

(New Wine in New Wineskins) 7. Jesus - Tempted as We Are

by Zac Poonen

Jesus' life on earth was a demonstration of His deity, and His temptation and obedience serve as an example for us to follow in our own struggles against sin.

Scripture: Matthew 4:1

Topics: "Victory in Christ", "Temptation"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the dual nature of Jesus as both fully God and fully man, highlighting that He accepted worship and forgave sins, proving His divinity. He explains that Jesus, while on earth, emptied Himself of certain privileges, including the inability to be tempted, to serve as our example in overcoming temptation. Poonen encourages believers to view temptation as a battle that can be won through faithfulness and reliance on the Holy Spirit, rather than succumbing to sin. He stresses that Jesus faced every temptation and emerged victorious, providing a model for us to follow in our spiritual journey. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep commitment to purity and obedience, assuring that through Christ, we can achieve victory over sin.

Transcript

In His Person, Jesus was still God when He lived on earth in the flesh - for God can never cease to be God. The clearest proof of Jesus' Deity in the days of His flesh, is seen in the fact that He received worship. Seven times in the gospels we are told that He accepted the worship that men offered Him (Matthew 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; Mark 5:6; John 9:38). Angels and God-fearing men do not accept worship (Acts 10:25, 26; Revelation 22:8, 9). But Jesus did - because He was God.

Jesus also forgave people's sins on His own authority (Mark 2:10). That is yet another proof that He was God even during the days when He lived on earth.

But at the same time, we are told that Jesus "emptied Himself" when he came to earth (Philippians 2:5). What did He empty Himself of? Not of His Deity (as we have just seen) but of the privileges he had as God. One of the privileges that He emptied Himself of was the privilege of not being tempted.

God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). But Jesus allowed Himself to be tempted (Matthew 4:1-11).

He allowed Himself to be tempted in order to be an Example to us as to how to overcome when we are tempted. The secret of living a godly life lies in seeing Jesus as One Who was tempted in every way as we are and yet Who never sinned even once in thought, word, deed, attitude, motive, or in any other way (See 1 Timothy 3:16 & Hebrews 4:15).

Since it is only those who have come to a godly life who can live together without strife as one body in Christ, we could go one step further and say that a local church can be the expression of Christ's body only where believers have seen our Lord Jesus in this way. This is the truth of which the church is to be the pillar and support (1 Timothy 3:15, 16).

Temptation is not the same as sin. James 1:14, 15 makes that clear. Our mind has to agree with the temptation before we sin. It is clear from Matthew 4 that Jesus was tempted. But His mind never agreed with any temptation even once. Thus He never sinned. He kept His heart pure.

Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit. He did not have the 'old man' that we were born with. We have sinful flesh, whereas Jesus did not have sinful flesh. He came only "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). But the Bible teaches that our Lord "was tempted in all points as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). We do not have to analyse this, even as we do not analyse the mystery of God becoming Man. We only have to believe it. At every point, in every temptation, Jesus obeyed His Father, unlike Adam.

God's Word says about Jesus,

He learned obedience and was made complete" (Hebrews 5:7-9).

The word "learned" is a word that relates to education. So what this verse is saying is that Jesus received an education in obedience as a Man. In each situation, He obeyed His Father and thus completed His education as a Man. Thus He became a Forerunner for us, so that we too can follow in His footsteps, overcoming temptation and obeying God (Hebrews 6:20).

Our Lord can sympathise with us in our struggles against temptation, because He too was tempted like us (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15; 12:2-4).

The purity of Jesus as a Man was not something that He received on a platter, but one that was acquired through battle. But those battles were not endless ones. Every temptation was conquered - one after another. Thus, over the period of His lifetime, He faced every single temptation that we are tempted by - and overcame.

All of us have lived in sin for many years, and our sinful flesh can be likened to a box full of poisonous snakes that have been well-fed - by us!! The names of these snakes are impurity, anger, malice, strife, bitterness, love of money, selfishness, pride, etc. This box has an opening at the top from which these snakes put out their head whenever we are tempted. We have fed these snakes in plenty during our unconverted days. As a result, they are well-fed, healthy and strong. Some snakes have been fed more than others, and so those lusts have a greater grip on us than others.

Now that we have died with Christ to sin, even though these snakes are still hale and hearty, our attitude to these snakes has changed! We have now been made partakers of the Divine nature and "those who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its lusts" (Galatians 5:24). Unlike in the old days, now, when a snake puts its head out of the opening of the box (when we are tempted), we hit it on the head with a stick. It goes back into the box. When we are tempted again, the snake puts its head out again, and we hit

it again. Gradually it gets weaker and weaker. If we are faithful in each temptation to hit the snake instead of feeding it, then we will soon find the pull of temptation weakening. The flesh cannot be 'shot' or 'hanged' in a moment. It can only be crucified. Crucifixion is a slow death, but it is a certain one. That is why we consider it all joy, when we are tempted (James 1:2) - because it gives us the opportunity to hit the snakes and weaken them. This would not have been possible otherwise.

Consider the matter of dirty thoughts. If we are faithful in this area, we will find that death enters in after a while. This may take some years, if in our unconverted days, we have fed this snake for many years. But death will surely come if we are faithful. One result will be that our dreams will become purer too. Dirty dreams will become more and more of a rarity. If however dirty dreams increase in their frequency, that would indicate that we are becoming unfaithful in our thought-life once again. This is a good test by which we can gauge our faithfulness in our thought-life. Dirty dreams are unconscious sins, and so we need not feel guilty about them (Romans 7:25; 8:1). 1 John 1:7 tells us that the blood of Jesus cleanses us automatically from all such sin, if we walk in the light.

Utter faithfulness will bring total victory. But utter faithfulness in the sexual area, for example, involves our not even admiring a good-looking face (in the opposite sex), even when no sexual thoughts are connected with such admiration. This is the faithfulness that Proverbs 6:25 ("Do not desire her beauty") calls us to. It is because very few are faithful in this area that very few come to purity in their dreams.

The subconscious part of us is affected a great deal by what we consciously think about during our waking moments - not by temptations that are flashed into our mind, but by our reactions to those temptations. If our subconscious part gets the message that we hate sin even in our thoughts and attitudes and that we are living before God's face, then it will 'fall in line' with our desire for purity (See Psalms 51:6). The important question therefore is not, "What do my fellow believers think of my purity?" but rather "What message has the subconscious part of me got?" Your dreams will usually give you the answer.

Those who are not seeking for total purity can never understand what we are saying here. Those who take their dirty dreams lightly do not realise that these are indicators of unfaithfulness in their conscious thought-life. Such believers will consider what we are saying as extreme and unrealistic, because spiritual matters are foolishness to the natural mind.

The good news however is that no matter how filthy your thought-life may have been, it can become totally pure, if you are faithful in seeking to walk the way Jesus walked. This in turn, will purify your dreams too - although this will take time; the time taken will depend on how much you fed the flesh in your unconverted days. But the strongest snake too can be put to death, through radical faithfulness.

Jesus invited only those who were weary and heavy laden to come to Him. It is only when you are sick and tired of your own defeated life that you qualify to come to Him for victory. The world is full of those who are sick and tired of others and the way that others behave towards them. Some Christians are also sick and tired of compromise and worldliness that they see in their denominations. But these are not the qualifications for victory. Only those who are sick and tired of themselves are invited by the Lord to come.

Only those who are thirsty for victory can come to Him (Matthew 11:28; John 7:37). Those who weep each time they slip up in their thought-life and who mourn for their secret sins, will understand God's truth very quickly; while others will consider the doctrine to be heresy - for spiritual truths are not understood by the natural understanding, but rather by revelation that God gives to hearts that mourn over their secret sins. God whispers His secrets (including the secret of a godly life) only to those who fear Him (Psalms 25:14).

The 'rest' that Jesus promised to those who were sick and tired of their defeated life was the rest of total victory over sin.

In Hebrews 4, this rest is equated with possession of the land of Canaan. The giants were slain one by one, over a long period of time (See Exodus 33:29). Rest and peace thus came over each area possessed for the Lord. The giants of Canaan are a type of the lusts in our flesh. The giants that were seen typify conscious sin. The giants hidden in the caves of the land are a type of unconscious sin.

Hebrews 4 also speaks of the 'Sabbath rest' that God has prepared for His people. After six days of labour they could enter into God's rest. So too, God allows us to struggle in our own strength for 'six days' - and to fail and fail and fail again. When we have come to an end of confidence in our own abilities ('ceased from our own efforts' - Hebrews 4:10), then we enter into God's sabbath rest - into life in the power of the Holy Spirit. No amount of self-effort (even "putting the flesh to death") can make our sinful hearts holy. Only the Holy Spirit can do that by making us partake of the Divine nature. We can live in this sabbath rest all our days, if we are faithful. If we are unfaithful, we go back to the "labouring" again.

It is not the will of God that we should be battling a particular sin all our life. God desires that "every giant in Canaan" be slain. At each stage of our growth - physically and spiritually - we are tempted in new ways. A four-year-old child is tempted to be angry, but not with sexual desire. That comes later, in his teenage years. However it is not the will of God that a man should remain defeated in the sexual area year after year, merely confessing his hope that one day he will be victorious. He can come to victory quickly, if he is wholehearted. Death can enter in, even in this area; and divine nature can take over.

Romans 6 speaks of the sequence of the life of victory. Knowing that we have died with Christ (verses 6 - accepting this fact by faith, even if we cannot understand it) we now consistently consider ourselves dead to sin (verses 11) and present our members to God alone for obedience and righteousness (verses 13-18). The result of this is increasing sanctification (verses 22). The final outcome is eternal life - which is just another expression for 'the divine nature' (verses 22). So our ultimate goal is that we might partake of the divine nature. But this begins only when we accept our position as dead with Christ on the cross and consistently consider ourselves thereafter as dead to sin.

How was it in Jesus' life? He was tempted in all points as we are. But He was not forever battling with the same temptations. If Jesus was tempted as we are, He must have been tempted as we are in the sexual area too. But He must have finished with this area in His teenage years itself, through His utter faithfulness. As a result, He was not even tempted in this area by the time He entered His public ministry. Women could wipe His feet and He was not even tempted. Those who are not themselves faithful in their battle against temptation in this area cannot understand this truth.

When Satan tempted Jesus at the end of forty days of severe temptations in the wilderness, Satan knew very well that it was futile to try and tempt Jesus in the areas of sex and money, because Jesus had conquered those areas so thoroughly, many years earlier. The last three temptations in the wilderness were temptations of such a high order that we can understand their subtle implications only as we ourselves are faithful in walking the way that Jesus walked.

The school of temptation is just like any other school. We all have to start in the kindergarten class. Our Lord too must have been tempted with the most elementary temptations first. But He never spent more than the minimum time necessary in each class. By the time He was 33 years old, when He died on the cross, He could say, "It is finished". Every single temptation had been overcome. Every single examination

in the school had been passed successfully. He had been made perfect. His education as a Man was complete (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

For a person who is unfaithful in the kindergarten class of temptation (e.g. sexually dirty thoughts, anger, lying, etc.) to try and understand what temptations Jesus faced in the Ph.D. class is both ridiculous and presumptuous. If you are faithful yourself, you will understand (That is what Jesus said plainly in John 7:17). If you are unfaithful in the moments of temptation however, you will never understand, no matter how many books you read or tapes you listen to. God's secrets are not heard through tapes or from books but directly from the mouth of God Himself through His Word.

There are some who teach that even though Jesus did not sin, yet He came in our sinful flesh and had "sin in His flesh". This is heresy. No-one can stand before God with any type of sin - even sin in his flesh - for God is so pure that He cannot look at sin. If Jesus had had sin in His flesh, He could never have had fellowship with His Father even for a single day of His life on earth. This is the clearest proof that Jesus did NOT have sinful flesh. The only reason why God can have fellowship with us (who have sin in our flesh) is because we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ Who had no sin in Him.

There are others who teach that Jesus may have sinned unconsciously. This too is heresy. Under the old covenant, a sacrifice had to be offered even for unconscious sin when a man became aware of it (Leviticus 4:2, 13, 27, 28). So even unconscious sin has to be atoned for. Under the new covenant, the blood of Jesus immediately cleanses away unconscious sin as soon as it is done (1 John 1:7), if we walk in the light as far as conscious sin is concerned. That is how our fellowship with the Father is maintained. No blood was however available for Jesus for unconscious sin, had there been even one unconscious sin in His life. This is the clearest proof that Jesus did NOT sin even unconsciously.

Unconscious sin is the result of our having lived for many years in selfishness and in pride.

Jesus never lived like that even for a moment. He never had a dirty dream because all His conscious thoughts were pure. No sin was found in Him - in His conscious life or in His unconscious being.

We, on the other hand, have unconscious sin in us, because our attitudes, habits and practices in our past life have given a selfish and conceited bent to our soul. Now the Spirit has come to make our crooked soul straight.

Those who have come to a life of victory over sin need to be careful and honest here. There are unfortunately many who have a measure of victory who excuse many un-Christlike things in their behaviour, speech, etc., by calling them only 'mistakes' or 'deeds of the body'. If only they analysed the reason for those 'deeds of the body' they would discover that the underlying cause was their conceit and selfishness. But Satan deceives them (and God allows Satan to do so), because God sees that such believers do not love the truth about themselves (2 Thessalonians 2:10, 11) - even though they may be very righteous in external matters and have a good testimony in the church. The light is not getting brighter in their lives (Proverbs 4:12) because they are forever excusing their actions! We should all walk in brokenness and honesty, lest we end up like that ourselves.

God does not demand that we BE like Jesus now. He knows that it is impossible, for being refers to our total personality. We can be like Him only when He returns. Today God only demands that we WALK like Jesus (Compare 1 John 2:6 with 3:2). Walking is a conscious act and refers only to our conscious life. In this area alone can we follow Jesus.

The good news of the gospel is that because Jesus became a man and was tempted like us in all areas and overcame, we too can overcome as He overcame (Revelation 3:21). There is no more need for us to keep on sinning in our conscious life.

Hallelujah, for such a glorious gospel!

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