would have been able to turn the stones of Israel into bread for the hungry, dazzling them with His supernatural power. Then would they believe in Him? Would His mission be accomplished?
- C. However the problem of the world was not their physical hunger. They needed more than social reformer to give them bread (even Dictators can do that); they needed a spiritual reformer who would shame the serpent, break the power of sin and loose the shackles of death! Mere loaves of bread fall short of the *everlasting bread of life* (see John 6).
- D. This temptation tried to remove Jesus from pain, hunger and the identification with humanity. This same temptation would face Him upon the cross. Why would He need to suffer the humiliations of humanity if He really were the Son of God?

...If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” (Mt. 27:40)

- E. The people may have accepted Him as a *miracle worker* but their souls would still remain under the bondage of sin. The revelation of Jesus as a miracle worker does not save the soul. Many wrongly see Him only as that and wrongly believe that they are saved.

There are deeper needs than crushed wheat, greater joys than a full stomach...¹

- F. Every generation has its young zealots who rise up and attempt to shame the true worshippers by blaming the social problems of the poor on them. They accuse the church of being more practical; that it would *give bread* to the hungry and that would be enough.
- G. But the church is not called to merely give bread but to *be Christ* to earth, a city set on a hill, burning and shining lamps. The world cries to the church that she would be *accepted* if she embraced her role as simply a bread giver and not a repentance declarer. As long as the church doesn't declare repentance from sin and the coming of a King, then she can join the lists of those who “actually help” others.

¹ *Fulton Sheen*

IV. THE SECOND TEMPTATION – USE MIRACLES

⁵ Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple,
⁶ and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. (Mt. 4:5, 6)

- A. Here the enemy tempts Him to use extraordinary power to convince men that He was the Son of God. The enemy attempted to lure Him from the cross with the display of a great miracle. It's like Satan saying, “If you trust in your Father, then throw yourself down! He won't let you die because you're the beloved Son!”
- B. He even quotes Psalm 91 to Jesus that guarantees the Lord's safety from being crushed against the “stone.”
- C. The cross would prove to be an incredibly long process of interrogation, beating, humiliation, torture and a slow painful death.² In the suggested scenario, the Son would escape the longevity of the suffering, or more likely, be entirely spared by the Father if He would fling Himself off of a high building.
- D. The crowds of men would undoubtedly be convinced of His divinity if He were spared from such a feat. By what other means could one explain survival after such a mind-bending display? This temptation appeals to the desire of man for the spectacular rather than the ordinary.
- E. Scripture affirms the tension of the *ordinary nature* (human) of Jesus mixed with the divine. Jesus chose to live, walk, speak and accomplish His mission in such a way that it defied human logic and reason.

For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness (physical/outward appeal); and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. ³ He is despised and rejected by men (Is. 53:2, 3)

- F. The temptation was to be so publically extraordinary that through sheer miracles and the bending of the laws of nature, men would accept and receive Him as Messiah. Yet in Jesus' ministry He repeatedly showed that miracles alone do not convince everyone.
And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, “This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet (3 days in the fish; Christ – 3 days in the grave). (Lk. 11:29)
- G. The Lord knew that the masses wouldn't be convinced by some marvel but by the cross. Through the cross alone, the demonstration of God's extravagant love (Rom. 5:8), men would be drawn to Him
³² ***And I, if I am lifted up [speaking of the crucifixion] from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”³³ This He said, signifying by what death He would die. (Jn. 12:32, 33)***

² Crucifixion was designed to maximize suffering while prolonging death. It was one of the cruelest forms of capital punishment contrived. It often took subjects more than day to finally expire; the cause of death was usually suffocation. Jesus hung on the cross for 6 hours after being subjected to previous torture and beating.

- H. Jesus in His humility consistently restrained His glory rather than displaying it. Christ, Himself was a Diving Sign; a Divine Sign means not drawing attention; mankind would expect a supernatural spectacle but not a Suffering Servant; they would expect fireworks and displays of power, not a robed servant washing feet.

"I want men who will believe in Me, even when I do not protect them; I will not open the prison doors where My brethren are locked; I will not stay the murderous Red sickle or the imperial lions of Rome, I will not halt the Red hammer that batters down My tabernacle doors; I want My missionaries and martyrs to love Me in prison and death as I loved them in My own suffering. I never worked any miracles to save Myself! I will work few miracles even for My saints. Begone, Satan! Thou shalt not tempt the Lord, thy God."³

V. THE THIRD TEMPTATION – WORSHIP

⁸ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." (Mt. 4:8-9)

- A. The third temptation, and a very boastful statement of the enemy, was that the kingdoms of the world would be delivered to Christ if He would worship the devil. But had the enemy overplayed his hand? Had the kingdoms really been given to the devil for him to give away?
- B. The authority of the earth in fact had been given to man. It was man who has resigned this authority over to the Serpent, who now was the "*prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2).*"
- ²⁶ Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all^[b] the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."²⁷ ...God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen. 1:26-28)**
- C. Even if Christ had agreed to *worship* Satan it would inevitably mean *servicing*, for the two are connected. Christ could rule through this shortcut but He would be limited by the following ways:

1. It would only be an earthly rule. This is what many of His followers expected and wanted. Christ would avoid death through the cross but He would also avoid the resurrection. He could not rule eternally as a man, for all men die.

Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone. (Jn. 6:15)

2. As only an earthly man with an earthly rule, Christ could not redeem the souls of mankind. The only way for the sins of humanity to be atoned (paid) for was through sacrifice. Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb slain on behalf of sinful humanity. If there were no sacrifice, there would be no redemption.

³ Fulton Sheen

3. The kingdom under this scenario would not be a *heavenly kingdom* that shattered all the kingdoms of man, but simply a continuation of the old one.

³⁴ You watched while a stone (Christ) was cut out without hands, which struck the image (earthly kingdoms) on its feet...³⁵... and the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Dan. 2:34, 35)

4. The Father, the Ancient of Days, is the only One who can only fully give the kingdoms of this world.

¹³ “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. ¹⁴ Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed. (Dan. 7:13, 14)

...‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. ⁸ Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. (Ps. 2:8)

- D. Jesus would later affirm to Pilate the passing of an earthly kingdom and the establishment of His future, eternal one. There was only one way to receive the future kingdom He was alluding to: He must go to the right hand of the Father by conquering sin through His death on the cross.

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” (Jn. 18:36)

³² This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. ³³ Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. ³⁴ “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand...(Acts 2:32-34)

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. Christ’s completion of His mission wasn’t to be through a shortcut or the militant campaigns of his followers but through publically suffering on the cross, paying for the sins of humanity, taking the keys of hell and the grave from the enemy, shattering the power of death through the resurrection, and ascending to heaven where He now *waits* for the day of His coming.