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

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

Matthew 4:1

Thus we are introduced to the profound subject of the temptation of Christ, and let us at the outset remember that there is no sin in being tempted. Jesus was tempted, very severely tempted, but He did no sin. Sin commences and proceeds when we 'enter into temptation.' So Jesus counsels watching. And in that sacred, solemn place, Gethsemane, He said, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." How wholesome and necessary is such counsel. What readiness there is in our fallen nature to comply with solicitation to evil and wickedness. What is wickedness? Everything contrary to God's revealed mind and will constitutes wickedness. What contrariness there is in us.

But in order that we may proceed in a clear way to consider this profound subject we will try as the Lord may help us to notice first why Jesus was tempted; and then, when He was tempted and further how He was tempted.

1) Why was Jesus tempted? Everything that Jesus did as the incarnate Son of the eternal Father He did in the interest of His beloved people every word, every act, every thought, every experience that was His was in order to effect their complete redemption. There was no redundancy in anything He did, or said, or was. All was vitally essential for the salvation of His beloved people. Well, the Holy Ghost tells us why He was tempted "He suffered being tempted that He might succour those that are tempted." Notice at this point – He suffered. Undergoing temptation was part of His voluntary sufferings. He suffered at close quarters the loathsome presence of the chief of those foul fiends of hell - the devil. Let us notice there is a personal devil, an evil spirit, the captain of the host of like-minded spirits. He has persuaded men and women today to believe he does not exist. It is quite common for people to say there is not a devil. What did Jesus grapple with then? a fantasy, a myth, just a circle of turbulent thoughts? Away with such nonsense, there is a personal devil, his person is tremendously mighty, solemnly real, he figured very largely in the experience of the dear Redeemer, and he figures very largely in the experience of every one of his children in some way or other, always much inferior in measure or manner to that in which he figured in the experience of the Saviour. He suffered in tolerating the loathsome presence of the devil it was a great trial. Let me illustrate to our young friends here. Some of you are blessed with the fear of the Lord, or if you are afraid to claim that, those of you who desire to fear the Lord. Do you not find it trying to have to make necessary contact with worldly people, worldly relatives, worldly neighbours? You find it trying, not because you are self-righteous, and consider yourself superior, but because wickedness without or within is always a trial to the principle of the fear of the Lord. How much more was it a trial for Jesus to suffer this loathsome presence. And lest His tempted people should be over disturbed by the little tiny fellowship with the Saviour that temptation brings them into, they are bidden to consider the Saviour who suffered such contradiction of sinners. As if to say terms are inadequate to fully describe and we can only say "Such contradiction of sinners against Himself."

Now consider that "lest ye be weary and faint in your minds." Every contact He made with human kind was contact with something that was repellent to Him, for every human contact was a contact with a sinner, by nature evil, only evil continually. That in itself was a great trial. At every turn, whatever contact He made with men there was sin confronting Him. And He never suffered contagion by contact. We do. There was nothing in Him that could be responsive to sin in others. There is quite a lot in us that is responsive. So "He suffered being tempted that He might succour His tempted people, as good John Kent said,

All to succour, every tempted, burdened son.

And we are informed there is great mystery in it, but we do not stay to inquire beyond the depth the Lord has given us the capacity to explore, but the Word says, "He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." What a comfort there is in this to His tempted people. There is comfort in remembering,

*He knows what sore temptation means,
for He has felt the same.*

And consequently He will never misunderstands you, I do not think there is any one of us who have reached mature life who have not justly, or otherwise, felt we were misunderstood. We do well, all of us, to remember there are two sides to all matters. And it is well to think the other side needs considering as well as our side, But Jesus knows all the sides of the matter, and He never misunderstands.

I think we have a very comforting and instructive warning example of woeful misunderstanding in the case of Hannah and you remember when she poured out her soul in the bitterest anguish that was squeezing it; of all men, Eli, God's priest, misunderstood her and he censured her wrongly, bade her put away the intoxicant she was thought to be under. She did not rise up in resentment and anger but she in effect said, 'You misunderstand me, I am not drunk - except drunk with trouble! reeling to and fro like a drunken man.' The Lord enabled him immediately to retract. And if we have made a mistake, it is greater one to refuse to acknowledge it when we realise it. And so I say the dear Redeemer never misunderstands.

Misunderstanding was Job's last ditch, naturally, speaking. His three well-meaning friends, who were by no means hasty - they spent a long period of silence considering and weighed up his case as they thought, then came to conclusions that were wrong because they had never been in like trouble and took up a wrong attitude. How we need the Psalmist's prayer, "Hold: Thou me up, and I shall be safe." And because they misunderstood they added sadly to his grief and affliction. And that was not the worst, his wife misunderstood him too. In effect she said, 'Job, this is what you get for your religion. Had you not better be done with it? Curse God and die! Make and end of it.' And that was the final thrust; the last straw! His comfort, in all this was, "He knoweth the way that I take and when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold." That was a great comfort to Job, as if to say, 'My God does not misunderstand, and He will not take up a wrong attitude consequently. He knows me better than I know myself, and He knows me not only now but in the beginning, and the conclusion of it.' What a mercy! So you can tell him without reserve whatever perplexes oppresses and squeezes you, and He never misunderstands. He understands even if you do not express yourself rightly. How much misunderstanding is due to unclear expression. But Jesus understands what vie

mean if we do not say it rightly, and He says, "Trust in Him at all times, ye people; pour out your heart before Him." Do not have any reserve, let it come out. What a privilege thus to be favoured, in everything, nothing is too trivial to let our request be made known unto God. Our young friends may remember this, the Lord began His work in me when I was young, when I was a boy at school I used to ask Him to help me do my sums, to get my arithmetic right, my dictation right, my composition right. I believe it is right to do that. There is nothing that should be considered to be too trivial, because we need Him in everything, natural and spiritual, from the cradle to the grave. Thus He suffered, that He might succour them that are tempted.

Then again, there is temptation in the sense in which it is here used meaning more than soliciting to evil, it means subjecting to vital tests to bring out the character, valuable character. To explain in certain parts of the industrial world, in the chemical and engineering world, things are subjected to severe stress and strain thus to find the reaction; and when the articles have been thus tried and tested, and, they come through well, then to demonstrate proof that the same are reliable. Now when Jesus was tempted, His absolute imperviousness to sin was demonstrated, tried, and proved to the utmost, gloriously proved more than equal to the test in every case. "Tempted like as we are, yet without sin." And this I think is a comfort, because He is proved thus resultantly to be the almighty Saviour, the master of the devil, and all the forces of hell, and hellish actions that can be employed against us.

Hence He proved what later He declared, "On this rock (the rock of my Deity) will I build my church the gates of hell and all that emanates from it, shall not prevail against it."

*Here is our point of rest,
Though hard the battle seem,
Our captain stood the fiery test,
And we shall stand through Him.*

And this assured complete victory is embraced in a word He spoke on the eve of His death "Because I live - despite hell, sin, and death doing its worst - ye shall live also." Glorious Captain, of our salvation: How endeared He is to us when we consider the glorious result of His suffering to be tempted. There is another aspect of this matter we would notice, the Holy Ghost through Mark's inspired pen, tells us, "The Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." Matthew in our text says He was led of the Spirit. That sounds strange, does it not? Led, driven, by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. What kind of driving power? What kind of leading power was operative? What is the strongest power in existence? Is it not love? There is nothing stronger than love in any realm of life. I believe it was His loving eagerness to meet His people's foe on the, very ground he had downed them, to destroy His people's destroyer. "For this purpose He was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." He had not to be dragged, He had not to be forced to meet the devil, He was all eagerness that He might fight the battle, and secure His people, and only love's driving power was equal to the occasion, as it was on Calvary. He said in these very sweet terms, "I have, a baptism to be baptised with." He meant, immersed with sorrow, not sprinkled, completely immersed in sorrow, and sighing, and groaning and dying. "How am straitened until it he accomplished." Full of eagerness, full of intense loving desire to undergo this great flood of suffering for his beloved. Love was the driving power. Now when we

read "The spirit driveth him into the wilderness" I think we can see some precious reason why he suffered being tempted that he might succour his tempted people with his full understanding of all their case that he might demonstrably prove Himself to be the mighty Saviour, the devil and hell's conqueror, for the beloved of His people that He might strengthen their hope of final victory because of His victory.

Now we will try and consider when he was tempted. Our text says "Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." When? immediately after his baptism. We will just tarry a moment and consider the blessed baptism of Jesus. He took a special journey that he might submit to this beautiful ordinance and in doing so He said, it is comely, "Thus it becometh us." It was not a mere option; He bids those who love Him to do it. It is comely obedience; a comely ordinance. And notice the force of the little word 'us.' "Thus it becometh us." He did not say 'It becometh me' more than that - it becometh us. Which means 'I for you, you in union with Me as your surety, your propitiation, your high priest. I am determined to identify myself with you as your Surety. I have come to be under God's holy law and becoming your Surety thus to identify Myself with you. So in love I bid you identify yourself with me in faith's obedience and submission.' That I say is the significance of the word 'us.' "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

What was the paramount feature in the Saviours baptism? Was it not the acknowledgement of Him by the Father as being His well beloved Son? "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." What was the result? The heavens were opened to Him, and in visible symbolic form, He saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descending on Him. So He was initiated into His public ministry. It meant all the grace, and gracious activity of the Holy Spirit unreservedly was to come from the Father and an open heaven: and through Him, the glorious head, to the church, securing every gracious member. And remember when He thus rendered comely obedience He was the Son of God incarnate and it was upon His incarnate person the Spirit descended like a dove, and to His incarnate person the heavens were opened, signifying in due time He would go into heaven as the head of the church, and every member in due time must follow Him. So we have these words, "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus." It was then Jesus was tempted. And this brings up for our instruction and comfort, that, wherever God is graciously busy the devil is maliciously busy, and that quickly follows closely the work of God. The devil is not omnipotent, he is very knowledgeable, and is adept at intelligent guessing. He has had thousands of years to observe mankind, and their character, and knows they are always true to type as fallen sinners. What he does not know of them is almost negligible, he is knowledgeable but not omniscient, and he does not know what will happen tomorrow. God does. Satan is a sworn enemy to God, and is out as far as possible destroy and annul God's work. "The thief cometh not but to kill and to destroy." This is his object in coming to those who are Christ's sheep. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

And so we find this close evil observer of God's dealings quickly at work in Eden's garden. God's human creatures were but a little time enthroned in original innocence, when along comes the tempter questioning, and saying, "Yea, hath God said?" Don't read too much into what those words suggest, after all, can it be right, can it be kind of God, to so forbid you? Then the conflict began between God's truth and the devil's lie, I need not tell you the issue of that, you know it. The devil's

lies delude every sinner, and make them Satan's dupes. I should not have done so well as Adam did, I should have done worse, I know.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil," So if God blesses you with a little gracious hope, expect it to be challenged, and that quickly. And if, it is not challenged, you may well doubt its divine origin. The word of the Lord is tried, Why? That it might be purged from the thought of creature help, and creature glory, and creature wisdom. The word of the Lord is tried and purified like silver: precious metals: purified in a furnace of earth seven times.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." So I say again, if the Lord has granted you a little gracious unction, a little gracious communion, gracious help, be on the lookout for the tempter, he is waiting in the shadows, he will probably trip you up before you are aware unless the Lord gives you grace to watch and pray. I know it. And when he strips you, you have lost the comfort and peace and joy that come with it, and brought guilt and misery and sadness into your soul. How much we need grace to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation.

Now we will consider a little how he was tempted. First we would notice the comparative advantage possessed by the devil when Jesus suffered being tempted. When Satan tempted the first Adam he was surrounded with the best possible environment, comfort, and security, enjoying the favour and blessing of God, heavenly communion with and from God. Jesus was in a waste howling wilderness surrounded with wild beasts, and he was human, with true human susceptibility. This seemed to be an advantage to Satan, especially after his wily observations; he noticed that Jesus was very hungry. He had fasted forty days and forty nights and afterwards He was an hungered. Then the tempter came along. Hunger is a natural urge to gratify a lawful vital need. Satan then gave this need a subtle twist. 'Act upon your own initiative, do not seek from your Father to know if it is right at this time to provide bread for your hungry body.' A very subtle temptation. Child of God, do not be led to act on your own initiative in anything, you will be wrong if you do. °In everything by prayer and supplication let your request be made known unto God. Travel or your knees, my friends, you will the travel securely, safely, wisely and best. We are not strangers to this temptation in a sense, you know when you come home tired from your labours, and it service night, perhaps you have had a hard day, very harassed, it is not a nice night, cold winds, then it is a distance for you to travel, some of it uphill perhaps so you had better stay at home just for once. And if there is a first time there will soon be a second time. Then in the home perhaps, 'Just leave out prayer for once.' And if for once the second will soon follow. Thomas was absent on one occasion, he missed something, didn't he? We do not read the Bible too much; we do not read it enough. I am not forgetting there may be lawful absence.

"Commend that these stones be made bread." There was also another subtle challenging thrust. Look at the If; If; if. The richest, felicity of the co-equal Son of God is the fact that He is the beloved Son of the Father, a felicitous ineffable delight. Coming to lower levels, is there anything more precious to a saint of God than son-ship, the relationship as a son of daughter of the Most High? And is there anything more tormenting than to suggest he is not a child of God? And to have this called into question gives him more pain than anything else, does it not? I think the lady of noble birth expressed this thought in these lines,

*Can I bear the piercing thought,
What if my name should be left out,
when Thou for them shalt call?*

Is it not a piercing thought to you, friends? There could not be a greater calamity befall a poor sinner than to be disowned of God, and not a greater honour then to be owned by Him. It must be the one or the other, either, "Come ye blessed, eternally blessed, of My Father in settled covenant arrangements, "Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world." Or the dreadful alternative, "Depart ye cursed. You are not Mine." Oh, I do understand good Dr Watts in one of our hymns, when he seems almost to think it too good to be true,

*Then will He own my worthless name
Before His Father's face,
And in the New Jerusalem,
Appoint my soul a place.*

Wonder of wonders; Mercy of mercies; favour of favours, because this must be of the Lord's giving. The devil challenges it, brings it into question.

"If Thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread." I believe that one of the most keen observers in that solemn sweet proclamation at the baptism of Christ on earth was the devil; he heard the voices he had seen the heavens opened, the Father's testimony is what he attacked. And he thrusts thus with bold cunning, vile, crooked wisdom "If Thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread."

The time is gone, I must leave it this morning! Amen.