

The Temptation of Jesus

Matthew 4:1-11
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Sunday AM, November 8, 2015
Sermon Summary

Introduction

There is a little plant called the “sundew” in the Australian bush country. It has a slender stem and tiny, round leaves fringed with hairs that glisten with bright drops of liquid as delicate as fine dew. Woe to the insect, however, that dares to dance on it. Although its attractive clusters of red, white, and pink blossoms are harmless, the leaves are deadly. The shiny moisture on each leaf is sticky and will imprison any bug that touches it. As an insect struggles to free itself, the vibration causes the leaves to close tightly around it. This innocent-looking plant then feeds on its victim (*Our Daily Bread*, December 11, 1992). This is a parable in nature about the allure of temptation. Temptation has a deadly attraction to it. We’re going to deal with the subject of temptation this morning by looking at the temptation of Jesus recorded in Matthew 4:1-11.

Exposition

This morning we will set the stage for the temptation of Jesus. Then we will consider the three recorded temptations and also draw lessons from each temptation. Finally, we will close the curtain on this drama in the wilderness.

1. Setting the stage (vv. 1-2)

There are two competing purposes of Jesus. The Greek word translated “to be tempted” (πειράζω) can mean to test or prove or it can mean to lure with evil. God’s purpose was to prepare and test the Son of God (cf. James 1:12-15). That is, God wanted to establish the moral perfection of the Son. God had the Son’s good in view; God was for Him. Satan’s purpose, on the other hand, was to tempt the Son of God. That is, Satan wanted to entice disobedience from the Son. The evil one had the Son’s hurt in view; Satan was against Him. “In all these experiences he was by Satan urged to believe that he could receive a good thing by committing a bad act” (Hendriksen, 223). Another way of putting this is that temptation is an enticement to act in ways contrary to God’s commands. The relationship of the Son to the Father is put to the test in this account.
2. The first temptation (vv. 3-4)
 - A. The temptation’s location: the wilderness.
 - B. The temptation’s essence: Turn these stones into bread. What was really behind this temptation? This question behind the temptation is, “Will God provide?”
 - 1) Scripture from Satan: none
 - 2) Scripture from Jesus: Deuteronomy 8:3. Jesus battles this reminder with the truth that God does provide in His time and in His way.
 - B. The temptation’s lessons
 - 1) Temptation is part of the Christian life (even when filled with the Spirit). Jesus was “led up *by the Spirit* into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”
 - 2) Temptation is opportunistic and takes advantages of our weakness. Jesus was hungry. The devil shrewdly exploited His current vulnerability. The evil one will do the same to you.

- 3) Temptation can often be most powerful in times of loneliness. Jesus was “led up by the Spirit into the wilderness...” The wilderness region was a place of intense solitude.
 - 4) Temptation is diabolical. Jesus was “led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted *by the devil*” (cf. James 1:12-14). God does not tempt, the devil does.
 - 5) Temptation can be intense and unyielding. Luke 4:1, “for forty days, being tempted by the devil.” Then Luke 4:13, Luke notes, “And when the devil had ended every temptation...” It appears that three temptations were recorded but that many more were probably included during this time. The devil’s ravenous appetite for the demise of Christians is never satisfied (1 Peter 5:8).
 - 6) Temptation is a battle that must be fought with the sword of the Spirit “It is written” is an important phrase. Jesus battles temptation with the offensive weapon of the word of God. This weapon remains our only offensive weapon in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:17). “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). Isn’t it frustrating to forget a tool you have to complete a job? It’s downright dangerous to leave behind our weapon to fight temptation. Forgetting a tool is an inconvenience. Forgetting your weapon in war time is deadly.
3. The second temptation (vv. 5-7)
 - A. The temptation’s location: the pinnacle of the temple
 - B. The temptation’s essence: Jump from the pinnacle of the Temple. What was really behind this temptation? This question behind the temptation is, “Will God protect?”
 - 1) Scripture from Satan: Psalm 91:11-12
 - 2) Scripture from Jesus: Deuteronomy 6:16. “[Satan] omits any reference to the Scriptural truth that God does not condone but condemns and punishes rashness, a trifling with providence, and impetuous rushing into totally unwarranted danger (Genesis 13:10, 11; Psalm 19:13; Esther 5:14; 7:9, 10; Daniel 4:28-33; 5:22, 23; Romans 1:30; 2 Peter 2:10) (Hendriksen, 229). Jesus realized the presumption behind the request. The citation of Jesus is from an account when the nation of Israel presumed upon God in Exodus 17:1-7.
 - C. The temptation’s lessons
 - 1) Temptations misuse or misapply the promises of God. Jesus used Deuteronomy 6:16 to respond to Satan. “Satan’s deception continues today through the misuse of the Word of God. He leads people to take God’s promises out of their original context, resulting in incorrect interpretation and application. The terrible scourge of contemporary Christianity is that believers become disillusioned, thinking that God did not live up to His promises, when in reality God never made the promise they tried to claim” (Hendriksen, 87).
 - 2) Temptation is a universal reality. If Jesus was tempted, is there a reason we would not be tempted? So expect it, prepare for it, and overcome it.
 4. The third temptation (vv. 8-10)
 - A. The temptation’s location: a high mountain with an impressive panorama
 - B. The temptation’s essence: Worship me. What was really behind this temptation? This question behind the temptation is, “Will God satisfy?”
 - 1) Scripture from Satan: None
 - 2) Scripture from Jesus: Deuteronomy 6:13
 - C. The temptation’s lessons
 - 1) Temptation overpromises and under delivers. Was this a legit offer? When we look at Psalm 2:8 and Revelation 11:15, the kingdoms of the world already have a “Reserved” sign on them. This is the evil one’s *modus operandi*. He is a liar and the father of all lies (John 8:44). Adam and Eve (Genesis 3) and Sampson (Judges 16:1-22) discovered that the promises are illusory.

- 2) Temptation appeals to our thirst for personal glory. Temptation allures us with the promise of gaining personal glory rather than a pursuit of God's glory.
 - 3) Temptation is taxing. It will tax us physically, it will tax us spiritually. It may be hard for us to understand that temptation can tax us in a big way. Jesus needed angels to minister to Him.
 - 4) Temptation can be overcome. This is a critical and comforting truth we must see from this event our Lord's life (Hebrews 4:15). "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Jesus lived what He told the disciples in John 4:34, "...my food is do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."
5. Closing the curtain (v. 11)
 We close the curtains on this drama in the wilderness. God's promises never fail. The protection of angels came to minister and attend to Jesus along after all. The echoes of Psalm 91:11-12 are certainly discerned in this moving final scene.

Conclusion

Have you ever stopped to reflect on how important this occasion was? What if Jesus had failed the test? His work would have been nullified. He could not have died as our sinless substitute. All of the cosmic, massive, eternal purposes of God in Christ would have been hijacked. The effects of one's sin often extends beyond themselves.

There are two exceedingly marvelous comforts from this passage.

1. Jesus met the demands of God's law that we could not. Unlike the first Adam, the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), Jesus, lived a life of perfect obedience. Because Jesus never once yielded to temptation He could die as our sinless substitute (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 1:22).
2. Jesus is the believer's sympathetic High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16). "The soul of our Lord was not hard as flint or cold as an icicle. It was a thoroughly human, deeply sensitive soul, affected and afflicted by suffering of every description" (Hendriksen, 223). The life of Jesus was undeniably and deeply affected by life in a sin-cursed world. He experienced basic human frailties such as weariness (John 4:6) and thirst (John 4:7; 19:28). Jesus also experienced profound emotional, relational, spiritual, and physical suffering. Jesus understands the rigors of temptation. He has walked in our shoes, so to speak. Because of this event in His life, He is sympathetic to the vexation temptation brings you and me. Christian, the evil one is against you in temptation. Jesus Christ is for you. He is for you because He faced fierce temptations. You, like Jesus, can have victory over temptation!