

"Then Jesus was led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (MATT 4:1). What an incredible verse. Matthew boldly states that God's Spirit led Christ into a desert experience, where He would have to undergo severe temptations.

Even more amazing, this verse directly follows a scene of great glory. Jesus had just been baptized in the Jordan. As He came up out of the water, the heavens opened, and the Spirit descended like a dove and rested on His shoulder. Then a voice from heaven declared, ***"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"*** (MATT 3:17).

Perhaps you're wondering: If God was so pleased with Jesus, telling the whole world this was His beloved son, why did He then lead Christ into a wilderness experience?

Let me remind you that Jesus is the pattern for our lives as believers. John writes, ***"As he is, so are we in this world"*** (JN 4:17). Moreover, Christ was ***"in all points tempted like as we are"*** (HEB 4:15). The message from scripture is clear: All who are in Christ - God's "beloved," on whom His Spirit rests - will undergo a trying wilderness experience, just as Jesus did. And that experience will be accompanied by satanic temptations.

Note - this principle does not apply to lukewarm or cold-hearted believers. Such trials come only to those who walk in the Spirit and commune with the Lord. In fact, the greater a person's passion for Jesus, the more intense his wilderness trials will be.

Yet, when the Holy Spirit leads us into the wilderness, God has an eternal purpose in mind for us.

The Temptations of the Righteous

Make no mistake, however - God doesn't tempt us. It's the devil who does the tempting: ***"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man"*** (JAS 1:13).

To discover God's purpose for us in our wilderness trials, we need to examine Christ's experience. Outside the wilderness, the multitudes faced their own temptations. These temptations were base, having to do with greed, adultery, violence, stealing, drinking, gambling. Those people lived on a lower plain in every sense.

And Jesus stood above it all. He wouldn't be tempted by such gross sin. Because He was righteous, beloved, chosen, His temptations would come at a higher level. They would be far more profound, mysterious, and intense than the base sins of life. His temptations would be in the spiritual realm - and they would have eternal consequences.

The same is true for us today. A truly spiritual person isn't tempted along the lines of gross flesh. For example, he probably wouldn't be tempted to sneak into a bar to drink, or to rent a hotel room to fornicate with a prostitute, or to lust after another man's spouse. Nor would he ever consider gambling, using drugs or cursing.

On the contrary, his daily desire is to draw closer to the Lord. He

makes Jesus Lord of his whole life - devouring God's Word daily, seeking Him in prayer. His soul cries, "Lord, I want to go deeper with You. I want to walk closer to You than ever."

Does this describe you? If so, your temptations will be more like the kind Christ endured. They will have to do with your obedience to God, and with dependence on His Word. And satan will do everything in his power to tempt you. He wants to turn you aside from God's destiny for you. He'll try to undermine your calling, rob you of your anointing, and convince you God's approval and blessing on your life is a lie.

1. After Forty Days and Nights of Fasting, Jesus Grew Hungry.

At a moment when Jesus was physically vulnerable, the devil brought his first temptation. Scripture says of Christ: ***"When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread"*** (MATT 4:2-3).

There's no sin in being hungry. So, what's the issue here? Satan was challenging Jesus: "If you're fully God, then you have God's power in You. And right now, You're in a very hard place. Why don't You use the power God gave You to deliver Yourself? Didn't He give

You that power to see if You would use it properly?

"You didn't do anything to be in this trying circumstance. And You know God doesn't like to see His children suffer. So, there's no need for You to endure another hour of this. And there's nothing wrong with meeting Your own need. Just speak the word, and command Yourself out of this."

Here is one of the most insidious temptations facing truly godly people. Like your example, Jesus, you have a passion for God. You've set your heart to be wholly surrendered to Him. Then the Lord leads you into a wilderness experience - and you endure a long period of testing and dryness. After a while, questions arise. You begin to lose your bearings, wondering about God's eternal purposes in your life. And while you try to pray and gain the victory, satan's temptations seem fiercer than ever.

This was David's experience. The Holy Spirit led this godly man into a prolonged wilderness experience. Over time David became so discouraged, he thought the whole world had gone mad. He cried out, *"The godly man ceaseth ... the faithful fail from among the children of men"* (PSA 12:1). *"They speak vanity every one with his neighbour ... with a double heart do they speak"* (PSA 12:2).

David was in distress for so long, he began spiraling into despair. He said, *"I have sorrowed in my heart daily"* (see Psalm 13:2). And he wondered when it was going to end: *"How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? For ever? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?"* (PSA 13:1-2). He was asking God, "Why do I have to keep trying to figure this out on my own? I can't find the cause."

In Psalm 35, David speaks of a trap his enemies had laid for him: *"Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul ... For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul"* (PSA 35:4,7). What is this hidden trap?

It's the same temptation satan threw at Jesus. The enemy wants you to act independently of the Father. When you're in the midst of your trial, the devil says, "Your suffering isn't of God. You don't have to go through this. You have

God's power in you, through the Holy Ghost. So you don't have to put up with this another day. Speak the word - free yourself of your deep stirrings. Satisfy your own hunger."

Satan's first scheme was to create a power failure. He was hoping God wouldn't honor Jesus' cry for bread, should He ask. If heaven's power failed, then Christ might doubt His divinity and turn aside from His eternal purpose on earth.

Second, satan knew Jesus was sent to do only what the Father told Him. So he aimed to convince Christ to disobey here for His own welfare. That way, if Jesus used His power now to avoid suffering, He might do the same later to avoid the cross.

The devil has used this same temptation on multitudes of Christ's followers. Such believers at one time were truly hungry for God. They were anointed, prayerful, full of the Holy Ghost's power. But then they were led into a wilderness of suffering, need and despair. And satan tempted them to doubt that their testing was of God's leading, and to use God's power to save themselves.

The enemy whispered, "You're tired of all these financial problems. And God isn't answering any of your prayers. Every day, you despair over what this trial has brought upon you and your family. And now you can't endure it any longer."

"You've got God's Word in your heart. And He's given you power through the Holy Ghost. Why not exert that power to end this suffering? Lay hold of God's promise, and speak your way out of this trial, right now. It's for a good cause."

They believed satan's lie. And they sought to lay hold of a single promise of deliverance, to try to end their suffering. They stopped trusting, and instead began to "command" finances to come their way. But their commands weren't validated by the Holy Spirit - and their plans failed.

So they took matters into their own hands. They maxed out their credit cards and took on loans. They went deep into debt, boasting all along, "God is blessing me." But eventually, it all crashed. That's when they grew embittered. Finally, they gave up on God's

Word and backslid. I've witnessed this time after time.

These people ended up aborting God's design for their trial. The Lord had desired to bring them to full dependency and trust in Him. He wanted the trial to strip them of all confidence in man and in their own abilities. He also wanted to produce in them a Christ-like compassion for others in similar trials. Scripture says these were God's purposes even for His own Son: *"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered"* (HEB 5:8). *"For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted"* (HEB 2:18).

So, how did Jesus answer the devil's temptation? *"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"* (MATT 4:4). Christ said, in essence, "My coming to earth is not about my needs, hurts or physical comfort. I came to give to humankind - not to save myself."

Even at the height of His suffering, Jesus didn't lose sight of His eternal purpose. And if our Lord learned dependence and compassion through a wilderness experience, so will we. Indeed, the believers I know who have the true compassion of Christ are those who've endured suffering and come out with a testimony of God's faithfulness. They can say with Paul, *"I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus"* (GAL 6:17).

2. Next, Satan Took Jesus to The Roof of the Temple.

As Jesus stood at the highest point of the temple, satan whispered to Him, "Go ahead - jump. If You're really God's son, He'll save You. His word says angels camp all around You to protect You, so that You'll never suffer injury" (MATT 4:5-6).

Do you see satan's deviousness in this? He isolated a single promise from scripture - and he tempted Jesus to cast His whole life upon it. He was suggesting, "You say God is with you. Well, show me the proof. Your Father has already allowed me to harrass You. Where was His presence in that? You can prove He's with you right now by jumping. If God is with You, He'll provide a soft landing. Then You can base Your confidence on that. If not, You might as well die rather than go on wondering if You're on

Your own. You need a miracle to prove the Father is with you."

Once again, David endured a similar trial. He'd testified to the world of God's faithfulness to him. Yet now David found himself in a pit of despair. And satan came to him with accusing taunts: "Look at you. You're cast down, and you don't even know why. You say God is faithful, yet you're spiritually dry. You pray morning, noon and night. But every day you wake up with an unexplainable, unmet longing. Where is God in all of this?"

David cried, *"Mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?"* (PSA 42:10). Then he added these words to his cry: *"Lighten mine eye, lest I sleep the sleep of death: lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved"* (PSA 13:3-4).

The battle that raged in David's mind is common to all godly people. At times God seems silent. We may find ourselves in struggles we don't understand. Like David, we cry, "How long, Lord? When will you show me evidence that you're with me? Please, give me a sign, some token of good."

At this point, you may wonder, "What's wrong with casting ourselves on God's promises? The Bible says all of God's promises are 'yea and amen' to those who believe" (see 2. Corinthians 1:20). Indeed, we are delivered by the faithful promises of our Lord.

But there is a serious danger to anyone who isolates one verse from the rest of Scripture and casts his entire faith upon it. Let me give you an example. I know a woman who was in utter despair over her finances. She needed a series of miracles just to survive. So she put all her faith in a single biblical promise: *"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it"* (MAL 3:10).

This woman cast herself down from the temple and discovered there was no net. The devil succeeded in destroying her faith. How? He convinced her to ignore the whole counsel of Scripture.

Yes, God does promise to open heaven to givers. But He also

requires a certain heart condition of those who tithe: *"The heaven is shut up, and there is not rain, because they have sinned against thee"* (2.CHR 6:26). This woman never dealt with other passages requiring her need to forgive. She harbored envy and jealousy in her heart.

Most false doctrine, error and religious cults spring from such misguided attempts. When people attempt to isolate one promise from Scripture, they want to force God to prove Himself by being faithful to that one promise. Yet they ignore the rest of scripture demands in the matter of conditions required. This is the reason for Jesus' previous reply to satan: *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"* (MATT 4:4).

Now, on the roof of the temple, I find it profound that God would allow His Son to be led to such a perilous point of decision. And, because Jesus was fully human as well as fully God, He must have had questions. Did He wonder, "Father, I know You've called Me to lay down My life. And I gladly accept that. But where are You in this? Why have You permitted Me to be put to such a trial?"

How did Jesus respond? He stated, *"It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"* (MATT 4:7). What exactly does Jesus mean here by "tempting God"?

Ancient Israel is an example. Ten times the Lord proved Himself faithful to the Israelites, God's people received visible proof that their Lord was with them. Yet, every time, the people asked the same question: "Is God among us or not?" God calls this "tempting Him." Had God permitted it, there would have been no end to their seeking "proof."

Now Jesus uses this same phrase - "tempting God" - in His reply to satan. What does this tell us? It shows us it's a grave sin to doubt God's presence, we're not to question whether He's with us.

All too often, Christians put God to the test in their wilderness experiences. They say, "Lord, I can't go on unless You show me evidence that You're with me. Satan is accusing me, and I can't help feeling he has the upper hand. Are You with me or not? If You don't deliver me soon, or give me a sign of Your blessing, I'll quit the fight."

Yet, as with Israel, God has already given us an entire body of evidence. First, we have in His Word multiple promises of His closeness to us. Second, we have our own personal history with God - a testimony of His many past deliverances in our lives. Third, we have a Bible full of witnesses to God's presence in past centuries of trials and hardships. Without question, our Lord has proven Himself to us over and over. But we still demand physical evidence - or else.

The Bible is clear: we're to walk with God by faith and not by sight. Otherwise, we'll end up like faithless Israel.

3. Jesus Was Taken to a High Mountain Where He Was Shown the Kingdoms Of the World.

On the mountain, satan tempted Jesus with this offer: *"All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me"* (MATT 4:9). This sounds so outlandish, so ridiculous, how could it ever be considered a temptation? Did satan actually believe Jesus would be tempted by it?

Believe it or not, this was a powerful, enticing offer. Satan was challenging Jesus, saying, "God has called You to lay down Your life for a lost world. And now You've come to deliver the prisoners from my hands. Jesus, I tell You, You can accomplish all that right now, in a mere instant."

"I promise that if you'll merely bow down at my feet, in a single act of worship, I'll quit the fight. I'll give up all my power over these realms. I won't possess or enslave anyone else. No more demonic bondage, no more harassment from my principalities and powers. I know that You love humankind enough to be accused by God for their sake. So, why wait? You can sacrifice Yourself right now, and free the world from this moment on."

This actually echoes the apostle Paul's words: *"I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh"* (ROM 9:3). Satan was playing on Christ's human compassion here. He was tempting Jesus with a vision of a world where the devil resigned his rule over wicked people - all in exchange for one act.

Why was the devil willing to give up all his power for this? Again, he

was trying to save his own skin. Satan knew his eternal destiny would be sealed at Calvary. So, if he could just keep Jesus from going to the cross, he might spare himself that fate. And by convincing Christ to give up His life now, the Cross might never occur. The devil was saying, in essence, "Be accursed, Jesus, to save the world now."

You may be wondering, "How could this possibly relate to me?" Satan still tempts the righteous with a similar offer. Let me explain.

First, satan knows that devoted believers would never bow down to him in any act of worship. So instead, he comes to us with threats and accusations. He tells us, "You don't have to worship me - because I already have access to your flesh. I know all your weaknesses and tendencies. I've been nurturing them since you were a child. And I can plague you with them at my will."

"There's no victory in the Cross for you. The covenant promises are all lies. I have total control of your Adamic nature, your indwelling sin. I've proven that to you time after time. You know I can overwhelm you anytime I please, when you least expect it.

"So, go ahead and testify about your freedom in Christ. At the moment you're singing your loudest praises, I'll overpower your mind with evil. I'll bring up your sin to you so powerfully, you'll despair of ever being free. You are powerless. Even now you give in to my slightest temptation."

I know ministers who were set free from sinful bondages for decades. Then, later in their life, at a moment of great anointing or blessing, their old lust appeared. The enemy brought it up before them to try to scare them and bring on thoughts of condemnation. This has happened to me at times during my ministry. The enemy has hounded me with evil thoughts and told me the covenant was a lie - that I was powerless against sin's

dominion, and my sin would always rise up in me.

How do we answer satan's accusations? **"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"** (JAS 4:7). **It doesn't matter how many temptations satan throws at you. You needn't fear any sin from your past. If Christ's blood has covered it, then the devil can't do anything to separate you from the Father.**

Of course, you'll always face sudden surprises of sin. But the Holy Spirit is faithful to kill off these old lusts as we call on Him to mortify them. He won't allow them to destroy us. God's covenant promises set us free from sin's power and dominion.

4. The Devil Left Jesus, and Angels Ministered to Him.

Suppose you came upon Jesus on day forty-one - the day immediately following His temptation in the wilderness. His face is shining, because angels have refreshed His spirit. He's rejoicing, praising the father, because He's won a great victory. He has overcome the enemy's temptations.

You see Jesus exuding life and confidence. Now He's ready to face the powers of hell. So He sets off boldly for the great cities that lie in darkness. He preaches the gospel, sure of God's word. And He heals the sick, knowing His father is with Him.

Now, as you examine your own life, you see just the opposite. You're still facing your own dry wilderness experience. You've endured fiery attacks from satan, and your soul is cast down. You can't help thinking, "Jesus never did go through trials like mine. He was above all this."

You go to church in this frame of mind - tempted, tested, despairing. And now before you stands your pastor - a man who appears strong in faith. He sounds so assured of God's presence, as if he'd just been visited by ministering angels.

You think, "He's never had any problems like mine."

If only you knew. You weren't there when God called this man to preach. The Holy Spirit gave him a glorious calling - and immediately led him into a wilderness to be tempted sorely. You know nothing of the days, weeks and months he was plagued by a deep hunger for God that went unmet. You've never experienced the lies satan put into his head, the evil thoughts that have been pressed upon him at times. You weren't there on the days he was reduced to nothing, cast down in despair. And you don't realize that often his best sermons have come out of the testings in his own life.

Paul warns us not to measure our righteousness against what we think is another's: ***"We dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise"*** (2.COR 10:12).

We can't read the hearts of others. Who would have known on day forty-one that Jesus had just emerged from a long, horrible temptation? Who'd have known that the glory they saw in Him sprang from a struggle worse than any they would ever endure?

We're to look only to Jesus. And we're to rely only on His righteousness, His holiness. He has given us all equal access to it.

God loves you in your testing times. His own Spirit has led you into the wilderness. Yet His own Son has already been there - and He knows exactly what you're going through. Let Him complete His work of building into you utter dependence and trust in Him. You'll come out with confidence - and Godly compassion and strength to help others.

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