

LIVING WITH TEMPTATION - PART 2

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Matt.4:1-11; Heb.4:14-16

Out of the vast treasury of folk lore comes the story of a hunter who went out to shoot a bear so he could use the hide for a new fur coat. As he trudged along through the forest, he rounded a corner in the path and came face to face with a giant bear. As he raised his rifle to take aim, the bear said, *Mr. Hunter, why do you want to shoot me?* The hunter replied, *I want your skin for a fur coat.* The bear thought quickly and said, *Well, before you pull the trigger, let's sit down and talk this over. You see, while you're out looking for a fur coat, I'm out looking for my dinner. Let's go over to my den and see if we can't come to some compromise.* So, the hunter followed the bear into his den. After a brief interlude, which was punctuated with the sounds of a violent struggle, the bear emerged from his den. As he stood there picking his teeth, he announced that he and the hunter had indeed reached a compromise. *I had my dinner and the hunter has his new fur coat.* The trouble with that kind of compromise is that the hunter lost his identity. He got what he wanted, but he paid too great a price. And that is always the case when we submit to temptation.

By conforming to the pressures of the world, we place ourselves in jeopardy. Through compromise with principle we lose our Christian identity and when that happens, our usefulness to God and everybody else is immeasurably reduced. Last week, we only had time to lay the ground work for our theme on *Living With Temptation*. You will remember that we discussed four rather general aspects of temptation.

Temptation: Not Evil in Itself

The first of these was that there is nothing evil about temptation per se. It is a universal fact of life. An experience common to all of us. Therefore you need not be distressed because you are constantly beset with desires and feelings, thoughts and urges, which run at cross grains with everything you know to be right and true.

This is one of the hazards of belonging to the human race and evil lies, not in temptation, but in yielding to temptation. For, as the old gospel hymn succinctly says: *A Yielding is sin.*@

Closeness to God Makes Us a Favorite Target of Temptation

Secondly, we saw how the closer one walks with God the more subtle and vicious temptation becomes. It seems to be one of the laws of life that we are most susceptible to a great defeat immediately after we have won a great victory.

That was true in the case of Elijah, who singlehandedly routed the false prophets of Baal and turned the whole course of Hebrew history back to God. And yet, within a few hours of that stupendous conquest, we find Elijah quaking with fear beneath a Juniper treeCshaking with frightCsimply because Jezebel had hurled a few hollow threats at him.

It was also true in the life of Jesus, as we saw last week. It was immediately after his baptismC
after His honoring as the Son of God by a voice out of heaven,
after forty days alone with God in the wilderness,
after those moments of great victoryC
it was then that he was sorely tempted.

The closer one lives to GodCthe more sincere his or her attempts to measure up to the challenges of the Christian lifeCthe more vicious and subtle become satan attacks.

The Nature of Temptation

Then we spent some time developing the basic nature of temptation. We saw that it is ever and always the same:

The suggestion that we do the right thing in the wrong way.

This was illustrated by the experience of Jesus in the wilderness. In each case, the appeal of satan was that Jesus do a perfectly normal, natural, even healthy thing. Satisfy His hunger. Trust in God. Worship. All of these are normal and goodCbut the temptation was that Jesus

do the right thing in the wrong way.

Hunger

He was asked to satisfy His hunger by turning the stones into bread. It was an act which would have divorced Him completely from all other people for, as we pointed out last week, a normal, red-blooded human being cannot work a miracle every time he or she faces a moment of desperation.

And Jesus was perfectly normal! The power of the incarnation lay in the fact that God had clothed Himself in human flesh so He could deal *with* human beings *as a human being on the level of* human beings. But the temptation of satan was that Jesus repudiate that humanity and presume upon His power as the Son of God to gratify His hunger. He was asked to do the right thing in the wrong way.

Trust God

The second temptation was that He prove His trust in God by doing something spectacular. But again, as we showed last week, the only time we experiment with someone is when we do *not* trust them. It is then we put them to a test to see how far they can be trusted. For Jesus to so test God would have not proved His trust, but rather the opposite, his lack of trust.

Worship

In the third case Jesus was asked to worship. A good and needful thing. But instead of worshiping God, He was asked to worship satan, an act which is the very essence of sin itself.

So, by examining the temptations of Jesus, we discover the true nature of temptation which is always the same: do the right thing in the wrong way.

Christians Must Live With Temptation

Fourth, we came face to face with the fact that, as Christians, we cannot escape from this world

of temptation. Nor are we in any way immune from the vicious and subtle attacks of satan. But to be *in* the world does not mean we must be *of* the world.

It is perfectly natural for a boat to be in the water. But when the water gets into the boat, it can lead to disaster. The secret of victorious living lies not in adopting a life of monasticismCtotal withdrawal from the worldCbut in following the example of our Lord who lived *with* temptation. Who faced it squarely and thereby conquered it.

All of this is by way of introduction and leads us to this morning=s question:

How did Jesus conquer satan? What was His secret for victorious living?

Actually, it is sublimely simple. First of all, as soon as satan reared his ugly head in the form of temptation,

Jesus Quickly Moved from the Defense to the Offense.

He knew that it is always fatal to try to be neutral on the question of sin, and so He immediately went on the attack. He quickly challenged the premise of each of the devils arguments.

Hunger

Regarding the first temptation, in essence, He said:

AYou are supposing that all man needs for survival is food for his body, but that just isn=t so. <Man does not live by bread alone=, he needs more. He must have food for his soul as well.@

Trust In God

In the case of the second temptation, that He prove His trust in God by hurling Himself from the pinnacle of the temple to see if God would send angels to catch Him, Jesus said something like this:

AThat would not be *trusting* God, but *tempting* God. The premise of your argument is false, satan.@

Worship

When the tempter sought to trick Him with the third temptation by promising:

AWorship me and I will give you everything you came into the world to gain@,

Jesus quickly reminded satan that to worship is to serve. That He could not pay homage to evil and then hope to defeat evil.

The Best Defense Is An Offense

Instead of cautiously trying to ride the fence, Jesus proved the validity of the old adage that *the best defense is an offense.*@ As each temptation was presented, He swiftly mounted a counter-attack.

When I was a boy in junior high school, I remembered one of my chums who was considerably smaller than the rest of us. But all the other boys had a healthy respect for his two fists. One day I asked him how he happened to come out so well in the few fights in which he had been engaged. His answer went something like this:

AI hate to fight and I do my best to steer clear of one. But when it looks like I just can't avoid it, I don't waste any time fooling around. I pick out a spot like the end of the nose and let fly! I put everything I have into that first punch and then I keep goin-like sixty! Before the other guy has a chance to get started, I usually have him licked. But the suddenness of my attack lets him know that I really mean business.@

Since then, I've often thought that technique would work wonders in our moral conflicts. Because all things being equal, a fast start is a big advantage. If temptation arises, the best way to overcome it is to resist it promptly and decisively. That is precisely what our Lord did in His warfare with satan. At the very moment the temptation came, He moved from defense to offensive.

The second ingredient in Jesus= formula for a victorious life is found in the fact that

He Fortified Himself With An Effective Counter-Attraction.

In Greek mythology there is the story of the Argonauts who sailed with Jason in search of the Golden Fleece. In the course of their journey, they had to sail past the Island of the Sirens. According to the myth, the strains of music which came from the island where so bewitching the sailors were often seized with such desire they threw themselves into the sea and swan to the sirens, an act which always led to certain and speedy death.

So Jason decided to take a counter-attraction on board with them. He selected Orpheus, whose music was said to be so beautiful it entranced the very beasts of the forest and made even the trees to wave before him in homage, to accompany them.

Each time they passed the island and the sirens began to play their soft, bewitching music, Orpheus would strike up the wondrous notes of his lyre. He filled the air with such sweet melodies the sailors on the boat could only laugh and scorn at the sirens.

Now, I'm quick to acknowledge the story is a myth. But there is nothing mythological about the conquest of Jesus over satan. It was real! One reason is that He fortified Himself with a counter-attraction. In fact, if you look at the story, you'll see that He employed two of them: The word of God and the will of God.

The Word of God

Three times He was tempted and three times we hear Him respond: Alt is written.@ His first weapon was the sword of the Lord and He handled it with perfect mastery.

We know very little of what transpired during the thirty years between His birth and the beginning of His public ministry. But it's perfectly obvious from these three instances that He had spent many hours pouring over the Old Testament scriptures. Filling His heart and mind

with them. Perfecting His Awordsmanship@ so that, in the hour of crisis, He could handle His weapon deftly. When the siren call of sin began to whisper in His ear, He was fortified with an effective counter-attraction: The word of God.

That's one reason I'm so thrilled that a number of our young people have begun a program of scripture memorization. They are writing God's word upon their hearts. They are building up ammunition against the day of their temptation.

The same is true with the wonderful program of learning Bible verses coming out of our Sunday School. From the nursery on up, our children are taught scripture verses which will help prepare them for a victorious life.

But the value of this program is not limited to children and young people, we adults need it, too. Some of our very newest members have undertaken correspondence courses in Bible study. They want to know what God's word has to say for them in a day like this. The response of our people to our Wednesday evening Bible studies has been gratifying evidence that more and more of you are concerned with fortifying yourselves with a counter-attraction against the temptations of the world.

I got a chuckle out of the story told about the old country boy who was widely known for his rebellious ways. He rarely attended church, but one day he showed up unexpectedly. The preacher was quite surprised and he said, AWhat brings y'all here? Has you given up the ways of the devil?@ ANot ~~zakely~~,@ was the reply, Abut I got me a job white-washing a chicken house and fencin= in a watermelon field and I needs strengthenin!=!@

Well, if we're honest with ourselves, we will all admit that we need Astrengthenin=@. The harder we try to live as we know our Lord would have us live, the more aware we become of our need of Astrengthenin=@. How wise we would be if we followed the example of Jesus in learning to use God's word so that in our hour of temptation we could say with the psalmist:

¶Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against
Thee.®

The Will of God

The second half of our Savior's counter-attraction was the will of God. One of our big problems today is that we have so many standards of morality. When it comes to deciding what is right or wrong in a given situation, we are more often moved by *expediency*® than principle. A good deal of the mental turmoil which harasses our minds today is due to the fact that we are trying to live by a thousand different principles and *that* kind of moral complexity can only lead to mental confusion.

Jesus had but one principle: The Will of God. *That* was the basis of every decision He ever made. When He faced temptation, He never asked, ¶Is this expedient?® But rather, ¶What will this action do to the will of God for Me?® Jesus went through life with the word of God in one hand and the will of God in the other. As a result, the siren call of Satan fell upon deaf ears. He was fortified with a powerful counter-attraction. The final element in Christ's formula for victorious living is found in

His Constant Communion with the Heavenly Father.

One of the most thought-provoking aspects of the life of Jesus is the fact that He never once lost sight of His utter dependance upon God for strength and guidance. Again and again He told His disciples that it was not He who did the miracles, performed the healings, spoke wise words of truth, but rather His heavenly Father who was working in and through Him.

The astounding part of all this is that here was the perfect human. Here was the one person to ever walk the ways of this world of whom it could be said: ¶He is altogether lovely.® The searchlights of scientific investigation have been placed upon Him for long centuries and yet they have never found one suggestion of sin, one idle word, one selfish act. And yet the only perfect person who ever lived was quick to acknowledge His total and utter dependance upon God.

The one truly integrated personality the world has ever knownCthe one person who really possessed the wisdom and grace to live the abundant lifeCthe one figure in history who had what it took to live *without* God was the very one who so plainly admitted His desperate need *of* God. Do you suppose that=s why He was the perfect human being?

Jesus had His regular, stated times of prayer. Mark tells us that:

AWhile there was yet a great while before day, He arose and went out into the country to pray.@

Time after time we found Him in the temple on the Sabbath Aas was His custom@.

Again and again we see Him in the wilderness or in a garden or in some upper room holding rendezvous with God.

Everyone ought to have regular, stated times of prayer. There is something to be gained through the discipline of spending one-half an hour each day in prayer and meditation which cannot be received in any other way.

In addition to those stated times of prayer, Jesus lived a life of continual fellowship with God.

He was in constant communion with His Heavenly Father.

Whether trudging down the dusty roads of Old Jerusalem, or

standing on the temple stairs, or

visiting in the home of friends, or

chatting with a sinner who came seeking the way of salvation, or

standing at the grave side of a beloved friendC

it didn=t matter where or whenCJesus was utterly at home with God.

That=s why the tempter=s power could not molest Him. That=s why He could pillow His head and sleep when the little ship upon which He sailed with His disciples was tossed about by a violent storm. That=s why He could inflame the hearts and nerve the arms of His poor, bewildered followers so that, in the end, they too could face tribulation and temptation and do so

victoriously.

Oh, my friend, if you would know the sheer delight of the victorious life Cif you would be a conqueror over the temptations that assail you Cthen you must follow the example of your Savior.

Through continual prayer and worship you must commune with God. And, by becoming more and more aware of Him and His high claim on your life, you ll become less and less susceptible to the low persuasions of the enemy. You will find shelter in the time of storm.

There is a wealth of wisdom in the last verse of our text. For after we are told that we have in Christ a High Priest who understands the fierceness of our temptations, because He, too, has faced them, there comes this great exhortation:

A Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. @

I like the way one of the new translations puts it: A Grace to help in the nick of time. @ Just what we need, when and where we need it.

And how does that help come? By drawing near with boldness to the throne of God.

Not waiting until Sunday to send your petition heavenward on wings of prayer.

Not by postponing your cry for help until some theoretically perfect moment when you can enter your closet and pray.

Not by depending upon the pastor or some other person to do your praying for you.

But rather, to pray wherever you are.

At school.

At home.

On city streets.

In business conferences.

With the flaming temptation in front of you and the jabbing darts of satan behind you^Cthen and there^Cin the moment of need turn to the Christ within you with a cry for help. And even as you frame your prayer, there will come A^{grace to help in the nick of time.}@

What is the secret to the victorious life?

First of all, at the moment temptation comes, move from defense to offense. Do not try to be neutral with sin. That always leads to defeat. Instead, immediately mount an attack.

Second, fortify yourself with a counter-attraction. Fill your mind with the word of God and measure every act and thought by what you know to be the will of God.

Third, constantly strengthen your defenses by living in close communion with the Loving Father. In the beauty of His holiness, you will become desperately aware of the sinfulness of sin and you will realize that hell is not nearly so nice as the road that leads to it!

Remember, my friend, as a Christian you are not immune from the temptations of life. As a matter of fact, you are one of satan=s favorite targets. But the secret of Living *With* Temptation is to do as Jesus did. Never losing sight of the simple truth that the weakest person who leans wholly upon God is mightier than the strongest person who stands alone.

Join me, please, in the little prayer we prayed last week:

AMake me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free;
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life=s alarms
When by myself I stand;
Imprison me within thine arms,
And strong shall be my hand.@