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Sermon preached by our Pastor

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Lesson. Genesis 3.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Matthew 4. 1.

We seek to tread with profound reverence this very sacred ground. The depth of truth expressed by the holy words we never can fathom: the depth is only known to the Son of God incarnate Himself. But blessed be God, it has a connection and relevance of vast importance to the whole Church of God because there is the foundation here upon which every tempted child of God rests and is secure. If the Son of God incarnate had never been led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil He could never have felt with a holy sympathy for His tempted followers. We read that He was made a perfect Saviour by suffering, - a complete Saviour. All He passed through as God incarnate was essential for their salvation, deliverance and victory, and the victory was in Him. I felt especially led, I believe, to the subject, and my inability and lack of grace caused me to feel a large measure of trembling, and I could have withdrawn easily from it, but I felt impressed in my spirit that there would be in the House of God to night tempted sons and daughters of Christ who needed divine consolation in this blessed subject. I need it myself, and some of you need it deeply. Let us therefore, endeavour by the grace of God to introduce the subject.

You will see, those of you who are deeply taught, or who are taught of the Spirit, the connection between the Lesson and the Text, When God spoke to the serpent we read He declared that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, that is, destroy his federal power, and He has done it. Do you realise it? He has bruised his head. It is done. Satan is a defeated foe. He will torment and distress you by means that you discern, and by means you do not initially discern. I assure you, though here is part of your greatest sufferings as you go through the wilderness, he is a defeated foe. He may roar: he is chained; he will never devour you. This is a wonderful secret.

There is another point to refer to, namely, "it, Satan shall bruise His heel." My Text is a record of the beginning of the fulfilment of this, and concerning the heel there are several things. First, the sacred humanity of our blessed Lord. Satan could not bruise Deity. Have you ever thought of that? But as Christ became our Surety and condescended to be a Servant, and as He passed through the days of His humiliation He was exposed to a degree of bruising of His holy humanity far beyond what we shall ever know. Satan bruised Christ. A bruise, as you know, is caused by a blow: a hard blow causes a contusion; blood vessels are ruptured and the blood flows under the skin. You are bruised. He bruised the harmless Son of God.

Let me remind you of the doctrine divine. The second part of the exposition of 'heel' is, that part of the Church of God at any time in the whole of history walking this earth. Only that part that treads the earth can Satan as allowed, bruise. You will remember I have tried to define this. There are two parts of the Church of God he cannot bruise. He cannot bruise those in the womb of the everlasting Covenant: they are unborn. He cannot bruise those who are safely landed in glory. O my friends, do you ever think of it? The time will come when he will never bruise you more because you are Home: in bliss; out of his reach. Your body, (he bruises body, soul, and spirit) but think of it, your body rests in the downy bed; the silent, peaceful tomb. He will never bruise you more. Often, whether I am in the cemetery or thinking of it, my mind goes to the precious dust there, and of some of the terrible trials the friends passed through, and the sore conflicts. It is all over; Satan cannot bruise them more. They are in glory, and he cannot touch their bodies.

So the second part of 'heel' is that part at any time in the history of the Church of Christ that walks the earth. I am thinking of those born again of the Spirit, and those treading this weary wilderness. He will bruise your heel: you are exposed to it. Am I speaking the truth? Let all wise men respond. This is the word of God; "and thou shalt bruise his heel." Warriors, especially in the ancient days, felt a great honour concerning their scars.- I should think there is some honour with bruises if Satan bruises your heel because you are Christ's.

I think this is a fair introduction concerning the activity of Satan and the part he is able to touch with divine permission. We know from Job, and

from experience, and the case of the children of Israel that the adversary can only go so far. Satan told the Lord in a dialogue that He had put a hedge around Job and he could never get through. He was allowed to do certain things, but he could not touch his life, and your immortal life is sure; it is in God, in heaven, out of his reach. You have a hope beyond the grave: it is out of his reach. Your poor heel is bruised. You think, and I wonder whether you have in mind certain years. It is natural for us to think of milestones,- you may think next year will be better, and so on. Do you find you are immune from bruising? You have known it for thirty, forty, fifty years. It means you are bruised: the people of God are; all who fear God are.

Let us go further, by His help. Very striking is the position of the Text in the narrative by the evangelists,- the position in the life of Christ here below. What is the position? He was baptised: He had come from the seclusion of Galilee, where He lived, to Jordan to John to be baptised. I have no need to especially dilate on this, though it should engage our whole attention: we call ourselves Baptists. As He was baptised, and went up straightway out of the water, and received immeasurably, that is the Man Christ Jesus, the anointing of the Spirit,- "for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."- and as the heavens were opened, the Father gave a wonderful attestation concerning His Son. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This is one of the most delightful passages in the Bible: and again, on the mount of transfiguration; "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." You can undoubtedly give this a title; A Time of exceeding great Joy; unfathomed Joy. O the happiness filling, surrounding, emanating from this blessed point; His baptism, and the heavens opened, and the descent of the immortal Dove, and the voice of the Father!

I want to co-relate this to your experience; to terms of the spiritual. What do we read? You would have thought by this means He was thus initiated into His public ministry, and that you ^{would} read next that He had gone forth and preached and performed His miracles. Now the subject is current. "And immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness." I rather feel to say to you the people of God become ^{wise} to one thing, that is, if you get a little sweetness or joy it is not long before you have a season of temptation. If you get a time of blessing, you hear a Hymn announced, and

you want to close the Hymn book and not hear it. What am I referring to?

"If to day He deigns to bless us
With a sense of pardoned sin," (758)

You say; "Lord, let me stop there."

Perhaps tomorrow He'll distress us."

and you say; "Lord, I do not ^{want} to hear it really. I wish I could stay in the other part." One day the Lord is blessing you: tomorrow you are tempted. Are you willing? It is so. If the Lord favours your soul it is not long before you experience what is expressed in the Text, measurably. If you are in the wilderness and in deep sorrow, it is not long before the Lord gives you a little consolation. It is a wonderful thing. I remember once I had occasion to visit a brother minister, and one thing entered my heart concerning a certain morning. He went down and collected the mail, and he opened one and it absolutely bruised and distressed him. He opened the next and it comforted him. It was as if the Lord said; "Here is consolation. You have got trouble: here is consolation." The scale-pans are balanced. The Lord knows how to do it at the right time.

So consider the position of this in the life of Christ. Immediately following His baptism what do we read? The language is highly significant. You do not read; "Jesus went to the wilderness." No: you read; "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness." The same immortal Dove, the precious Dove, - no doubt you have thought a lot of the Dove of Peace, - He led Him, your Saviour, and in Him you have a perfect example of filial submission as a Servant of His Father. He was led by the Spirit to the wilderness, and He was perfectly willing to be. You see, this puts a great lustre on it all, and it does with His people. Are you willing to be led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil? Or are you rebellious and resentful concerning the wilderness and the bruising of your person? It is a leading. He was led of the Spirit, and He was perfectly willing to go, though He knew according to His omniscience and prescience, all that was before Him. He went in perfect willingness. This is one of the great characteristics of grace.

If you say to me; "Spell out a part of it." I will.

"Why should I shrink at pain or woe,
Or feel at death dismay?" (934)

Another point is, you are led of the Spirit; made willing. If it means pain or woe, or suffering, or an operation you are made willing: you are led of the Spirit. God makes His people willing. You may say you are not willing: you will be. The Lord makes His people willing. Christ was made willing to go to the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. He knew all about it. If you take this home and work it out you will see how important it is; to be led into a path of trial. It is not something mechanical or accidental: it is in the hand of God; you are led of the Spirit into the path. I will ask you; do you feel as the Lord has sanctified His hand and dispensations that you would have been without any affliction? Would you say you could have dispensed with any? No: you are led of the Spirit. This is a blessed character; made willing. You come into deep waters, and I do not know what they are for you: you only know as you come into them. It is a matter of being led and made willing, and you see there is a purpose in it. So how vastly important this is.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." I will now pronounce a few things concerning our blessed Lord. It is essential to postulate points. The first is, we firmly believe, all who are taught of the Spirit, in the impeccability of His human nature. To spell it out, it means it was impossible for Him to sin. He was not capable of sin. Let that be laid down firmly.

There are two other things. When the devil came to Him first, (it was not the only time. He suffered at various seasons being tempted, and severely in His Passion.) Christ Himself said; "The prince of this world cometh," He knew Satan was coming. "and hath nothing in me." There was nothing in Him Satan could stir up. How different it is with us! When the prince of this world cometh to us there is the scum of fallen nature, and he soon works on it. But Christ was spotless, innocent, and pure: there was nothing in Him to work on. Another point is, it was impossible for Satan to inject anything into Him because of the purity and holiness of His sacred humanity. This forms the basis for further meditation. I judge you are well established in holy doctrine. Let us by the help of God go further.

There are three things stand out here in the narrative. The first is, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness." Are any of you

in the wilderness? Poor soul, do you know what it is to be in the wilderness. As I think of the Holy Land,- I have never been there,- but I visualise ~~it~~ according to the word of God, and from those who have gone to Israel recently, the unparalleled beauty of the land, a land flowing with milk and honey. It was not in the most beautiful and fertile part that Christ was led, but in the wilderness. I wonder if you get to the wilderness? Some do not know it. You will know when you get there. It was a waste place indeed, a waste howling wilderness. You wanted to stay in the rich, fertile land, in the vineyards and the fragrance and beauty of those places. It was to the wilderness He was led. It^{is} useless for me to try to describe it, because you will know it when you are there. Try to visualise a bleak place, a dark, desolate place.

The second thing that stands out is, that He was there all alone. There was no one with Him: alone in the wilderness, my friends, and so you will be. His mother was living, obviously. She was not in the wilderness to go with Him. There was only One, and that was His Father, to lean on. I refer of course, to His sacred humanity, and His position as Surety and His Father's Servant in a lowly condition. So He was in the wilderness all alone apart from a few companions. He had a few; the wild beasts. Do you know of this? with the wild beasts: your Saviour. He came from glory on high: He was baptised, and led of the Spirit to the wilderness, a terrible ^{place}, and was with the wild beasts. You will have a taste of it: some of you already have. Alone, and yet not alone. God will not forsake you. You are with the wild beasts.

"Is this, dear Lord, that thorny road

Which leads us to the mount of God? (289)

You must go through: you will not die there.

The third point is, as He fasted forty days and forty nights,- think of it! so the word stands out;

"The strength of God is owned by all;

But who His weakness knows?" (709)

the weakness of His holy humanity; a pure weakness: ours is a sinful weakness. Forty days and forty nights, and He hungered, and then it was the tempter came to Him. This is where I have to stand afar off: it is all I can do; not in a state of apathy. This is where the depth is so great you

hardly get a glimpse. This is where the devil tempted Him. You see the same characteristics of temptation: one is, it is always relevant to what you are in. He was weak: He had fasted ~~for forty~~ days and forty nights, and immediately, says the tempter; "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." That is where the temptation comes; what you are right in. "If" I shall not presume to try to go out of my depth, because this is beyond me. All I know is, He was ~~tempted~~ in all points tempted like as we are. This is something you can never fathom. You will gaze at the abyss in wonder. He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin...For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." There is all the spleen, malice, and venom of the pit here.

I say to you first, Satan was completely defeated: and then you say; "Why did He go through? why pass through it?" Because part of His sufferings was that He suffered being tempted. This is one of the guide lines in what you suffer. You will soon know when it is the adversary because you will ~~suffer~~^{say} "Why did He pass through?" That He might be a faithful and merciful high priest. He got the victory! He is touched with the feeling of our infirmity. And He not only feels a sympathy, but He will deliver you. He has power to deliver. Also

"He knows what sore temptations mean,
For He has felt the same." (120)

So He can sympathise, and He can succour those who are tempted. Amen.