

THE THIRD TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

Matthew 4:8-11

As we have already seen in our previous studies, Satan's first appeal to Christ was to His appetite. Satan tempted Christ to prove that He was the Son of God by working a miracle to satisfy His hunger, which was due to His fast of forty days and forty nights. Had the Master done so He would have separated Himself from His brethren, for they were not able to work miracles to satisfy their needs. To satisfy hunger is legitimate, but Satan asked Christ to do it in the wrong way by making use of His newly announced Sonship. Instead of arguing with the devil, which in itself would have been an error, Christ merely answered him from God's Word, saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Satan's second appeal to Christ was in the realm of adventure. He tried to get the Saviour to put God's keeping power to the test by jumping from one of the wings of the temple, fully expecting God to protect Him from any injury. Satan implied that, in the event that God did protect Christ, He 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 the midst of the crowd below. From Christ's refusal 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. In response to Satan's appeal to adventure Christ said, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Having failed in both attempts, Satan's next appeal was to ambition. He came out boldly in his true colors and sought to get Christ to render to him that worship which belongs to God alone. Standing on a very high mountain, Satan pointed out the mighty kingdoms of the earth with all the glory thereto attached and proudly boasted that he held them in his hands or under his control. Satan offered Christ the kingdoms of this world without toil, tears, suffering or the loss of His life on the single condition that the Lord Jesus would pay homage to him. Satan said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Could he actually make such an offer? Were the kingdoms of this world so completely in his hands that he could give them to Christ, provided He would meet his demands for worship? Unquestionably Satan could make such an offer, otherwise he would have been rebuked by the Master, who could have quickly and frankly reminded him that he did not have any kingdoms to give. Our Lord knew full well that "the whole world lieth in wickedness," or "in the lap of the evil one." In Eden Satan had wrested the dominion of the world from Adam and Eve and he has held it in usurpation ever since. In his proposal Satan was actually setting himself above God and calling upon Christ to worship him. It was a temptation to gain a temporal, rather than a spiritual, dominion; to gain this dominion at once; and to gain it by an act of homage to the ruler of this world, which would make the Messiah the viceregent of the devil and not of God. Our Lord was tempted to sell principle for property and power, but He knew, of course, that they are never of commensurate value.

It was a temptation to easy conquest. Christ was tempted to forsake the way of the cross and to gain the control of the world by disobedience to God, and without sacrifice. All of us are likewise tempted to take the line of least resistance, to reach the crown by dodging the cross, to come into power without sacrifice, to gratify ambition at the cheapest rate and to achieve one's goal without suffering. Satan here offered Christ a short cut to victory.

In all parts of the world people make the statement that every one has his price, and Satan often acts on this theory or premise. He tried it on Christ, but made a

miserable failure. Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage and Judas Iscariot sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver, but no crown that Satan could offer ever attracted the Lord Jesus. Here was a temptation to the "lust of the eye," but our Lord did not yield to it.

When the tempter said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me," he was promising a worldwide empire of majesty and power beyond all that Alexander the Great had attained once, and beyond all that the Roman emperor then possessed. What a temptation was that prospect! As the bribe was the largest that Satan had to offer, so the temptation was the most powerful in its appeal to such a one as Christ. What the tempter was saying was, "Compromise! Come to terms with me! Don't hold your standards quite so high! Wink just a little at questionable and evil things, and then the people will follow you in great numbers. It was the temptation to try to change the world by becoming like it. Ordinarily, people are not deceived by the temptation to adopt evil means for the wrong ends. But many do things that are wrong for worthy purposes. Christ was here tempted to do a treacherous act for a religious cause --just to bow the knee to Satan in order to bless the world. But, it is never right to do wrong in order that good may come from it.

Satan's appeal was: Worship and serve me and rule the world. In modern phraseology, be practical, be sensible, be realistic and be ready to compromise. The end justifies the means. To help people you must get position and power. The good you can do will justify the necessary compromises that promise such quick results. But this procedure always calls for a divided allegiance; the devil always gets the first place and God comes in as a poor second. Christ knew that the essential thing was not temporal power, not quick, superficial, outward results, or not a hasty seizure of the Messianic rule and authority, but a full and undivided allegiance to and service of God alone. Satan had come out in the open and frankly acknowledged that his purpose was to overthrow the supremacy of God in His own universe.

How great an appeal this temptation made to Christ we can only imagine by thinking of the appeal which the prospect of doing good universally would make to the noblest minds. What was offered Christ was authority and glory. That offer was made to One Who had a right to the authority and was worthy of the glory. No temptation is as great as that which appeals to the consciousness of capacity, and the belief that for certain ends we are ordained.

God provided protection for His Son in the hour of His great temptation. That protection was found in the written Word. Our Lord found sweet recourse in a simple statement from God's Word, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Thus our Lord repelled the infamous suggestion by again quoting God's Word. His statement was full of holy disdain. There is no other way of victory for us than that which Christ used. Just as God provided protection for Christ in the hour of His temptation, so will He provide protection for us against the onslaughts of Satan. We should follow the example of our Lord in boldly jabbing the tempter with the truths from the Word of God.

When our Lord said, "Get thee hence, Satan," the tempter hastened to leave Him, no doubt embarrassed and ashamed. Because Satan had been resisted victoriously with the sword of the Spirit, he fled and did not tempt Christ any more "for a season."

The fact that the tempter left Him "for a season" indicated that he intended to return at the first opportunity. Only when he has tried his utmost will the tempter let a child of God alone, and even then he will watch for another opportunity. Let us ever be on our guard against the adversary and strive to overcome him through the use of God's Word. He will not be able to stand before the incisive power of that Word.

In His victory over Satan, our Lord's method involved the threefold principle of all triumph over him --namely, absolute dependence on God, accompanied by absolute faith in God and reinforced by absolute obedience to God. If we will follow His example, we also will be triumphant.