

Matthew 4

by John Nelson Darby

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness demonstrates His faithfulness to God's will, emphasizing the importance of living by God's word and seeking only the glory of God.

Scripture: Matthew 4:1

Topics: "Obedience to God", "Temptation"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Matthew 4, illustrating how Jesus, led by the Spirit, faced temptation in the wilderness, contrasting His trials with those of Adam. He emphasizes that Christ's obedience was rooted in His unwavering commitment to fulfill the Father's will, even amidst hunger and the allure of earthly power. The sermon highlights the significance of Scripture in Jesus' responses to temptation, showcasing His perfect obedience and reliance on God's word. Darby also notes that Jesus' victory over temptation serves as a model for believers, who are called to resist the devil and trust in God's guidance. Ultimately, the message underscores the importance of living in accordance with God's will and the power of His word in overcoming challenges.

Transcript

Having thus in grace taken up His position as man on earth, He commences His earthly career, being led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. The righteous and holy man, the Son of God, enjoying the privileges proper to such a one, He must undergo the trial of those devices through which the first Adam fell. It is His spiritual condition which is tested. It is not now an innocent man in the enjoyment of all God's natural blessings, who is put to the proof in the midst of those blessings which should have made him remember God. Christ, nigh to God as His beloved Son, but in the midst of trial, having the knowledge of good and evil, and as to outward circumstances come down into the midst of man's fallen state, must have His faithfulness to this position fully tried with respect to His perfect obedience. To maintain this position, He must have no other will than that of His Father, and fulfil it or suffer it, whatever might be the consequences to Himself. He must fulfil it in the midst of all the difficulties, the privations, the isolation, the desert, where Satan's power was, which might tempt Him to follow an easier path than that which should be only for the glory of His Father. He must renounce all the rights that belonged to His own Person, save as He should receive them from God, yielding them up to Him with a perfect trust.

The enemy did his utmost to induce Him to make use of His privileges, "if thou be the Son of God," for His own relief, apart from the command of God, and in avoidance of the sufferings which might accompany

the performance of His will. But it was to lead Him to do His own will, not God's.

Jesus, enjoying in His own Person and relationship with God the full favour of God as Son of God, the light of His countenance, goes into the wilderness for forty days to be in conflict with the enemy. He did not go away from man, and from all intercourse with man and the things of man, in order (like Moses and Elias) to be with God. Being already fully with God, He is separate from men by the power of the Holy Ghost to be alone in His conflict with the enemy. In the case of Moses, it was man out of his natural condition to be with God. In the case of Jesus, it is so to be with the enemy: to be with God was His natural position.

The enemy tempts Him first by proposing to Him to satisfy His bodily need, and, instead of waiting on God, to employ according to His own will and on His own behalf the power with which He was endowed. But, if Israel was fed in the wilderness with manna from God, the Son of God, however great His power, would act in accordance with what Israel should have learnt by that means, namely, that "man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The Man, the obedient Jew, the Son of God, waited for this word, and would do nothing without it. He was not come to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him. This is the principle that characterises the Spirit of Christ in the Psalms. No deliverance is accepted but the intervention of Jehovah at His own good time. It is perfect patience, in order to be perfect and complete in all the will of God. There could be no sinful lust in Christ; but to be hungry was no sin, yet it was a human need, and what harm in eating when hungry? There was no will of God to do it, and that will by the word He came to do. Satan's suggestion was, "if thou be the Son of God, command"; but He had taken the place of a servant, and this was not commanding: he sought to get the Lord out of the place of perfect service and obedience, out of the place of a servant.

And note here the place the written word has, and the character of Christ's obedience. This character is not simply that the will of God is a rule; it is the one motive for action. We have a will arrested often by the word. Not so Christ. His Father's will was His motive; He acted not merely according to, but because it was, God's will. We delight to see a child who would run off to something it delights in, stop and cheerfully do its parents' will when called to do it. But Christ never obeyed thus, never sought a will of His own, but was stopped by His Father's. And we are sanctified to the obedience of Christ. Note further that the written word is that by which He lives and by which He overcomes. All depended here on Christ's victory, as all did on Adam's fall. But for Christ, one text, rightly used of course, suffices. He seeks no other: that is obedience. It suffices for Satan; he has no reply. His wiles are thus defeated.

The first principle of conquest is simple and absolute obedience, living by words out of God's mouth. The next is perfect confidence in the path of obedience.

In the second place then, the enemy sets Him on a pinnacle of the temple, to induce Him to apply to Himself the promises made to the Messiah, without abiding in the ways of God. The faithful man may assuredly reckon on the help of God while walking in His ways. The enemy would have the Son of man put God to the test (instead of reckoning on Him while walking in His ways) to see whether He might be trusted in. This would have been a want of confidence in God, not obedience; or pride, presuming on its privileges, instead of counting on God in obedience. [See Footnote #12] Taking His place with Israel in the condition they were in when without a king in the land, and, quoting the directions given to them in that book to guide them in the godly path there taught, He uses for His guidance that part of the word which contains the divine injunction on this subject, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"; a passage often quoted as if it forbade excess in trusting God; whereas it means not to distrust, and try if He is faithful. They tempted God, saying, Is God indeed among us? And this Satan would have had the Lord do.

The enemy, failing to deceive that obedient heart, even by hiding himself under the use of the word of God, shows himself in his true character, tempting the Lord, thirdly, to spare Himself all the sufferings that awaited Him, by shewing Him the inheritance of the Son of man on earth, that which would be His when He had reached it through all those paths, toilsome yet necessary to the Father's glory, which the Father had marked out for Him. All should now be His, if He would acknowledge Satan by worshipping him, the god of this world. This in fact was what the kings of the earth had done for only a part of these things; how often done for some trifling vanity! but He should have the whole. But if Jesus was to inherit earthly glory (as well as all other) the object of His heart was God Himself, His Father, to glorify Him. Whatever might be the value of the gift, it was as the gift of the Giver that His heart prized it. Moreover He was in the position of tested man and a faithful Israelite; and whatever might be the trial of patience into which the sin of the people had brought Him, be the trial ever so great, He would serve none but His God alone.

But if the devil carries temptation, sin, to the utmost, and shews himself to be the adversary (Satan), the believer has the right to cast him out. If he comes as a tempter, the believer should answer him by the faithfulness of the word, which is man's perfect guide, according to the will of God. He does not need to see through everything. The word is the word of Him who does, and in following that, we walk according to a wisdom which knows everything, and in a path formed by that wisdom, and which hence involves absolute trust in God. The two first temptations were the wiles of the devil, the third, open hostility to God. If he comes as the open adversary of God, the believer has a right to have nothing to do with him. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." He knows he has met Christ, not flesh. May believers resist if Satan would tempt them by the world, remembering it is Satan's domain in fallen man!

The believer's safeguard, morally (that is, as to the state of his heart) is a single eye. If I seek only the glory of God, that which presents no other motive than my own aggrandisement, or my own gratification, whether of body or mind, will have no hold upon me; and will shew itself in the light of the word, which guides the single eye, as contrary to the mind of God. This is not the haughtiness that rejects temptation on the ground of being good; it is obedience, humbly giving God His place, and consequently His word also. "By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer," from him that did his own will and made it his guide. If the heart seeks God alone, the most subtle snare is discovered, for the enemy never tempts us to seek God alone. But this supposes a pure heart, and that there is no self-seeking. This was displayed in Jesus.

Our safeguard against temptation is the word, used by the discernment of a perfectly pure heart, which lives in the presence of God, and learns the mind of God in His word, [See Footnote #13] and therefore knows its application to the circumstances presented. It is the word that preserves the soul from the wiles of the enemy.

Observe also that, consequently, it is in the spirit of simple and humble obedience that power lies; for where it exists, Satan can do nothing. God is there, and accordingly the enemy is conquered.

It appears to me that these three temptations are addressed to the Lord in the three characters, of man, of Messiah, and of Son of man.

He had no sinful desires like fallen man, but He was an hungered. The tempter would persuade Him to satisfy this need without God.

The promises in the Psalms belonged to Him as being made to the Messiah.

And all the kingdoms of the world were His as the Son of man.

He always replies as a faithful Israelite, personally responsible to God, making use of the Book of Deuteronomy, which treats of this subject (namely, the obedience of Israel, in connection with the possession of the land, and the privileges that belonged to the people in connection with this obedience; and this, apart from the organisation which constituted them a corporate body before God). [See Footnote #14]

Satan departs from Him, and the angels come to exercise their ministry towards the Messiah, the Son of man victorious through obedience. What Satan would have Him try God about, He has fully. They are ministering spirits for us also.

But how profoundly interesting is it to see the blessed Lord come down, the Son of God from heaven, and take the Word made flesh-His place among the poor godly ones on the earth, and, as having taken that place, owned of the Father as His Son, heaven being opened and opened to Him as man, and the Holy Ghost coming down and abiding on Him as man though without measure, and so forming the model of our place, though we were not yet in it; the whole Trinity, as I have said, being first fully revealed when He is thus associated with man; and then, we being slaves to Satan, going in this character and relationship to meet also Satan for us, to bind the strong man, and give man through Him this place also: only for us redemption was needed to bring us where He is.

John being cast into prison, the Lord departs into Galilee. This movement, which determined the scene of His ministry outside Jerusalem and Judea, had great significance with respect to the Jews. The people (so far as centred in Jerusalem, and boasting in the possession of the promises, the sacrifices, and the temple, and in being the royal tribe) lost the presence of the Messiah, the Son of David. He went away for the manifestation of His Person, for the testimony of God's intervention in Israel, to the poor and despised of the flock; for the remnant and poor of the flock are already in chapters 3, 4 clearly distinguished from the heads of the people. He thus really became the true stock, instead of being a branch of that which had been planted elsewhere; although this effect was not yet fully manifested. The moment corresponds with John 4.

We may remark here, that, in John's Gospel, the Jews are always distinguished from the multitude (called the people in the Gospels). The language, or rather the pronunciation, was entirely different. They did not speak Chaldee in Galilee.

At the same time this manifestation of the Son of David in Galilee was the fulfilment of a prophecy in Isaiah. The force of that prophecy is this:-although the Roman captivity was far more terrible than the invasion of the Assyrians when they came up against the land of Israel, there was nevertheless this circumstance which altered everything, namely, the presence of the Messiah, the true Light, in the land.

We observe that the Spirit of God here passes over the whole history of Jesus until the commencement of His ministry after the death of John the Baptist. He gives Jesus His proper position in the midst of Israel-Emmanuel, the Son of David, the Beloved of God, acknowledged as His Son, the faithful One in Israel, though exposed to all Satan's temptations; and then at once, afterwards, His prophetic position announced by Isaiah, and the kingdom proclaimed as at hand. [See Footnote #15]

Footnotes for Matthew 4

12: We need confidence to have courage to obey; but true confidence is found in the path of obedience. Satan could use the word in guile, but not turn Christ the Lord from it. He still uses it as the adequate divine weapon, and Satan still has no reply. To have forbidden obedience would have been to shew himself Satan. As regards the place in which the Lord was dispensationally, we may remark the Lord always quotes from Deuteronomy.

13: There must be no other motive for action than the will of God, which, for man, is always to be found in the word; because, in that case, when Satan tempts us to act, as he always does, by some other motive, this motive is seen to be opposed to the word which is in the heart, and to the motive which governs the heart, and is therefore judged as being opposed to it. It is written, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." This is the reason why it is so often important, when we are in doubt, to ask ourselves by what motive we are influenced.

14: A careful examination of the Pentateuch will shew that, though needed historical facts are stated, yet the contents of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers are essentially typical. The tabernacle was made according to the pattern shewn in the mount—the pattern of heavenly things; and not only the ceremonial ordinances, but the historical facts, as the apostle distinctly states, happened unto them for types, and are written for our instruction. Deuteronomy gives directions for their conduct in the land; but the three books named, even where there are historical facts, are typical in their object. I do not know if one sacrifice was offered after they were instituted, unless perhaps the official ones (see Acts 7: 42).

15: And we may remark here, that He leaves the Jews and Jerusalem, as already remarked, and His natural place, so to speak, what gave Him His name, Nazareth, and takes His prophetic place. The casting of John into prison was significant of His own rejection. John was His forerunner in it, as in his mission, of the Lord. See chapter 17: 12. The testimony of Jesus is the same as that of John the Baptist.

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