

Christ's Temptations and Victory.

A Pattern for the Believer To-Day.

MATT. IV. 1-16.

"In that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." (Heb. ii. 18.)

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Sequel to "Christ's Position." (Matt. iii.)

WE have seen in a previous paper that Matthew iii. presents to us the new position for the believer marked out by Christ's position. It is not exactly what you call the new man ; Christ is never called the new man, as far as I can see, in scripture. He is the second Man. When we are exhorted to "put on the new man" it is to put on the characteristics of Christ. But we have a new position marked out by the Lord Himself.

There are three elements in this position: 1, Sonship in conscious nature. 2, The opened heavens. 3, The Spirit of God.

This was Christ's position personally on earth, and even since believers are linked with Him now redemption has been accomplished, He is marked out as anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows. But believers to-day are in the position of sons of God; the heavens are opened to them, and the Spirit of God is to them also the Spirit of sonship, and the power to look up into the opened heavens, that they may behold Christ as an Object there.

Now we have in chapter iv. this Man of a new order put—Shall I say, on His trial? No! much more. He is tested, but beyond all the trial it is here set forth that

CHRIST IS DISPLAYED.

He is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the

devil. In these temptations He is most fully proved, and God shews in them that He has found a Man who is entirely superior to all the devil can do. But, on the other hand, the way He, as an obedient Man, obtained the victory over the devil becomes the pattern for others. They who are of the same order as Himself risen from the dead, may also obtain the victory over the devil, who is now a defeated foe, having been conquered by Christ. In order that we may the better be able to conquer, it is good to understand the principles that are at stake, and the armour by which He conquered; although, alas! even then we so little come out victors. But Jesus is the Conqueror and is here displayed as such. We may well glory in this wonderful display of what that blessed Man is! And if we are of that order we need not succumb to the enemy. Paul says, "I can do all things." How? "Through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 13.)

We shall notice that Christ was tempted as Man, as Messiah, and as Son of man, which temptations resolve themselves into the natural, the religious or spiritual, and the worldly temptations. The lust of the flesh, the pride of life and the lust of the eyes are supposed as the bases of the temptations. The principles by which He conquered are obedience, confidence and resistance.

Christ comes from the Jordan into the wilderness. He reverses the history of the children of Israel. They came to the Jordan last, and they had not learned the lessons that God had to teach them in the wilderness. He needed not to live forty years in the wilderness in order to learn God's lessons, and this indicates display in this wonderful scene. He goes from the Jordan, where He recognises what baptism means. It closes earth for Him. He gives up His claims to earth there for the moment, and passes on into the wilderness. All the details of the history of Israel

and of man are gone through by Him, but in a kind of inverse order.

God says in effect to the devil: There is the Man, test Him and try Him! One may well feel ashamed, yet at the same time adore, as one follows the Lord Jesus Christ through these temptations. The contrast to all that is in oneself, is seen in Him; yet this is good if it tends to diminish self. It is good, too, to know that He stood the test, and it is true of Him, as the apostle says: "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." (Heb. ii. 18.) If one has to say, Ah! hitherto I have greatly failed. Well, gird up your loins and start afresh! "He is able to succour." Why? Because He knows what temptation means, He suffered being tempted. You perhaps do not suffer being tempted, but peradventure you suffer having failed. If failure comes in, His hand must rest upon us in governmnet, and we suffer in that way.

He suffered being tempted. Do you not think the temptation was suffering to Him? Ah! indeed, it was beyond what we can think. Jesus is not in the place of temptation now, but in the place of power, and He can sympathise with and help those who suffer being tempted. He does not succour those who suffer having failed. He is an Advocate for such. In this case an honest confession must be made. Now the next best thing to being what one ought to be, is to own that one is not it. Then mercy can have its sway and all can be set right again.

We may notice that Jesus was

LED UP OF THE SPIRIT

into the wilderness, to be tempted. It is very well for us, when we are led of the Spirit into temptation; we are more likely to stand in that case. But we often open the door for the devil to tempt us, and then we cannot

stand. Alas! how true is this. But Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tempted.

You have no other resource there. Go into temptation by yourself, and you will fail and dishonour the Lord. But go into it as the Lord Jesus Christ did, led by the Spirit, and you may suffer being tempted, but you will have His succour, and may be able to stand.

Suffer, we must, in temptation, but how much better to suffer being tempted, than to suffer having failed! In the former case we have all the blessed sense of His presence with us, His words of comfort and encouragement, His "fear not!" His sympathy, strength and sufficient grace! Besides the joy of glorifying His name by victory over the enemy, following in His own blessed footsteps.

"And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred." (Ver. 2.) We do not know anything at all of what

happened these forty days and forty nights. This answers to the

CAKE OFFERING BAKEN IN AN OVEN.

(LEV. II.)

There the cake is put into the oven, and no eye sees what goes on. So with Jesus those forty days, no one saw it, but there was testing and trial unknown. What He passed through no one knows. It has not pleased God to reveal it. It is part of the unknown sufferings of Christ. Oh, how much of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ are unknown to mortals! God only can know them. An old writer prays, "By the sufferings of Christ known and unknown." How little are they thought of! But there He was for forty days and forty nights, and He was afterward an hungred.

Now it has been opposed by many to this, that both Moses and Elias had fasted forty days, but it only needs a spiritual glance to see the

difference between what they passed through and what Christ suffered. They were alone with God, but Christ was alone with the devil. Moses would scarcely have stood there. He could not always stand the trial of the children of Israel. He says, "Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh that we may eat. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me." (Num. xi. 12-14.)

Then after all he failed and said, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (Num. xx. 10.) And the meekest man in all the earth was angry with the people. He was faithful in all God's house, but could he have stood there alone with the devil? Not he,

nor you, nor I could stand alone there! Only Jesus could! But the devil is a conquered foe now; we need not fear him. You and I cannot conquer him, but Christ did. "Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house." (Matt. xii. 29.) Jesus did this here. Satan was the strong man! Who were his goods? Alas! man is looked at as the goods of Satan. It comes out in Babylon where bodies and souls of men are goods of traffic. (Rev. xviii. 13 margin.) Alas, for that place in which Satan rules so largely, and where he traffics in the bodies and souls of men! How blessed then to see that Jesus has conquered him and delivers man from his power.

There are other sufferings of the blessed One also, which may be more known where love cares to follow, but even these, alas! are too little entered into.

The next kind of offering was a cake

baken in a pan : it is parted in pieces and oil poured upon it. In this case you can see it. Here we have the sufferings of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ more open to view, answering to the three temptations after the forty days were ended. He is, too, as it were, parted in pieces and every part is found to be anointed by the Holy Ghost. The devil tempts Him as Man first, then as Messiah, and then as Son of man : thus is He parted in pieces, but in every case the Lord conquers the devil with a text of scripture.

But now we turn to the first. He is

TEMPTED AS MAN.

This is what you call a natural temptation. He was hungry ; and it is not wrong to be hungry. Nature craves for bread under such circumstances ; but it is the will which satisfies itself independently of God which constitutes lust. This temptation supposes, in order to be success-

ful, the lust of the flesh, but it need not be said there was no answer to it in the Lord Jesus Christ, no evil lust in His heart. He was hungry, and He had the power to make the stones bread, and the temptation was to use His power to satisfy His desires without the word of God. This, of course, He would not do. For while it was not wrong to be hungry, He would not, as obedient, use His power to satisfy His hunger without the word of God. Very beautiful it is to see, that there was no exercise of will in Him, He was obedient and dependent.

There is for Him something better than life, better than bread. Do you know what is better than bread? Will bread support your life? Yes, your natural life! Will it support your spiritual life? No! That life has cravings also which can only be met by God and His word. When, therefore, the devil came and said to the Lord, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be

made bread" (ver. 3), Jesus said in effect, You have made a mistake to begin with. I am the Son of God, and hitherto My voice has only been heard to command, and when I spake it was done. Now I have had ears digged for Me, and I have come to obey. May we not ask ourselves, Do I know what it is to obey thus?

We may notice as we go through the Lord's conflict with the devil how He used armour similar to that which is provided for us in Ephesians vi. We can trace the use of three pieces here, and each one is connected with the word of God. They are: The girdle of truth, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit.

He bound Himself with

THE WORD OF GOD AS A GIRDLE.

Man girds himself to strengthen himself. Morally, to gird oneself is to keep in the desires of the heart. So, although Jesus was hungry and wanted bread, and had the power to

satisfy His hunger, He says, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Ver. 4.) Now what life was that? It was in contrast to mere physical life; it was spiritual, and "I know that his commandment is life everlasting." (John xii. 50.) The word of God was more than His necessary food to Him. There are very many other things which are right in their place, but if will works and we seek after them more than the word of God, the desires of nature will become the lusts of the flesh and we shall sacrifice that which is of God in us.

Many a man says, "I must have bread." Well, the baker will let you have it on credit. But the word of God says, "Owe no man anything." Will you traverse that scripture? Yes! many a man puts his foot down there, as it were, and says, "*I must* have bread." Beware! Will is at work. The lust of the flesh is in that "must." Can you not trust God?

Do you not think that He knows you need bread? Do you not think if He has created you, and created you after such a sort that bread is necessary to you, that He will give it to you? I know that must touch some very closely.

Or, it may be, a man may see an opportunity of a good business, but has no capital. He desires to do better for himself and family, and may have credit; but God's word says, "Owe no man anything." What will he do? What is the Christian? Is he a mere man? Surely not! Will he count upon God to meet his need? Or will he use the means at hand and help himself, traversing the scripture in doing so? This has caused many a shipwreck! Jesus had made up His mind to obey God's word, and God had made up His mind to support Him. It was not that *He* would have traversed a plain text of scripture, had He made the stones bread, but He said in effect, I have no instruction from my Father to do it: I

is food in every part of it. Pray over it! read it! study it! eat it! It was more to Jesus than His necessary food. If any wish to live in the power of eternal life, I ask, What are you feeding on? Now the written word of God is the transcript of the Living Word, and by the Spirit's power spiritual food is in it. Do you value the word of God more than your necessary food? Is not this necessary if you would live in the power of eternal life? Yes! and for this, we must feed upon Christ Himself: "He that eateth me, even he shall live by me." (John vi. 57.) It is not "Ye shall have life" only, but "Ye shall live." Let each one see that he is truly living! "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Deut. viii. 3). In this case the devil was foiled by Christ's obedience.

"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith

am dependent upon Him ; I can wait !
That was obedience.

Do you think you can act as a Christian without obedience ? Can you be a soldier without obedience ? No ! Show me a disobedient *child* and I will show you an unhappy household. There must be strict, rigid, self-sacrificing obedience. Are you prepared for it ? Have you your loins thus girded ? It may be a question of the satisfaction of nature, or earthly advantage, or of display in the church of God ; but what is better than all, is obedience to the word of God. Let us remember in all things God is God. We do not know our way, we need God to guide us. It is a question altogether of strict rigid obedience. The blessed Lord Jesus Christ thwarted the devil by that simple text of scripture. Again, there is

FOOD IN EVERY WORD OF GOD.

Do not tell me there is food in this and the other particular part. There

unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down : for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee : and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." (Vers. 5, 6.) Here He is

TEMPTED AS MESSIAH.

It is a religious or spiritual temptation, and supposes, in order to be successful, that there is spiritual pride ; but again there was none in the Lord. The devil professes to give Him a word of God. He goes to a right scripture for Messiah ; but in citing it he misquotes. You never found him quoting a scripture properly. He either misquotes, or misapplies it. In this case he misquotes. "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." (Psa. xci. 11, 12.) The devil left out "To keep thee in all thy ways." He wanted to take

Him out of Jehovah's hand in this particular instance, so he seeks, as it were, to destroy the germ of scripture.

Strange he should have chosen this Psalm! for the next verse reads, "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." (Ver. 13.) This refers to his own destruction at the hand of the very Man he was tempting now. He would not quote that. He was too cunning. It was death to him. He wanted to get the Lord Jesus to take Himself out of God's hands. The Lord says, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." (Ver. 7.)

Here the piece of defensive armour used was

THE SHIELD OF FAITH.

In effect the Lord said, I do not want to prove that word, I believe it, I confide in it. "Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God." (Deut. vi. 16.) This refers to Massah. How

did they tempt God there ! They said, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Exo. xvii. 7.) That is tempting the Lord. There is a scripture, says the devil, suggesting, Do you believe that God can do this? Prove it ! Display your power ; and shew that you are the Messiah ! Jesus says, I have confidence in God's word, I know He can do it, I want no display of power ! "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

To tempt God is to bring His hand upon you in government. To prove Him is to bring in His arm on your behalf. Gideon proved the Lord again and again, and though there was a certain amount of weakness in his faith, yet God bore with this because he was really looking to Him to come in. He wanted to be quite sure, and he was quite right to be sure. Better prove the Lord ten times than tempt at all. And the end of this proving was that he could say, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon," a wonderful combination.

(See Jud. vii. 18.) Ahaz, on the other hand, excused himself from proving the Lord, under a pretext that he would not tempt Him; but he really did tempt the Lord, and brought His hand upon himself and the people in judgment. (See Isa. vii. 10-13.)

Now the devil wanted the blessed Lord Jesus Christ to tempt God, but this was impossible. And although he did not come personally to the Lord again until Gethsemane, yet we may trace this temptation through others, his unconscious agents, as His brethren, when they said, "If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world." (John vii. 4.) All through this kind of temptation Jesus quietly raises the shield of faith.

This quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked one. It is faith in the word of God objectively. He confides absolutely in Jehovah and His word. He will not take Himself out of His hands in order to obtain the ministry of angels, which rightly

comes in due course, to the One who confides in Him.

The devil would seek to get us also to tempt God. He may come to us saying, "Prove that God is with you; display your spiritual power!" Young Christians, beware of it! Raise the shield of faith! I have confidence in God, I believe His word, I want no display! I know that He is with me. If you have not strong confidence in God, and faith in His word you will be swept off your feet, and the work you profess to love will be hindered. God was displaying this blessed Man in the wilderness, that is one thing; but it is quite a different thing for a man to display himself, even if it be his spiritual power. If we go in for display we really tempt God. Is it not enough to realise this power in secret? It is spiritual pride to use it for display.

The devil came to Paul at Philippi and said, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. . . .

But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour." (Acts xvi. 17, 18.) He would not come into prominence by Satan's means. He knew his desire was to hinder and damage the work. In the assembly of God, love does not seek display, but edification.

In this temptation there was nothing which the devil could act upon in the Lord. He had implicit confidence in God, and faith in His word consequently. Oh, that we too had ever before us the shield of faith! Oh! if we more knew the blessedness of confidence in God, whether as individuals or as in the assembly, how much more would He be glorified in us! God will give to no human name the glory. He will be trusted for everything. If there are diversities of gifts, they are by the same Spirit. If differences of administrations, the same Lord. If diversities of operations, it is the same

God which worketh all in all. (1 Cor. xii. 4-6.) We see here that God is the operator; man is not mentioned, he must not glory. It is the Spirit, the Lord, and God in the church. God is all in all. But how does the Lord act? He does not say, "You have misquoted the scripture;" but He simply quotes another scripture, which detects and exposes the misquotation. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Again the devil is foiled. This is Messiah's religious temptation, and it appeals, but in vain in Him, to spiritual pride, or the pride of life.

Now a third time the devil comes to Him, and this time He is

TEMPTED AS SON OF MAN.

"The devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." (Vers. 8, 9.) This time it

is the worldly temptation, and the lust of the eyes is the principle which it supposes; but, as ever, in vain in the Lord. He comes now to the Lord as Son of man. Under this title He had right to universal empire. It was His; but having come to do the will of God, He could only take it up on the ground of accomplished redemption, and the temptation lay in this—It might be His without the cross.

The truth is that Adam, who was put at the head of God's creation, yielded allegiance to the devil when he believed his lie, and handed over to him that which had been in his own hands. What the devil wanted to infer here was, that it was God who gave him this power. That was a lie. For although he was invested with much dignity as a creature, being the masterpiece of God's handiwork, yet he was lifted up with pride and fell into condemnation. This was in another sphere, and it does not appear that he had any power on

earth until, having suborned Adam, he obtained power over man's heart. It appears, also, that there was committed to him the power of death over all who had sinned. Thus he mingles his lie with much attractive truth, which is his way. But it was, after all, a bold lie in the Lord's presence. He had obtained the power himself, and by wrong means. He was in this a usurper, and aimed at the rights of God over the souls of men, that he might lead them on to perdition.

What he wanted here was worship. Dear reader, do you believe the devil is behind all false religion? There is not a religion to-day that is of God but Christianity, and that in its purest form; the devil is in some way connected with all else, and pure demon worship is not unknown. After the fall the devil soon came in to secure the worship of man for himself, but this he did gradually, as he could not shut God out at once, and so we find, very early, that the attri-

butes of God were worshipped. The idea that God was eternal was laid hold of, and then he induced men to make an image of a serpent with its tail in its mouth as a symbol of this, and to worship it. The idea that God was strong was symbolised by a figure of a lion and worshipped ; and so on. Eventually, instead of the attributes of God, the passions of man were deified and worshipped, and the devil was behind them all. Can it be thought that to-day the devil is not bidding for the worship of the heart? How fatal would such a mistake be !

Satan knows that every man has his price, and how to bid for him. He says, If you are not quite so strict in your religion I will give you more trade. Loosen the girdle and give me a little worship. Ah ! that is all he wants. Just give me a little worship ! Are you worshipping the devil ? What an awful thought ! He sought worship from the Lord Jesus Christ ; but that was a mistake, and was fatal to him. To believers, he says, there

is something you want! Well, I will give it to you, if you will only listen to me rather than to God. Alas, for those who do so! He tempts man with very much less, but he presented to the Lord all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and that without the cross. Christ said in effect, Give Me death from the hand of the Lord rather than all the kingdoms of the world from the devil. "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John xviii. 11.) But why should we go to the devil for anything? Do you not think that the Lord will give all that is good?

Here the Lord uses the only offensive weapon in the armour, which is again the word of God,

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT.

Resistance is the principle here. Jesus says, "Get thee hence, Satan," for he has now manifested his true character. "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Ver.

10.) He comes to Him no more personally until he comes with the power of death in his hand. We cannot suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ went through these temptations without intense sufferings. The sufferings are seen more plainly when he does come again to Him in Gethsemane. There the very blood left its proper channels, until "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground;" but He stood firm. Oh! the mercy of knowing that one Man has conquered the devil! This being so, he is a conquered foe.

Observe that Satan left the Lord as he was bidden. In the Gospel of Luke this is wrongly introduced, having been placed in the Authorised Version without due authority, and toned down to "get thee behind me." It there looks as though the devil had stayed after the Lord had bidden him go, but no expression of the kind should be there. The devil did leave Him when bidden, a conquered foe,

having been, as it were, bound with three texts of scripture; "and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him." (Ver. 11.) It is better to have the ministry of angels in the path of obedience than to tempt the Lord in order to try to get it.

It is needless to say that none of us will stand as the Lord Jesus Christ stood. But He did stand, and Satan was defeated. We come in after that blessed Man, and we have the same armour provided for us that He used, with the power to use it. The girdle of truth is a defensive piece of armour and acts upon ourselves. The shield of faith is defensive also; it believes God's word. Faith quenches all the fiery darts of the devil. It is not simply that they fall flaming at our feet, but they are quenched and thus harmless. Then there is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, the only offensive weapon. But it must be used as the Lord Jesus Christ used it, in the power of the Spirit and in depen-

dence upon God. No doubt His Spirit was up before His Father the whole time in prayer and supplication, answering in this also to Ephesians vi. 18. But Jesus conquers and binds the devil with three texts of scripture, and then goes about to deliver his goods, that is, He delivers poor man from his hand, who had been hitherto oppressed by him. (See vers. 23-25.)

We may notice that in these temptations the devil was obliged to tempt the Lord objectively. He could not get at His mind to suggest evil thoughts to tempt Him from within; all was pure there, and so all these temptations come from without. With Christ as an example, and the armour and power provided, there is no need that those who follow in His footsteps should fear the devil even when he rages and roars around them. May the Lord keep His people and give them to be able and content to walk the pathway appointed by Him for them through this scene, trusting

to Himself alone. Let them remember that Christ suffered being tempted, and that He is able to succour them that are tempted, and to enable them to stand in temptation. Blessed be God ! failure is not now a necessity.

G. J. S.



BY THE SAME :

The Heavenly Jerusalem.

Clean and Unclean.

**The Pledge, Power, Protection and
Guidance of the Holy Spirit in
the Wilderness.**

Be Filled with the Spirit.

The Passover in the Pentateuch.

Christ's Position a Pattern, &c.

Notes on Galatians. (Six Lectures.)

The Young Stowaway.

**Provision for the Wilderness. (Six
Lectures).**

Wise or Foolish.

Thrice Lost.