

JESUS BAPTIZED AND TEMPTED

- MATTHEW 3:13-17; 4:1-11. - JANUARY 9. -

**Golden Text: – "In that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted."
– Hebrews. 2:18.**

JOHN'S baptism, as we saw in a previous study, was intended merely as a sign of reformation. There is no intimation that either John or his disciples or others of the "Israelites indeed" made use of it. Nothing in the Jewish Law required it either. Our lesson notes the fact that John objected to our Lord's being baptized, because he was not a sinner. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners."

Our Lord's baptism, therefore, as intimated in his reply to John, was a new institution, which he did not explain at the time, but which, later on, he showed was a symbol of his consecration unto death, not as a sinner, but as a sin-offering. He thus consecrated as soon as he was thirty years of age, the legal age at which a priest could offer sacrifice. The language of his heart is told us by St. Paul, "Lo, I come, as in the volume of the Book it is written of me, to do thy will, O God." (Heb. 10:7.) There, declares the Apostle, he began to set aside the typical sacrifices of the Law Covenant by beginning the "better sacrifices" – the antitypes.

In symbol our Lord declares that his perfect human will and all his earthly rights and powers were fully consecrated, even unto death, and that he was trusting the Father's promise that such an obedience would result in his resurrection from the dead to the spirit plane which he left, in order to become man's Redeemer. This symbolical consecration to death was responded to by the Father by the impartation of the holy Spirit as a beginning or start

of the new spiritual nature which he would enter into fully by resurrection after the completion of his sacrifice. He was there *begotten* of the Spirit. Three and a half years later, in his resurrection, he was *born* of the spirit, "The first born from the dead." (Col. 1:18.) An additional attestation of Divine favor was the voice, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

From a child Jesus sought to be about the Father's business, and to know the teachings of the Scripture respecting his appointed work. His anointing by the holy Spirit quickened his understanding and made all that he had learned much more significant. At once he began to see lengths and breadths and heights and depths not possible of discernment previously, because, as the Apostle declares, "The natural man [even though perfect] discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned....But God hath revealed them unto us [Christ and all of his Spirit-begotten followers] by his Spirit, which searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." – I Cor. 2:14,10.

This illumination (Heb. 10:32) gave Jesus such new views respecting his work that he was thereby impelled to go aside into the wilderness to think and pray and study what his course should be as outlined by the Law and the prophets. He spent forty days thus, fasting, praying, studying. When weak as a result of these experiences the Tempter was permitted to assault him with suggestions of ways and means of carrying out his work, which were far different from those which he found in the Scriptures, – which his perfect mind grasped completely, having heard them read by course in the synagogue from childhood.

OUR LORD'S THREE TEMPTATIONS

The three temptations experienced by our Lord illustrated all the temptations of his followers as New Creatures. "He was

tempted in all points like as *we* are, yet without sin." He was not tempted as a father, as a mother, as a drunkard, as a gambler – and neither are these the temptations experienced by his followers. Of the weaknesses of the flesh he had none, while his followers have many; but the merit of his sacrifice is efficacious for the forgiveness of all the blemishes of his followers to the extent that they are unwilling, unintentional faults. Their testing is not along those lines, even as his were not. Proper understanding of our Lord's three temptations reveals to us that they are the same by which we are tested as New Creatures, his spirit-begotten disciples.

Temptation I. Hungry after his long fast, our Lord's flesh cried out for nourishment, and the Tempter, affecting a kindly interest in his welfare, suggested that, having received the holy Spirit, he now possessed the power of miracles and should use it to transform the stones into food. Our Lord subsequently used this power in feeding multitudes, but it would have been sinful for him to use it upon himself – to sustain the human life which he had already consecrated to death. He might use any ordinary means to supply his physical needs, but the holy Spirit was given him for another purpose – not for gratification of the flesh, even legitimately. Our Lord at once recognized the principle involved and promptly refused the suggestion, declaring, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." In a word, if he would deserve eternal life it must be as a result of absolute obedience to the Divine Law. To create and eat the bread for the nourishment of his life in opposition to the Divine Law would be disobedience; and that, so far from meaning life, would have meant death everlasting.

Applying this temptation to our Lord's subsequent career and that of his followers, the lesson is this: Obedience to the Divine will is paramount every way, and holy privileges of the Church

in spiritual matters must not be bartered for earthly advantage. The wrong course is symbolically prefigured in Esau's selling his birthright for a mess of pottage. (Heb. 12:16.) Every temptation to sacrifice spiritual privileges or violate spiritual responsibilities for the attainment of earthly advantages would be a yielding to this form of temptation.

Temptation II. It is not necessary to suppose that our Lord went to Jerusalem and to the pinnacle of the Temple in person to experience his temptation. On the contrary he was all the while in the wilderness and went to the Holy City merely mentally, guided there by Satan's suggestion that he could bring himself and his glorious mission quickly to the attention of all the people by performing a stupendous miracle – by leaping from the pinnacle of the temple into the chasm below and then arising unhurt. He could then explain to the multitude his heavenly errand and awe them to faith. Seeing that our Lord had repulsed his first temptation by quoting Scripture, Satan now attempted to support the second temptation with a text of Scripture, which, on its face, might appear to be properly applied by him. The passage reads much as though it were specially intended as a suggestion to our Lord to perform the very feat suggested – "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." – Psa. 91:11,12.

Our Lord promptly discerned the fallacy of the argument and the misapplication of the Scripture, which really belongs to the feet members of the Body of Christ, which is **[R4545 : page 9]** the Church, in this very time in which we are living, when stumbling-blocks to Christian faith are in the way, and when God is providing special light upon his Word and special assistance to the "feet" members of the Body of Christ – that they may surmount the difficulties and receive blessing instead of injury.

It would have been sin for our Lord to follow the course indicated because, although not misusing the Divine power, he would have been tempting God to use Divine power for his deliverance, whereas this was unnecessary, as he had not been called upon to thus hazard his life, but rather was required to sacrifice it – laying it down in the service of the Truth and of humanity. Our Lord's answer was directly to the point and was another quotation from Holy Writ; "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." In every case Satan seems to have realized that he was promptly and fully met by the quotations and his temptation shown to be contrary to the Divine instruction.

Our Lord's followers are tempted along this line also – tempted to presume on the goodness of God and by words or acts to place themselves in such positions as would test or **[R4545 : page 10]** tempt God in respect to his providential care of them – along lines which he has never authorized in his Word. The wonder-working spirit is contrary to the spirit of humility anyway and, if gratified, would lead to spiritual pride and egotism. God wishes his people now to "walk by faith and not by sight." Moreover the "call" of this Gospel Age is along lines of faith in the promises, rather than faith respecting the wonder-working achievements of others or of ourselves. Meekness, humility, faith, all stand arrayed on the side of the question which our Lord took and which his followers should take.

Temptation III. Again it is unnecessary for us to assume that there is any very high mountain in the wilderness in which Jesus was being tempted, for there is no such high mountain there. Nor is there a mountain in all the earth on whose pinnacles all the kingdoms of the world could be seen in a moment. In this case, also, our Lord was *mentally* transported to a high mountain, to a great, lofty kingdom overlooking and overtopping all earthly empires. For in Bible symbology a mountain represents a kingdom. In a brief moment Satan pictured himself to our Lord

as the ruler of all earth's kingdoms – as having the ruling empire of earth, controlling all empires. This is in accord with the Scripture which declares that Satan is the Prince of this world (this age), and that he "now ruleth in the hearts of the children of disobedience" – thus ruling the vast majority.

After thus picturing his own power over the world – the power of a usurping prince imposing upon the ignorance and superstition of mankind, Satan's argument paraphrases thus: I know well the object of your coming, and the promise that your kingdom shall bless all the world and uplift the willing and obedient out of sin and death conditions. I assure you that I wish you well in the enterprise. As the ruler amongst men, I deplore present conditions myself. I suggest, therefore, that you undertake the work of reform amongst men as my lieutenant and assistant. If you will thus recognize, honor, reverence (worship) me, I will co-operate with you and turn the world of mankind over to your care. You, then, will be their earthly king or ruler, while I, Satan, as a spirit-being, would still control after the manner of an over-lord. This is the best you could do. The matter is fully in my hands, as you will judge from your present view of human conditions. If you take any other course, it will bring you disappointment, scorn, defeat, shame. If you take the course I suggest it will bring you prosperity and honor.

Our Lord's reply was, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." The temptation passed successfully, Satan withdrew and holy angels ministered to our Lord.

A similar temptation is sure to come to every follower of the Lord, from the same Adversary, in one form or another. These are permitted by the Lord for the testing of our characters, even as in his own case. The temptation is, Will we connive with and recognize unjust and sinful institutions, because they have power

and because to oppose them would imply their opposition and the braving of shame and scorn and death. Such temptations may come to the tempted through political or social or religious institutions, saying, serve us and we will assist you. But in every case behind the temptation is the Adversary. Those who have not learned to love righteousness and to hate iniquity – all who have not come to the point of a full submission of their will to the Divine will – are in danger of falling in such a temptation. But those whose hearts are loyal to the core, as was the Redeemer's, will repulse the Adversary and disdain his proffer of assistance on such terms or any terms.

Our Lord had no Advocate to sympathize with him and to succor and encourage him in the hour of temptation: "Of the people there was none with him." With us, however, matters are different. Our Lord, as our great High Priest, by the merit of his own sacrifice for man's sin, has ascended on high and has appeared as the Advocate of all those who are now being "called of God" to faith in his blood, and to walk in his steps, and to be baptized into his death, and to share with him glory, honor and immortality in "His Resurrection." (Phil. 3:10.) This great Advocate, having been tempted in all these lines, is able to succor us. Yet he waits for us to realize our needs and to apply for succor at the throne of grace, as intimated by our text.

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