



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Jump Start # 1825

Matthew 4:1 *“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”*

Late last week we started looking at "Things they didn't tell me when I became a Christian." One other topic that needs to be included in that list is the fact that temptations do not cease. I think in theory, many have the notion that since a life has been committed to Christ, either temptations ought to cease, or at least, be fewer. That's not necessarily true. It also reminds us that a saved person can be tempted, can sin, and if not careful can return to the world. Peter's illustration of a dog returning to eat it's vomit or a washed pig returning to the mud, (**2 Peter 2:22**) is that very point. A clean soul can return to the misery and filth of sin.

Our verse today, begins Matthew's account of Jesus' temptation. Several things are interesting here.

First, the temptation of Jesus follows His baptism by John. It wasn't before the baptism, but rather, after the baptism that Jesus was tempted. Should it be any different for us?

Second, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness TO be tempted. Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. Temptation itself is not sin. It's the opportunity to sin. It's Satan knocking on the door of your heart. As long as you do not open the door and allow him in, he will not harm you. The next two verses add even more understanding into temptation. It says that Jesus fasted forty days and nights. He was hungry. He was weak physically. It is at this point that the tempter came. He didn't come when Jesus was strong, but when He was weak. Who does the lion pounce on in a herd? It's not the strongest for the fastest, it's those that are weak, slow, or not paying attention. At church services, surrounded by brethren, and with our hearts focused upon Scriptures and the Lord, it's hard for Satan to get far with us. But another night of the week. Tired. Alone. Vulnerable. At the end of a tough day. After harsh words were spoken earlier in the day to our spouse, "after" we have lost our strength, then the tempter comes. Thoughts race through our minds. We begin to see the good in what Satan offers. We listen. We pause. We contemplate. There is a knock on our heart and we open the door to see who is there. It's Satan disguised and ready to come in.

Third, In Matthew and Luke's account of the Jesus' temptation, the order of the three temptations are different. However, they both begin with the same one, turning rocks into bread. So simple. Later on Jesus will multiply bread to feed the disciples. His first miracle will involve turning water to wine. It would be nothing for Jesus to do this. Some commentators state that certain rocks in the desert area are shaped and even look like the hard rolls that were commonly baked in households. If this is true, you can imagine being hungry, and everywhere you look are these rocks that Satan is encouraging you to make into bread.

(OVER)

Satan is really appealing to the physical desires of Jesus. It's been a long time since You've eaten.

What is also interesting about these temptations is that only Jesus and Satan are together in the wilderness. No disciples are there. No multitudes are there. No one witnessed this. Had God not revealed this, we would have never known about this. That is another key component of temptation. No one is around to see. You can get away with it. Opportunity. No security cameras. No one at home. No one will ever know.

Now, mixing those two ingredients together, it's been a long time and no one will ever know, Satan presents powerful reasons to reach for the bottle, or to have an affair or to take something that does not belong to you. And maybe no one will ever know, but you will. You will know what you did. And, God will know. He always knows. Using these two strong reasons, 'it's been a long time,' and, 'no one will ever know,' Satan pushes our buttons. Temptation looks so good. And that leads to the third aspect of temptation.

Temptation always begins as a thought in our minds. The more of God's word that is in your heart, the greater this battle and struggle is in your mind. It's like the cartoon of the devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other. You are pulled. You are tempted. Your reasoning or lack of reasoning will determine the outcome of this battle. Passages come to your mind. You think of consequences. You see the folly of sin. Like Christ, you resist. You flee a situation. The door of temptation is not opened and on this day you have won a battle. But the battle could have easily been lost. Instead of thinking of verses, you think of reasons why you deserve what Satan offers. Alone and it's been a long time fills your mind more than the consequences. The door is opened and Satan is invited in. The temptation has turned to a wrong choice. You listened to Satan rather than God.

It's a difficult lesson for new Christians to learn that temptations continue on. Satan won't leave you alone. But like Christ, we do not have to open that door. Pour yourself into the Scriptures. Surround yourself with godly people who are serious about Heaven. Put some distance between you and your old ways. Can we live a sinless life? No. John reminds us that we will sin, but we also have the promise of forgiveness in Christ. The key, John shows us, is to walk in the light as Jesus is in the light. Walk. Make progress. Move toward Heaven. Start seeing things from Heaven's perspective. As one does this, he will recognize temptations faster and see through the phony words of Satan.

Notice some of the admonitions found in the New Testament:

- Be strong in the Lord
- Be on the alert
- Act like men
- Put on the full armor of God
- Flee fornication
- Do not be deceived
- Love not the world
- Stand firm in the faith
- Evil companions corrupt good morals

It would be great to be done with the devil. That day is coming. He won't be around where we are going. He's not allowed into Heaven. Someday temptation will no longer knock on the door of our heart. We need to help one another, rather than judge and point fingers at each other. We need to encourage rather than give up on one another. Together, with the Lord, we can make it.

Won't it be wonderful there, having no burdens to bear-great hymn. Great reminder. Great day, when we finally get there. Live as if one foot is already in Heaven.

Roger Shouse

