

The Temptations Of Jesus

1st Hymn: (by James Edmeston T: 'Manheim' by F. Filitz 1804-76) MHB 611

- 1) Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us, for we have no help but Thee,
Yet possessing every blessing if our God our Father be.
- 2) Saviour breathe forgiveness o'er us; all our weakness Thou dost know,
Thou didst tread this earth before us, Thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Lone and dreary, faint and weary, through the desert Thou didst go.
- 3) Spirit of our God, descending, fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
Love with every passion blending, pleasure that can never cloy;
Thus provided, guarded, guided, nothing can our peace destroy.

Prayer:

Dear Father,

We thank you for the privilege you have given us, to come and give our thanks and praises to you as we join in worship together. We pray you will lead us by your Holy Spirit as we engage in our worship, knowing that you accept us - for we come in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Readings:

- Ps 91:1-16
- Luke 4:1-1

2nd hymn: (by Christopher Wordsworth T: St Leonard's by H.Hiles) MHB 509

- 1) The Galilean fishers toil all night and nothing take;
but Jesus comes, a wondrous spoil is lifted from the lake.
Lord, when our labours are in vain, and vain the help of men,
when fruitless is our care and pain, come blessed Jesus, then!
- 2) The night is dark, the surges fill the bark, the wild winds roar;
but Jesus comes, and all is still--the ship is at the shore.
O lord when storms around us howl, and all is dark and drear,
in the tempests of the soul, O blessed Jesus hear!
- 3) A frail one, thrice denying Thee, saw mercy in Thy eyes;
the penitent upon the tree was borne to paradise.
In hours of sin and deep distress, O show us Lord Thy face,
in penitential loneliness O give us, Jesus, grace!
- 4) The faithful few retire in fear to their closed upper room,
but suddenly with joyful cheer, they see their Master come.
Lord, come to us, unloose our bands, and bid our sorrows cease; I
lift over us Thy blessed hands, speak, holy Jesus, peace!

Intercessions:

Dear Father, we come to you asking for your wisdom as to how to pray for the wars in our world.

We see the Middle East war between Israel and Hamas. Grant, we pray, that there may be a strenuous attempt to limit civilian deaths. While we have no assurance of what is right and wrong in Gaza, we pray your justice may prevail wherever possible. We pray as often before, for Ukraine, that they may be strengthened to sustain the attack of its neighbour, bolstered by world support. Help them to look to you for sustaining power.

We pray for the leaders of the world that they may search for your wisdom to lead the nations aright, to be fair and wise in their decision-making. Give our leaders discernment in their governing of us, and help us to live gratefully for the multitude of benefits we receive in this land. For we pray our prayers in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

3rd hymn: *(by William Cowper T: 'Irish' from Hymns and sacred poems)* MHB 503

- 1) God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to preform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.
- 2) Deep in unfathomable mines of never-failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs, and works His sovereign will.
- 3) Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.
- 4) Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for his grace,
behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.
- 5) His purposes will ripen fast unfolding every hour unfolding every hour;
the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.
- 6) Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.

Message: The Temptations of Jesus (Luke 4:1-30)

From our point of view we might say Jesus had a rough start at the beginning of his ministry, following his baptism. In the Hebrew tradition he was 30, the time ministries usually began, and we could say his baptism was essential - in that it showed his complete identification with sinners. John knew Jesus did not need his baptism of repentance; rather he was baptised on behalf of those whose sins he would later bear! This was how he fully identified with us. This pre-figured Christian baptism which is the sign of entry into the Kingdom of God, representing our death followed by our resurrection.

At the same time he was affirmed in his Messiah-ship by God himself who spoke audibly, sending upon him the Holy Spirit without whom of course he would not have been the Christ! (Christ implies "anointed").

There is another lesson in it for humanity - if the Messiah himself could not begin his ministry without the Spirit coming upon him, neither could any other human being expect to have a ministry of God and for God without the Spirit of God. The second book of Dr. Luke makes this clear - the disciples were commanded to wait in Jerusalem until they were "clothed with power from on high". (Acts 1:4)

Today's reading begins with Jesus, now filled with the Spirit and having returned from the Jordan, being immediately "led by the Spirit into the wilderness" where he was "tempted by the devil". (Matthew says "...led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil"!) Hence it was *God's plan* that he be tempted. It is interesting that God's plan includes being tempted by the devil - we are told God himself tempts no-one, but He includes the devil in His plans - He is content to accept and allow Satan to tempt us!

In 1 Samuel we are told the Holy Spirit departed from King Saul, and "*an evil spirit from God troubled him*" (1 Samuel 16:13). So much for "dualism"! God is in charge and Satan only acts as God allows him (In 1700's Leibniz wrote a book pointing out that this world is the *best possible world only because there is evil in the world!* (Would God allow it if this was not the case? This constitutes the subject of theodicy!)

The first temptation doesn't seem subtle on the surface of it - Jesus was fasting and so of course, relatively weak physically and hungry! The temptation of turning a stone into bread, given that he was "*The Son...by whom He (God) created the world*" (Heb 1:2) was probably obvious - so "how about creating some bread"!

1) But the temptation gets its kick from the insinuation "*If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread*". It raised the question of doubt! That seems to be the main thrust of the temptation. But Jesus had no doubt - as if the voice of His Father was still ringing in his ears - "You are my beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased".

2) To have commanded a stone to be made bread would have been entirely "self-serving" - that was never part of the signs that Jesus did. Usually he was meeting a need that was within the Messiah's role, to aid in seeing God's Kingdom extended, and helping people to hear his words. So to turn a stone to bread was not in the plan of God.

3) It might have seemed an easy way out of his hardship - the devil often works that way. But the true battle set before him was usually a hard one; he resisted.

4) It was against the principles that seemed to apply to his miracles.¹

¹ C. S. Lewis divides miracles into two groups: miracles of the Old Creation and of the New Creation. In the first Jesus was doing "small and in close focus" what God does normally but on so large a scale that humankind doesn't notice it.

For instance when he turned the water into wine at Cana instantly, we forget that God is *always* turning water, via the soil and sunlight, into grapes, the juice of which ferments "naturally". In Cana Jesus short-circuited the process - using a large volume in large jars! When he fed the 5000 he multiplied a little (5 small barley loaves and two small fish) into much, as God does all the time - look in every grain-field; and at the fish in every bay and river. We call it "Nature" and do not notice

Jesus quoted the scriptures to answer Satan "It is written Man shall not live by bread alone". (Deut 8:3) He *knew* the Word of God.

The 2nd temptation was to show Jesus the kingdoms of the world (Matthew says he took Jesus to a very high mountain to say this), "which have been delivered to me" - (a false claim really - Satan didn't really own them.) He said he would give these to Jesus if he worshipped Satan at that time, the temptation being *instant* fame and acceptance - a *short cut* to power, but almost certainly also to corruption! What Satan *did* have was an understanding of the thinking men use in their rebellion against God! Jesus saw through that immediately. God was going to give these things to Jesus in due time, but it would be "hard-won"! In any case he would not worship Satan. He answered his tempter from the Shema of Israel, as well from the 1st of the 10 commandments. Jesus said simply "It is written 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shalt thou serve'". (Deut 6:13)

(Jesus was later to say to the disciples "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me..." This would be the true authority, given to him by his Father after he had executed God's plan.) Satan was to be judged, and cast out of his false authority as Jesus said later. Jesus was the authentic Ruler of this world and would work till all the kingdoms of this world had been conquered.

The 3rd temptation was to leap from the pinnacle of the temple and call upon God to save him. Satan quoted (actually mis-quoted), from Psalm 91 "It is written 'He will give his angels charge of you to guard you' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'".

But the protection of God was a part of the covenant of Israel, for those who "dwelt in the shelter of the most High" - they would be protected while obeying the Covenant. This temptation would again be an attempt to glorify himself. It was outside his Father's will, and against His express order. So Jesus answered "it is written 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'" (Deut 6:16). Thus he was emphasising who he was, as well as quoting their law.

Jesus knew both their law and its context well (like the devil didn't)! Again he quoted that law countermanding it. Much later he was asked to put on a show, and "do a miracle" for Herod, and he wouldn't even answer! Later Jesus said "False prophets and false Messiahs will arise and show signs and wonders and lead astray, if possible, even the elect. But take heed, I have warned you." (Mk 13:22) St Paul reinforces that warning (in Thess 2:9), saying the lawless one would do the same "pretended signs and wonders". We must never be naive, seeking mere phenomena, particularly of a miraculous type.

anything remarkable. I could add that God is *always healing*. A cut heals, the immune system with its cells and hormones overcome infection. We call it "normal", and are not surprised! It takes time, and we accept that. Jesus' miracles and healing were instant, and so we call it a miracle.

But when Jesus walked on the water that was something we do not see normally now. Maybe it was a sign of the future - of the New Creation breaking in on the old! Even Peter did it for a few moments. Lewis calls this a "snow-drop miracle" - a sign of the coming spring! This and the raising of the dead were miracles of the New Creation.

The Temptations Of Jesus

Jesus won the battle of minds, as well as the battle for the truth in this encounter with the devil. He knew his Father's mind only too well! So Satan "left him for a season."

These temptations were all directed against Jesus' divine Sonship, all designed for him to misuse his divine power, to gain his purposes by obedience to the devil rather than his Father, and also to doubt the reality of his Father's love and care. They were not so much against his Messianic office as against the relationship he had with his Father. Clearly he understood the scriptures and their context, and would not be led to mis-represent them. He answered all the temptations from the Scriptures – we should do the same.

We should now be able to see reasons why temptation by evil is allowed and could be necessary in the interests of developing our strength of character, and growth to maturity. Our safeguard always is to know the word of God, that is to know God's mind, and so be able to pick the attacks of the evil one and see through them. St Paul also said "we will never be tempted above what we are able to bear - that there will always be a way of escape! To resist temptation in this way can only strengthen us and give us resilience and wisdom. Surely this is why God allows such testing, and I believe it pleases Him every time we take this step. Amen.

4th hymn: *by John Whittier (T: 'Rest' by F.Maker 1844-1927) MHB 669*

- 1) Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways;
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind; in purer loves Thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.
- 2) In simple trust like theirs who heard, beside the Syrian sea the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word rise up and follow Thee.
- 3) O Sabbath rest by Galilee! O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with Thee the silence of eternity, interpreted by love!
- 4) With that deep hush subduing all our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of Thy call, as noiseless let Thy blessings fall as fell the manna down.
- 5) Drop Thy still dews of quietness till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of Thy peace.
- 6) Breathe through the heats of our desire Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire,
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire, O still small voice of calm

Benediction:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen.

This service was prepared by Neil McIntosh (M.B.B.S. F.R.A.C.S.) for HopeNet SA