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THE TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS.

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THE temptation in the wilderness is usually explained as a temptation of the *man* Christ Jesus. The threefold assault was upon the three parts of Christ's human nature—body, soul, and spirit—by the triple agency of evil—the flesh, the world, and the devil. The appeal was made successively to the innocent human desires to live, to be recognized, and to accomplish. But such explanations do not give sufficient emphasis to the significant, "If thou art the Son of God," with which two of Satan's propositions begin. This is not the suggestion that doubt exists in Christ's mind; for doubt, after God's explicit declaration, "Thou art my beloved Son," would itself be sin. Rather it is the open recognition of Christ's divinity as the starting point of Satan's assault. This *if*, as Godet says, has almost the force of *since*. Christ is to be tempted, not as the son of Mary, but as the Son of God. And to understand the nature of the temptations we must study them in their relation to his Messianic work. They do not belong to the points in which he was tempted like as we are, except in so far as we, too, are sons of God and striving to do Christ's work in the world.

Whether and to what extent Jesus before his baptism was acquainted with his divine mission as the Messiah is a question over which scholars may dispute. But all will agree, I think, that the baptism, with the accompanying testimony from heaven and the descent of the Holy Ghost, must have brought that mission to his mind with new and mastering force. In the forty days which followed, while he wandered in the wilderness, Christ's thoughts must have centered upon the mighty work to which he had been called. He was to be the Messiah, the founder and ruler of the kingdom of God, the Savior of man-

kind. That work, vast as it was, he was ready to undertake unhesitatingly, for his obedience to the Father's will was perfect. But how should it be performed? How should he draw all men to him, and win their acceptance and allegiance? This was a question which must be answered before he could enter upon the work. It was the problem which filled his mind to the exclusion of all else as he wandered alone in the wilderness. He was the Son of God; the forerunner, the Father, and the Spirit had borne witness to that—how should he induce his fellow-men to accept him and obey him as such?

There were several possible ways which presented themselves. "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." The Jews were awaiting a Messiah who would do precisely that thing. His kingdom, so they expected, would be an earthly paradise. Their rabbis delighted in telling how in the Messianic days a kernel of wheat would be as large as the kidneys of an ox, the trees would bear fruit all the year round, a single grape would load a wagon, and men would draw wine from it as from a cask. They were hungering and thirsting after a Messiah who would work such miracles. Such miracles were in Christ's power, and in themselves were perfectly right. As the Lord of nature he could command it to feed his followers; and he could banish hunger, disease, and death from his realm. All men would come flocking into such a kingdom, and his mission would be speedily and easily accomplished. But what of the character of the kingdom? What of the subjects who served for loaves and fishes? The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Would turning stones into bread create this? Would it not rather have just the opposite effect, and make men more sensual and carnal than ever? There could be but one answer to such a question. The temptation was recognized and put aside. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

If men are not to be drawn into the kingdom by their appetites, may they not be allured into it by their imaginations? Let Christ, the King of Israel, descend borne on the wings of

angels into the courts of the temple where the priests and rulers daily assemble to pray for his coming, and immediately the Sanhedrin will accept him, and the whole Jewish nation will bow in adoration. This is perfectly proper; for in what way should he use his divine authority, if not in proving to men that he is the Son of God? Men will expect this, and demand it. Why not meet their just demands, and thus establish the kingdom promptly and firmly? But, again, what of the nature of such a kingdom? Will there be anything spiritual about it? Righteousness, peace and joy—do these come through marveling at miracles? Can you surprise men, or dazzle men, or scare men into the kingdom of heaven? As a matter of fact, the miracles which Christ wrought in his public ministry often seemed to hinder rather than to help his work. The excited crowds which they attracted elbowed and jostled each other, eager to gratify a low craving for the marvelous, but showing no desire to learn and follow the truth. Faith which is founded merely on miracles is vain. The desponding cry of Christ, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4:48), echoes Moses' expostulation with Israel at Rephidim when "they tempted the Lord, saying: Is the Lord among us or not?" (Ex. 17:7). And against any display of divine power to win admiration or superstitious following from men there abides the command—whose significance is found by studying the scene at Rephidim—"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Deut. 6:16). The gift of miracle working must not be prostituted. Christ will by a wonderful sign draw all men unto him; but the sign shall be a Messiah lifted up upon the cross instead of borne down from the pinnacle of the temple.

The third temptation does not begin with "If thou be the Son of God," because it is concerned, not with Christ's use of the divine power, but with the character of his proposed kingdom. The Jews were chafing under the Roman yoke, and were ready to follow any leader who would promise them deliverance. With the wildest enthusiasm they would greet him, and lay down their lives to place him on the throne of David. Christ was of

royal descent, and might properly claim the Jewish crown. Why not establish the kingdom of God by first restoring the kingdom of David? Take the sword to win the scepter; and when this has been secured, then make all things work together for righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. But can the earthly kingdom be secured except by a sacrifice of the heavenly? Can a man serve two masters? If he would receive a crown from the people, Christ must consult their wishes and follow their leading; and to do that would in reality be to bow before the prince of this world and do his bidding. When that fact is clearly recognized, the temptation is overcome, and the tempter spurned. "Get thee hence, Satan," for it is written, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

This brief outline of the three temptations is sufficient to show their official character. They may be profitably studied in their relation to Christ's three offices of prophet, priest, and king. As a prophet he must feed the hungry multitude with the Word of God instead of giving them stones made bread. As a priest he must offer for us "a body bruised for our iniquities" instead of one which angels bear up in their hands. And as a king he must ever proclaim, "My kingdom is not of this world." But I need not stop to elaborate.

It is a familiar thought that the temptations of the wilderness were set before Christ again in his public ministry. Luke evidently hints at this in his significant statement, "when the devil had ended the temptation, he departed from him *for a season.*" But, so far as I know, it has not been pointed out that of the three temptations each has a special relation to one year of the ministry, so that we may find in the great struggle of that year a repetition of an experience in the wilderness. Disregarding the chronological order of the temptations as uncertain and unimportant, we may say that the temple temptation corresponds to the first year, the bread temptation to the second, and the mountain temptation to the third. If this be so, then Christ in the wilderness did something more than pass through a general testing preliminary to entering upon his pub-

lic work; *he went through that whole work in anticipation, and fought its fight year by year.* To make this evident, let us look at the special character of each of these years.

The first year is that of the Judean ministry — begun in Jerusalem, and carried on afterwards in the land of Judea. Our only record of it is found in a few chapters of John's gospel; but this is enough to make its nature evident. It was an attempt to gain from the priests and Sanhedrin an official recognition as the Messiah. It began with the purification of the temple—an act which proclaimed Christ's authority in the most public and unmistakable manner. This at once called forth the question, "What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" In this act and question we have the whole year's struggle set forth. Christ demanded that the official head of the nation should proclaim him to be the Messiah; the priests and Sanhedrin demanded before doing this such a sign as they expected from the Messiah. It was the temptation which Satan already had put before him when the two stood upon the pinnacle of the temple. Had he done what Satan suggested, what the rulers demanded, the Sanhedrin would at once have proclaimed to the nation, "Our Messiah has come," and his kingdom would have been established. As it was, the miracles he did work created only imperfect faith among the people, and Nicodemus alone of the Sanhedrin gave him a guarded recognition.

The second year is the year of the Galilean ministry. This was an appeal directly to the people in the less bigoted and more independent land of Galilee. If they would give him recognition, Jerusalem and the Sanhedrin might eventually be brought to imitate them. The ministry of this year differs greatly from that of the first. It abounds in miracles of healing; it is filled with seeming popularity. For a whole twelve months Galilee is in ecstasies over the wonderful person who has appeared in their midst; crowds follow him, life is like a holiday, all are full of rejoicing, and—with the exception of the emissaries from Jerusalem—all are ready to hail him as their Savior. But when we look at the cause of this sudden affection,

we see that it is purely selfish. The desires of the people are fleshly; what they seek from Jesus is relief from bodily pain and physical wants. They think they have found in him a Messiah who turns the very stones into bread. It is the temptation of the wilderness repeated on a larger scale. And when Christ refuses to gratify their sensual cravings, they at once abandon him. The cessation of popularity is as sudden as its rise. When the people can no longer use their Messiah, they have no use for him.

To the third year it is difficult to give a name which shall describe it geographically; we may call it the year of peripatetic ministry. It is spent in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, of Decapolis, of Magdala, of Cæsarea Philippi, of Judea beyond Jordan. In fact, if we wish a single word which shall describe its locality, we might take this oft-repeated word "coasts." The character of the ministry is evident. Christ now withdraws, as far as possible, from the multitude, and devotes himself to the training of the Twelve. He has sought recognition from the rulers, and they have demanded a sign; he has preached to the people, and they have clamored for loaves. Now he takes up the task of fitting the apostles to preach the kingdom of God after his approaching death; and lo! the only kingdom which they are willing to hear about is a temporal one. They thirst for earthly authority; they misunderstand his words, and cannot imagine that he must be crucified; they quarrel among themselves about positions of authority when he shall receive a throne; and they urge upon him the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. It is the temptation of the mountain set before him by his own bosom friends. And not without reason does he rebuke Peter in exactly the same words he used to Satan.

It is very instructive to notice in this connection that each of the three years of ministry closed with an act by which Christ seemed to yield to the temptation dominant in that year, but really rejected it. The deed which was demanded was performed; but it was performed in such a way as to disappoint the expectations of those who demanded it, and to emphasize the truth which opposed the temptation. The priests and rulers

asked a sign ; so the Judean ministry closed at the second passover season by the healing of the impotent man at Bethesda, a miracle so public and indisputable—for the man was known to all the city as incurable—that no attempt was made to deny it or explain it away. But with the miracle came the command to carry a bed on the Sabbath, which so aroused the indignation of the Jewish authorities that the resolution to put Jesus to death was now for the first time framed. Concerning this miracle Ellicott properly says: "This is the turning point in the gospel history. Up to this time the preaching of our Lord in Jerusalem and in Judea had met with a certain degree of toleration, and, in many cases, even of acceptance ; but after this all becomes changed. Henceforth the City of David is no meet or safe abode for the Son of David ; the earthly house of his heavenly Father is no longer a secure hall of audience for the preaching of the Eternal Son." The discourse which followed this miracle, and whose central thoughts are, according to Westcott, "the nature and prerogatives of the Son, the witness to the Son, and the ground of unbelief," must be studied with reference to the special conflict with temptation which had been going on throughout the year, and now was brought to a triumphant close. If, as is probable, it was spoken before the Sanhedrin, it is still more significant.

The Galilean ministry ends with the third passover season, though Christ was still in Galilee as the passover drew nigh. Throughout its twelve months the people had been clamoring for the gratification of their sensual cravings, and now Christ apparently yielded to their clamor by the miracle of feeding the five thousand. But this miracle, again, was accompanied with words and acts which utterly disappointed the expectations it had aroused, and caused the people to abandon him, not, perhaps, so much in rage as in disgust. The discourse at Capernaum is Christ's own commentary upon the whole Galilean work. The excited multitude came flocking thither ; and "he told them" (I quote from Stalker) "how much they had been mistaken in him ; they were looking for a bread-king, who would give them idleness and plenty, mountains of loaves, rivers of

milk, every comfort without labor. What he had to give was the bread of eternal life. His discourse was like a stream of cold water directed upon the fiery enthusiasm of the crowd. From that hour his cause in Galilee was doomed: 'many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him.' It was what he intended. It was himself who struck the fatal blow at his popularity." In other words, another temptation of the wilderness was once more met, and in this decisive manner forever overcome.

The third year, likewise, ended with a passover season—the last in Christ's life. And its important closing act was the triumphal entry. The significance of this, and its influence in bringing about the crucifixion, are seldom sufficiently emphasized. To the excited multitude, and doubtless to the ambitious disciples also, it seemed as if Christ at last was going to fulfil their expectations, and set up his throne in the royal city. They greeted him with the cry, "Blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord; blessed be the kingdom of our father David." They led the way directly to the temple; they expected that there he would break the long silence, and proclaim himself their ruler; then the Romans would at once be driven out of Jerusalem, and presently out of all Palestine. The whole city was in a tumult, and it required but a single word from Christ to precipitate a revolution. But again he bitterly disappointed them. His entry in lowly fashion they might excuse, as being the fulfilment of ancient prediction; but his utter silence when he was within the temple and they waited to hear him speak, and his quiet withdrawal to Bethany as eventide drew nigh, were more exasperating than any spoken rejection of their temptation. The rage of thwarted ambition explains why Judas was ready to make a bargain with the priests, and why the multitude who shouted "Hosanna!" on Sunday, howled "Crucify him! Crucify him!" on the following Friday. The high mountain on which Satan for the last time spread before the Son of God a vision of the kingdoms of the world and said, "If thou wilt worship me, all shall be thine," was none other than Mount Moriah itself.

Such then, in brief, is the relation of the three temptations

in the wilderness to the three years of Christ's public ministry. Of course, it is not claimed that each temptation was confined wholly to one year, so that no trace of it can be found in the other two years; but only that each temptation was foremost in some one year, and by its preëminence gave character to the struggle of that year. So exact seems to me the correspondence between the temptations and the ministry that I would not hesitate to divide Christ's public life into the sign year, the bread year, and the kingdom year. Such names would be really helpful in studying the character of his work.

If the view which I have set forth be correct, we can understand why Christ related so fully, and apparently so often, to his disciples the struggle in the wilderness, though he said nothing about his other solitary experiences. He was endeavoring by this revelation to make them understand the nature of the struggle they witnessed in his public ministry, and to see in it a repetition of the temptations which Satan had already presented and he had overcome. We can also understand why the evangelists in their brief records give so much space to it. Above all, we find new reasons for emphasizing this chapter in our Lord's life. It was the battle in which the whole future war with Satan was anticipatively fought and won.