

THE SECOND TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

Matthew 4:5-7

In showing the real value of the temptations of Christ, Dr. I. M. Haldeman called attention to the great railroad bridge which had just been completed. To its dedication a multitude of prominent people had been invited. While they were standing at a vantage point they saw a large number of the heaviest locomotives which the company owned rolled out on the bridge. Was this demonstration of tremendous tonnage used to see whether or not the bridge would stand the strain? Or, was it done to demonstrate that the bridge would do all that was claimed for it? It was the latter. The company would not take a chance with its expensive rolling stock if there were a shadow of a doubt about the strength of the structure.

The temptations which came to our Lord were not for the purpose of trying to discover whether or not He could resist them, but to demonstrate that He was all that God had claimed for Him at the time of His baptism when the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

The first temptation was an effort on the part of Satan to induce Christ to use His miraculous power to satisfy His physical appetite rather than trust in God for relief. It was a temptation to distrust of God through an appeal for immediate self-gratification. Christ won the victory over that temptation by one keen statement, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Notice how crafty Satan's methods were. He was not limited to any one line of attack, but adapted himself to the situation. If Christ Jesus would not turn stones into bread for the sustenance of His body and live, then Satan wanted Him to die. Satan's attitude might have been expressed in these words, "If I cannot get Him to be disloyal to God, then I will try to get Him out of the way altogether, or at least, by the perversion of His trust in God, to render Him useless for the purpose of His mission."

In all probability the second temptation followed the first one immediately, although we do not have any definite data to that effect. The fact that the account of the second temptation is introduced by the word "then," which naturally suggests immediateness, would lead us to think just as soon as Satan was repulsed at one point he made another attack from a new vantage ground.

In this temptation Satan went beyond the realm of the appetite and made his attack in the area of adventure.

Having failed in his first attempt to get Christ to satisfy His appetite by turning stones into bread, Satan changed the ground of his attack. He conducted Christ to Jerusalem. The selection of the temple as the place to which Satan conducted Him in the holy city shows the subtlety of the foe. Satan knew that one's mind is often influenced by his surroundings. Human nature is made tender in the neighborhood of one's old home, and some of the deepest religious feelings well forth into new power in some places where long ago streams of living water refreshed the thirsty spirit. It is almost impossible to revisit any place of tender, sacred and holy associations without being profoundly influenced. Christ was no exception to this. How He loved Jerusalem!

At the temple God's power might be expected to be at its maximum. It was there that Satan tried to get Christ to put God's keeping power to the test by jumping

from one of the lofty projections or wings of the temple in the plain view of the crowds below, with the full expectation on the part of Christ that the Father would protect Him from any injury. Satan inferred that it would be folly for Christ to begin His ministry with the prospect of possible failure. He implied that the Lord should obtain more definite proof of His Father's protection by creating a situation in which He would be forced to come to the aid of His Son.

Satan also implied that, in the event that God did protect Him, Christ would then receive the acclaim of the people as their Messiah. Wresting it from its setting, Satan quoted Scripture in support of his suggestion that the Lord Jesus presume on the grace of God by casting Himself from the temple into their midst. In order to trip the Son of God the devil quoted the Word of God, omitted part of it and misinterpreted it. "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" (Psalm 91:11-12). Divine protection from physical disaster was promised to the faithful in the quotation from that Psalm. But the devil did not quote that passage accurately. Instead, he omitted the words, "to keep thee in all thy ways." There was no charge to the angels to keep Christ out of the will of the Father. From Christ's refusal to yield to temptation we learn that it is right to trust God, but that it is wrong to make presumptuous experiments in order to discover how far God can be trusted.

Christ might have reminded the devil that he had misquoted and misapplied the scripture which he used. This, however, he did not do. Why start an argument? Why give an answer that would lead to needless strife? Christ said to the adversary: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." By use of the sword of the Spirit our Lord was able to dispose of His adversary in very short order. Here is another demonstration of the effectual character of the Word of God.

Satan's proposal to Christ was that He should put God to the test and see if He would be as good as His word. It was an unwarranted act of faith that the Lord Jesus was being called upon to exercise. To cast Himself down was not God's way for the Master to demonstrate His Messiahship and His Sonship. Instead of trying to lure others with the spectacular, God's plan was for Him to do so by the glory of the life that He lived and by the miracles which He wrought during His public ministry.