

Sermon Preached by Mr Foster at Scaynes Hill Sunday Afternoon February 26th 1961

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

Matthew 4:1

It was said by our Lord's accusers that He made Himself the Son of God, A false claim. He is an impostor. Perhaps some of your hearts have been torn like that as a son or daughter of the Most High, You are inclined to think that after all sad as it is you have deceived yourself, and have deceived others too. This challenging is part of the suffering fellowship with the Saviour. Go to the Lord and plead the hope in his mercy in your heart which He has nurtured within thee and say with the Psalmist, "Remember Thy word unto Thy servant upon which Thou hast caused me to hope." And God will honour your pleading, in fact He invites it. 'Put me in remembrance, plead my word, honour me.' It is the work of faith, the fruits of My Spirit to teach you to plead my work in you, and for you.

Thus you see the dear Redeemer was assailed on this tender ground, His relationship. Now I want to go to the darkest hour of His sufferings. I pray the Lord to give tender, sacred thoughts, feelings, and words. In the darkest hour of His sufferings, (and even nature hid its face from the appalling sight of the appalling sufferings, darkness covered the face of the earth for three hours) during which it would appear that He lost the comfort of His son-ship, He did not lose His son-ship – that was impossible. Recall what cry that darkest hour wrung out of His anguished heart, "My God, My God." Not 'My Father,' but, "My God, My God, Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Do you feel forsaken and torn with such a terrible, indescribable, tortuous thought; that you dare not speak of yourself as a child of God? So did Jesus know that forsaking. Do not forget that He went to heaven with the recovered, revived joy of realisation of His son-ship. Did He not go to heaven with this on His blessed lips, indicating the joy of it in His heart, "Father into Thy hands I commit My spirit."? You may have your son-ship challenged. If it is begotten of the Holy Ghost it will be challenged, and however sorely it is challenged and however tempted to doubt it you woefully may be, your affinity will finally be revived and renewed. I believe you will go to heaven, to the God and Father of all your mercies. Ministers have sometimes to speak in face of their downcast feelings, yet must speak what they believe to be true, though sometimes it is challenged in the pulpit as well as outside.

In the interval my mind has been led to consider Peter's misguided attempt to persuade the Saviour to spare Himself, and not steadfastly pursue His way to Calvary at such cost. My mind was led to the recorded instance, of the discovery made to the disciples, of Christ's son-ship when they said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." We remember He told of His coming sorrows, suffering and their intense nature, so much so that Peter, overcome with the spirit of 'spare yourself,' declared to the Saviour, "Be it far from Thee, Lord," I looked in the Bible, it is enlarged like this: where it reads, "Be it far from Thee." the margin reads, "Pity Thy self, spare Thyself." Now if Jesus had heeded that counsel He would never have gone to Calvary, never have gone to Gethsemane, there would never be any salvation.

Now we go to another point, that is, the devil took Him up into the holy city and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple. Now frankly, how the devil did it I do not know, nor am I concerned to know. It was done, God says so, and faith does not question it, it is enough to know that God says it, There is as much wisdom in what He conceals as what He reveals, He was then tempted. Here again is a very tender point. Satan viewed Him as the one who had been proclaimed the 'Son of God,' yet was truly a man. As I see it, there was a suggestion of self-destruction! "Cast Thyself down from hence," I know

self-destruction could not be but likely Satan thought, 'If I could get Him to cast Himself down from this great height that would be the end of Him.' Be that as it may, this terrible temptation is not unknown in the family of grace. The poet Cowper was attacked well as outside not infrequently with this suggestion and went a long way in complying, but – and this is an important 'but' was mercifully prevented from effectively complying. A similar temptation, Satan with his cunning hurled at Job - his wife was Satan's messenger and did not know it at the time, 'Take your own life, put an end to all this suffering, What is the use?' Godly Job said 'Thou speakest as one of the foolish women.' And mysterious as it is, when Peter said, "Be it far from Thee Lord," he was Satan's agent unwittingly. Did not the Saviour say so? He said, "Get thee behind me Satan" and then addressing Peter, "Thou savourest not the things which be of God." 'I must go forward, I must accomplish the redemption of my beloved ones. They must all go to hell if I do not suffer it for them. I must go forward with it. I must be about my Father's business,'

Further, was there a suggestion of exhibition? 'What a grand exhibition it would be if Thou threw thyself down; there is a crowd of people in the temple.' What is self to want to exhibit it? The only right attitude of self is to be ashamed. Have you ever been ashamed of yourself before God? If you are never ashamed of your sinful, self you will perish in your sins eternally, If you are ashamed of yourself and want a place to hide your face, the wounds of Jesus are that place for you.

Now I want to speak of a few other things, that is to briefly travel with Jesus through his life and see some of the sufferings He willingly suffered for his people. We will begin where He began with His incarnate life, You remember when He was a babe, hanging on His mother's breast, on His mother's knees, totally dependent on his parents (Oh the glorious mystery of the incarnation) you remember Satan stirred up his agents to plot against him 'I will make sure of Him and destroy every child of 2 years old and under.' Then he did not get Him. Why? Because of His Father's intervention. You may rest assured my friends, if you are born again Satan will attack you, you will be in danger from your very birth and he will repeatedly attack you as long as you live in this valley of tears. But the Father of mercies who has begotten you again to a lively hope will intervene for you. He will not need elaborate means for your safety. He can do it with something very simple. He just gave Joseph a troubled night and awaked him and in the middle of the night he had to go and take Mary and the babe. That would be a very discomfoting experience to be hurried off.

The Lord will look after His little ones, they are dear to Him, and they are His beloved children. I like the particular manner in which He addressed His disciples on the eve of His death, when Judas had gone out, they were in the upper room, it reads like this: 'Therefore when he had gone out' it says also too 'It was night.' It was indeed. Immediately afterwards He turned to the remaining disciples and addressed them like this'- Little children' and they were not offended. They did not say 'Fancy treating us like children.' They did not think it – they knew they were his children, dependent, resource-less little children. Then He said the prince of this world will be cast out. This is the hour of the power of darkness. And then He went on to say 'This will be your hour of sorrow, the world will rejoice. It will be temporary too, though terrible; I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.' So the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ savingly intervenes.

"I give unto My sheep eternal life, and none shall pluck them out of My hand, nor out of My Father's hand" So Jesus has understanding in that way with the suffering family that He has begotten anew. Then a little farther when He was about twelve, in comely obedience to His parents, and I believe willing obedience too, He went up to feast at Jerusalem. And when they had attended the feast and the service connected with it, then Joseph and Mary turned their way homeward and wended their way,

thinking He was following in the company of some of their company and friends, and they had gone quite a long way before they began to wonder why He was not visible, then they went back for Him, and revealed how they had misunderstood Him. You remember how we touched on being misunderstood this morning, and His parents misunderstood Him, and reproved Him. In effect they were saying, 'You know you have been paying too much attention to these things.' A lot of people know what it is to be assailed by those who may have affection for them, but misunderstand them, 'You do not want to be going to chapel every service, surely: and so on - Why travel miles when there are other places within yards of you?' Well, hungry people want food, they do not want to be put off with music and entertainment, they want food, and go miles for it, It is impossible to pay too much attention to the things of God, none of us pay too much attention to these things which are of paramount importance, He said, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" He has the prior claim, He suffered that He might succour His people.

We go a little father and, we read this, 'Neither, did his brethren believe on Him.' We might put it like this - the odd one out in the family circle. That is not an unusual thing in the family of God is it? Especially if the Lord has in His sovereign goodness and mercy made a single example in worldly family though they may be respectable and moral and perhaps outwardly religious. 'Neither did his brethren believe on Him.' He knew what it was to be alone in the family circle because he was the Son of God and must be about His Father's business. Then we go a little further and find Him suffering the falsity, of His own disciples. They all forsook Him and fled; we have not any stones to throw have we? We are companions with the hymn writer

*False to Thee, like Peter
I would fain with Peter weep.*

Have you ever played false? What was the cause of it? The fear of man? The fear of losing prestige? Losing esteem among men? The very path of temptation - He suffered that. And now we go a little farther - the dark night in which He was apprehended. The rabby mob with lanterns and torches under cover of darkness found Him in Gethsemane led by Judas. He came forth to meet them which was a great surprise. I expect they thought they would have to search for Him in the bushes but He said 'Here I am; if ye seek me take me and let these go their way - I must shield them.' A glorious shield is this salvation. What should we do without this Christ? Then they hurried Him to the palace of the high priest and to the governor. Then they left Him in the hands of the soldiers and all through the night on and off they made Him their sport and jest, arrayed Him with a purple robe, put a palm in His hand made a mock allegiance, made a mock of him, plucked the hair off His cheeks and never gave Him a bite or a drink during the night.

Remember he was really human truly human as you and I are with this notable exception - not a partaker of our sinful nature, but truly a partaker of our human nature. The morning comes, away to Calvary, we will crucify Him. They took Him out of Pilate's palace put the cross upon His sacred shoulders and back. I do not want to let imagination run to unlawful limits. Cast a glimpse at Him, He is fainting, sinking, exhausted, buffeted, mocked, jeered, and insulted. Not a bite, not a drink, no sleep - no wonder! But we must get Him to Calvary, here is Simon, 'you come here and carry his cross.' I mention that for this point it is an amazing thing to realise Jesus came to a place where He needed help to carry His cross. It seemed to give a little inkling of that Scripture, 'He was crucified through weakness. Do you feel, your cross is too much for you? That you will need help to carry your cross? Jesus knew all about that. Jesus felt exhausted, faint, sinking. Jesus know all about that,

Thus He suffered being tempted that He might succour those that are tempted. Then we go a little farther, and the farther we go the more sacred the ground becomes, almost afraid to tread upon it. We would tremblingly try with wondering admiration and worship. "Being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground," "He cast Himself upon the ground," we read, full length, flat on His face! That is His baptism of suffering literally He was immersed in blood, every pore of His sacred humanity having become a relieving outlet for the agony tensed within. It would seem the body must have burst with the stress of it but for the relieving sweat of blood.

On such love, my soul still ponder.

The question put by Mr Hart arises here

What mighty motive could Him move?

The answer is right,

The motive's plain, 'Twas all for love

We said this morning; the greatest driving power was love. What then?

*Prostrate upon the ground He lay,
Seems a slaughtered sacrifice.*

Then this happened, an angel appeared from heaven, strengthening Him. Although He was God incarnate in our nature, he voluntarily comes to a place where He needed the strengthening help of one of His creatures in the person of an angel: I do not want to speculate, but I try to think on these sacred scenes again and again, and I cannot help wondering - was it to help Him to His feet? "Being in an agony"- His sinless humanity shrinking from the woe of it, "If it be possible let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done." An angel appeared from heaven strengthening Him. Do you need help from heaven? Have you been crushed; fallen full length in the dust of sorrow, suffering, or anguish, feeling you could not stand on your feet, cast down, thrown down? The word, He cast Himself down, means He threw Himself down, His sufferings were very voluntary. You have been thrown down, you have needed help from heaven. You will get it, "Fear not I will help thee." "Be not dismayed, I am thy God. I will uphold thee,"

But Jesus suffered, coming to this place, very really needing help from heaven. What a wonderful Saviour! I have already touched on the hour of His desertion, during which He passed through a hell of suffering. And if a child of God feels really deserted of God that will be hell to them, will it not? That is the essence of hell, to be dispatched there, abandoned there, under the frown of the Most High and most holy God. His holy displeasure creates hell. His undeserved pleasure creates heaven. Jesus suffered (it was very real terribly real) every hell belonging to His beloved children, All their sins' just due. He suffered it all! Do allow me to say it friends, He drunk hell dry for His people, so that this could be proclaimed in the Word of God, 'With joy shall ye draw water from the wells of salvation.' Jesus had to drink hell dry before they could obtain the water of eternal life.

So we see that as Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and was tested, tried in all points like as we are, He triumphed, He stood, He was victorious. And sometimes we sing

*He who conquered for us once,
Will in us conquer too.*

As again we sing,

Our Captain is stronger than all that oppose.

Now let us connect this with the Lord's promise prophetically through His prophet Isaiah, "He shall send them a Saviour and a strong one." He needed to be a strong Saviour to save sinners. Sin possesses a terrible destroying strength. Have you ever mourned, and said, "My weak resistance, ah how vain; my sins how strong? Have you ever tremblingly feared before God, "Oh my sins must drag me to perdition yet? No, no, says Jesus, "Because I live ye shall live also*"

This leads me to my last thought. There is a glorious promise connected with this, "Sin shall not have dominion over you," Oh, you might say, but it does. Yes, I know, and, in what you mean and feel I agree, but the word there, "Sin shall not have dominion over you," means, not have destructive dominion over you. It may get you down again and again, it shall not destroy you. It may make you captive, if I might use a figure, like a prisoner of war who is overcome by the enemy, made a prisoner. But if he is a member of a nation and army that is superior in strength in due time he is released, That is exactly what the apostle speaks about when he said I find a law in my members warring against the law of my mind against the ruling power of the new kingdom of grace and bringing me into captivity, and the law of sin and death makes me a prisoner of war, and makes me feel so wretched to be thus captive bound, overcome. Is the situation hopeless? Oh no, wretched as it makes me feel, it poses this tremendous question, "Who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?" And it brings this glorious answer forth as we get a sight of Jesus, "Out of Zion shall come the Deliverer." It takes us back to those precious words often quoted "Because I live ye shall live also." Sin shall not have destructive dominion over you, though you may have your peace, joy, and comfort stolen from you, though the thief may make attacks upon you with temporary success, 'I am come that my sheep might have life and that they may have it more abundantly.' And more abundant life means eternal life, What a glorious conqueror we have, assuring this, as truly as it is recorded in Scripture, "Through Him we are more than conquerors.

*The weakest saint shall win the day
Be more then conqueror too.*

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." And, He suffered, being tempted, that He might succour those that are tempted." And I hope we have felt a little succour in considering this tremendous theme. There we leave it. Amen,