

Matthew 4:8-11
(Deuteronomy 6:4-15, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31)
“Obeying God’s Word”

Introduction

The first temptation was dangerous because it attacked Jesus at his weakest point: he was weak and hungry from fasting, and tempted to use his prerogatives as God’s Son to provide for his own needs. More deeply, he was tempted to question whether or not God really loved him, whether he really was God’s Son. The danger of the second temptation was that it attacked Jesus at his strongest point, the one where he least suspected an attack. He was challenged to prove God’s faithfulness, to prove the trustworthiness of the God’s Word by casting himself down and entrusting himself entirely to God’s protection. In both cases, Jesus answered with Scripture, “It is written.”

The third temptation is far more dangerous than the first two because it strikes at the very reason that Jesus came into the world, and it challenges the means by which God determined to accomplish our salvation. Perhaps no one has captured the meaning of this moment as eloquently as the Russian author Dostoevsky in the famous “Grand Inquisitor” chapter of his novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. [Read the passage.]

When you and I begin to grasp the mission of God, the salvation of the world, we must be aware that the tempter is present here as well, tempting us to get the job done by any means possible. It is the daily temptation to those of us in ministry to assume that the means do not matter, only the ends. And how much is that also true for all who desire something with all their heart: the grades needed to graduate and enter the work force and justify one’s family’s sacrifices to provide that education, or the need of a particular job that will provide for one’s family, or the desire for a passionate, intimate, loving relationship. We excuse the means if only we can reach the goal. Here in our text, we see how our Lord Jesus dealt with this particularly subtle and potentially lethal temptation.

Body

1. The Point of Attack:

The attack is dangerous because of Jesus’ passion for the goal of salvation. He longed to see us free from our bondage to sin and death, to see us reconciled to God. If all of this could have been ours immediately, painlessly, how could he not long to say, “I will do whatever it takes, even an act of abasement before the enemy, anything to free my people from their bondage”?

The attack is dangerous because of Jesus’ horror of the means of salvation. His horror of the cross was not so much of the physical suffering, which is too often emphasized, but of the moral, spiritual suffering of becoming a sin offering and experiencing alienation from his Father.

And, the attack is dangerous because of Jesus' compassion for those he came to save. He could see the suffering of his people down through the ages. All this Satan offered to alleviate, if only Jesus would bow down and worship him. How could his love for us not cause his heart to break at thought of all that his martyrs would endure for the sake of his name?

2. The Purpose of the Attack:

The attack is meant to thwart the means of salvation: No cross, no suffering, no shame, no sacrifice for sin. Dazzling display and power religion would be the order of the day.

And the attack is meant to thwart the ends of salvation: If there is no cross, there is no crown. Without redemption, without the sacrifice for sin, there can be no forgiveness and no salvation.

More deeply still, the attack is meant to confuse God's work with God himself: The work is not God. The mission is not God. God alone is God.

3. Defending Against the Attack:

Recognize the nature of the attack: The enemy wants to enchant you with another way, another means of accomplishing God's ends, and to confuse the ends with the means.

God's Power, the Holy Spirit: When anything other than the one true God is worshipped, his Spirit is grieved, and his people weakened. When he is worshiped in truth, when his people seek his face, then he sends his Spirit to empower them.

God's Word, the Scriptures: Jesus once again quotes from the book of Deuteronomy, as Moses tells the people that God is about to give them a land that is beyond their wildest imaginings, a place with houses they did not build, vineyards they did not plant, cisterns they did not hew out of the rock. And he warns them that when God blesses us like that, we tend to forget him, to congratulate ourselves, and to go on our way as if we had done it all with our own two hands. "Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God," warns Moses. "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."

Conclusion

Here is the ultimate test of anything we do: Can I do this thing as a glad and grateful act of worship in spirit and truth? Do the means glorify God as much as the end? How will this appear in the clear light of day? Am I embracing the cross on the way to the crown, or am I seeking a shortcut? It is the enemy who says, "All this can be yours without the cross." But the One who calls us to take up our cross and follow him is the One who first embraced his cross for us, so that we might be God's beloved children. Follow him!

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