

The Temptation of Christ

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon explores the temptation of Christ as a model for overcoming sin and living in obedience to God's will.

Scripture: Matthew 4:1

Topics: "Obedience to God", "Temptation"

Description

John Nelson Darby discusses 'The Temptation of Christ,' emphasizing how Jesus' experience in the wilderness serves as a model for overcoming temptation and living in obedience to God. He highlights the significance of Christ's identity as the Son of God and how this relationship shapes our conduct as Christians. Darby contrasts the obedience of Christ with Adam's failure, illustrating that true obedience stems from a heart aligned with God's will rather than self-will. He encourages believers to recognize their position as sons of God and to rely on Scripture as the source of strength in resisting temptation. Ultimately, Darby reassures that through Christ's victory, believers are empowered to overcome the strong man, Satan, and live in the grace of their redeemed identity.

Transcript

{Christian Friend 1888, pages 57-64.}

I desire to speak to-night of the practical bearing of these verses, and also of the grace of the Lord in it all: how man in Him is brought into this place with God; and it is the model of our place, as we get in the previous chapter where the heavens are opened, the Holy Ghost descends on Him, and the voice comes, "This is my beloved Son." What is remarkable in it is, that where He brings out the model of the place into which He brings us, there is the first revelation of the Trinity. It is in the blessed Lord becoming a man that we have the full revelation of all truth. Redemption alone could bring us into this place. What characterizes Christianity is the revelation of the Godhead - sovereign grace of course. In virtue of the Lord Jesus Christ becoming a man, comes this revelation, and that gives the place He brings us into by redemption. In the first part I read, the other side of our place comes out; that is, the conflict with Satan down here on the earth; but the conflict does not begin till He gets the place of Son. We must distinguish between slavery to Satan and conflict with Satan. The saint is never in slavery, and the sinner is never in conflict. Here the Lord is binding the strong man; now he is bound, so that if any man resists him he will flee; but at the same time we have to pass through temptations and difficulties, and here He gives us the model of how we can overcome.

We get first the place to which we are brought by redemption; that is, as regards our relationship to God. We are now servants of God, and obedience is our path. Adam ought to have obeyed; everything was blessing around him; there was one test of his obedience, and he failed. Supposing a man is brought to this place by redemption, there is still the disposition to do His own will; temptation is there, and then comes the exercise of heart about this obedience in the relationship of sons with God. In this place of sons - Christ's place - sealed by the Holy Spirit, the place that was His by right and title, I have everything to learn, but the relationship is settled. I have to learn and to judge what is in me; but I have now God's will as the source of all my conduct, not the rule only, and there is a real difference.

The flesh never has God's will as the source of its conduct; it may be checked and stopped by it, as the rule. A person may have a will of his own, and the Lord may stop it; it is checked; but that was never the way with Christ. His Father's will was the origin and source of all He did. We have to be stopped sometimes, but that is not Christian obedience. Christian obedience is the will of God being the motive. The Christian starts in the place of a son, and the question comes, How he, being a man, can be consistent with this relationship? and there exercise of heart comes in.

We have to notice, and it is exceedingly sweet, how completely the Lord takes this place with us, how He takes us into His place with Himself as sons, and then comes to our condition and circumstances - sinlessly, of course - and to the conflict. We are often led by the flesh, but He was led of the Spirit, just as He tasted death by the grace of God, and we by sin. But it is a wonderful testimony to the grace of the Lord, how He is interested in us and has taken up our cause. On the cross He was alone; in all the rest He takes us into His place, or else comes into ours. "We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (rather, sin apart). He can give intelligent service, because He has gone through it, and His perfectness came out in it. Mark how thoroughly He came into our circumstances, not sin. When Adam was tempted, he was in the enjoyment of all the blessings God had given him, and he laid it all aside for a bit of self-will. He lost confidence in God; and if I have not confidence in God to make me happy, I must make myself happy. The will comes in, then lust, and then transgression. Men do not trust God's will for their happiness and blessing, and that is the principle of all sin.

Christians fail in it often, and the exercises we get are to lead us into it. Here Christ is where everything is to try a man - forty days without food, with the wild beasts, in every respect the opposite of paradise. Then mark, as everything hung on Adam's obedience (if he failed everything was gone), so here everything hung on Christ's obedience. He could not fail; but if He did fail in that desert spot - passing His time with Satan, so to speak - everything was lost to man. The trial was to be made, and He must overcome. Adam failed in spite of every blessing; Christ comes in grace and overcomes. Then He is hungry; there is no sin in that. God has put hunger into our natures as an intimation when to eat. Then Satan comes (v. 3) and says, "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Satan takes the ground of His being Son, he does not call that in question; nor does he with the Christian: when he raises that question we have not settled our affairs with God. The place revealed to us is that of sons; redemption has taken us out of the old place and put us into that of sons. The question is what God thinks, not what we think. And God has made us sons. Then it is a question of conduct in the relationship, not of responsibility as to my state. I cannot be a naughty child unless I am a child; and the temptation of Satan here is founded on Christ being a Son.

Note that the snare and temptation and difficulty is how to walk down here in this relationship. See if your souls stand in faith in this place with God. It is the place of every Christian. It is another thing to be in the

consciousness of it. Satan assumes it here, and says, "Command that these stones be made bread." It is a subtle thing; he does not show himself out as Satan. There is no sin in being hungry, and the Lord could turn the stones to bread. It is a wile of Satan; he comes with that which is "no harm." But it IS harm if it is my own will; for I am to eat and drink and do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. If I am doing it merely because it is my own will, it is harm; but the Lord keeps the consciousness of His place as a servant. The devil uses the testimony of His being a Son (chap. 3:17) to get Him out of the place of a servant; but He had come to obey, and to do whatsoever His Father commanded, and He says, as it were, "It is not my Father's will to make these stones bread." The perfection of His place makes the will useless. It is not a long chain of reasoning, but if I, with the consciousness of being a son, keep in the place of a servant, Satan can do nothing. The whole thing was to get Him to do His own will, and that is the whole principle of sin. Having left God, we do our own will. What meets Satan completely is, that I am a servant, and servants are not to command, but to obey. I have no word from God, and therefore I don't do it. What is remarkable is, the Lord says at once, "It is written." That word of Scripture, a single text, is enough for the Lord, and for the devil. Satan has nothing to say; he is dumb, and does not attempt to take up the question. The spring and power of life come in: we are begotten by the Word, and we live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Satan must either drop his will and show himself Satan, or hold his tongue, and he was not ready to show himself. The Lord is in the place of a son, and does not go out of that of a servant. He does what He is bid, and till the word is there, there is nothing to do; and that is living by it. He says, "I have no word from God about it." That is the character of Christian obedience; not a rule that checks the will, but the word of God producing it. Do you not like to do your own will in little tiny things, that are "no harm," as we speak? God has taken up this life we live in the flesh, and He has a will for us all the way along. In the wilderness, where there is no way, there is a way - a divine way - that the vulture's eye hath not seen; but the simplest believer that follows God's word has this way, and lives by it. The word of God is that by which we live in active positive life.

Satan drops that and takes up another thing - "Cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee," &c. (v. 6) It would have been His own will if Christ had done it. Satan takes up scripture, and says, "It is written," to make Him do His own will. But He says, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." People abuse this often; they use it as the very opposite of what it is. When people talk of "tempting God," they mean trusting Him too much. Satan says, "Throw yourself down, to see if God will be as good as His word." "I have no need to throw myself down. I know He will do it when the time comes. Of course His word will be fulfilled. Why am I to see if it will be?"

In obedience there is perfect confidence in God; no uncertainty as to whether God will be as good as His word, but perfect obedience and entire and absolute confidence. I don't act to try if God will be as good as His word; but when the time comes, I have entire courage to obey. If I die, I go to heaven. So much the better. But we know little of that - being martyrs, I mean. If you see some sacrifice before you, this or that to give up, there ought to be such confidence in God that you obey without the smallest question. He makes all things work together for our good. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him. Whatever comes, I have entire confidence in the Lord's faithful love, and courage to do His will. What matter if the cities are walled up to heaven, if they fall at the blowing of a ram's horn? No matter what comes, it comes from the Lord for our good. He puts us in the wilderness to exercise us on these points; but I start with His will for the source of my conduct, and I need not hesitate, having absolute obedience and confidence in God.

Satan has no more to say. His wiles are done; and then he shows himself, and asks the Lord to take the world. (vv. 8, 9) He likewise presents the world to us, and says, "If you will follow me, the prince of it, you will get riches and honour and position." But everything is Christ's, and everything is ours - "Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Satan wants me to take it from him in this way, by my lusts, as something the flesh desires here; but "all things are ours: life, death, things present, things to come," &c. Then the Lord (v. 10) addresses him as Satan, and sends him off. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." He knows flesh does not resist him; it is Christ, and he is off.

If you find something that has a claw in your heart, and you cannot tear it out, it tears your flesh too much, you cry to the Lord, and it is gone. It is positive deliverance from another, not progress. In cases where some certain thing has power over the mind, it is not you, you hate it, and you cry to the Lord, and find it gone. Christ has bound the strong man. Could you say in all you have set about and done to-day, it was the will of God set you about it? There is weakness and infirmity in us; but when we get our eye fixed on Christ, all is joy and blessedness in Him.

Satan leaves the Lord, and angels come and minister to Him. (v. 11) There was all the host of heaven serving Him, and so they are serving us: "Ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation;" ministering to us in every way that it is God's will they should minister. We have to overcome; but there is the blessedness of this host - He directing - to help and strengthen us in the path.

It is a great thing to get the consciousness of the place we are in. Being in it, we are set to make our way through the world as befits sons in it. We have to learn not to have a will here and a will there, and we are exercised and tried - and meant to be. The things that Satan ensnares the world with offend the new nature. I would just ask, Are you prepared to take the word of God as that by which you are to live every moment? Content in your heart to say, Whatever pleases God is for me? Are you willing? I don't ask if you do it. If you are not willing, you want deliverance from that which is between your heart and Christ being every thing to you. We are redeemed out of the power of the strong man, and if we resist, we keep him out. The Lord give us to see the grace of His giving us this place, and the way He showed how the heart is to be exercised in passing through this world. The time is coming when we shall find that every thing, where He has not been, has been folly and wretchedness!

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