**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**LUKE-012**. **THE TEMPTATION by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2. Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days He did eat nothing: and when they were ended, He afterward hungered. 3. And the devil said unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread, 4. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. 5. And the devil, taking Him up into an high mountain, showed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6. And the devil said unto Him, All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. 7. If Thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine. 8. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind Me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. 9. And he brought Him to Jerusalem and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down from hence: 10. For it is written, He shall give His angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee; 11. And in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. 12. And Jesus answering, said unto Him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God. 13. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from Him for a season."*

*Luke 4:1-13*

If we adopt the Revised Version's reading and rendering, the whole of the forty days in the desert were one long assault of Jesus by Satan, during which the consciousness of bodily needs was suspended by the intensity of spiritual conflict. Exhaustion followed this terrible tension, and the enemy chose that moment of physical weakness to bring up his strongest battalions. What a contrast these days made with the hour of the baptism! And yet both the opened heavens and the grim fight were needful parts of Christ's preparation. As true man, He could be truly tempted; as perfect man, suggestions of evil could not arise within, but must be presented from without. He must know our temptations if He is to help us in them, and He must first bind the strong manif He is afterwards to spoil his house. It is useless to discuss whether the tempter appeared in visible form, or carried Jesus from place to place. The presence and voice were real, though probably if any eye had looked on, nothing would have been seen but the solitary Jesus, sitting still in the wilderness.

**I. The first temptation is that of the Son of man tempted to distrust God.**

Long experience had taught the tempter that his most taking baits were those which appealed to the appetites and needs of the body, and so he tries these first. The run of men are drawn to sin by some form or other of these, and the hunger of Jesus laid Him open to their power--if not on the side of delights of sense, yet on the side of wants. The tempter quotes the divine voice at the baptism with almost a sneer, as if the hungry, fainting Man before him were a strange Son of God. The suggestion sounds innocent enough; for there would have been no necessary harm in working a miracle to feed Himself. But its evil is betrayed by the words, If Thou art the Son of God, and the answer of our Lord, which begins emphatically with man, puts us on the right track to understand why He repelled the insidious proposal even while He was faint with hunger. To yield to it would have been to shake off for His own sake the human conditions which He had taken for our sakes, and to seek to cease to be Son of man in acting as Son of God. He takes no notice of the title given by Satan, but falls back on His brotherhood with man, and accepts the laws under which they live as His conditions.

The quotation from Deuteronomy, which Luke gives in a less complete form than Matthew, implies, even in that incomplete form, that bread is not the only means of keeping a man in life, but that God can feed Him, as He did Israel in its desert life, with manna; or, if manna fails, by the bare exercise of His divine will. Therefore Jesus will not use His power as Son of God, because to do so would at once take Him out of His fellowship with man, and would betray His distrust of God's power to feed Him there in the desert. How soon His confidence was vindicated Matthew tells us. As soon as the devil departed from Him, angels came and ministered unto Him. The soft rush of their wings brought solace to His spirit, wearied with struggle, and once again man did eat angelsfood.

This first temptation teaches us much. It makes the manhood of our Lord pathetically true, as showing Him bearing the prosaic but terrible pinch of hunger, carried almost to its fatal point. It teaches us how innocent and necessary wants may be the devil's levers to overturn our souls. It warns us against severing ourselves from our fellows by the use of distinctive powers for our own behoof. It sets forth humble reliance on God's sustaining will as best for us, even if we are in the desert, where, according to sense, we must starve; and it magnifies the Brother's love, who for our sakes waived the prerogatives of the Son of God, that He might be the brother of the poor and needy.

**II. The second temptation is that of the Messiah, tempted to grasp His dominion by false means.**

The devil finds that he must try a subtler way. Foiled on the side of the physical nature, he begins to apprehend that he has to deal with One loftier than the mass of men; and so he brings out the glittering bait, which catches the more finely organised natures. Where sense fails, ambition may succeed. There is nothing said now about Son of God. The relation of Jesus to God is not now the point of attack, but His hoped--for relation to the world. Did Satan actually transport the body of Jesus to some eminence? Probably not. It would not have made the vision of all the kingdoms any more natural if he had. The remarkable language showed ... all ... in a moment of timedescribes a physical impossibility, and most likely is meant to indicate some sort of diabolic phantasmagoria, flashed before Christ's consciousness, while His eyes were fixed on the silent, sandy waste.

There is much in Scripture that seems to bear out the boast that the kingdoms are at Satan's disposal. But he is the father of liesas well as the prince of this world, and we may be very sure that his authority loses nothing in his telling. If we think how many thrones have been built on violence and sustained by crime, how seldom in the world's history the right has been uppermost, and how little of the fear of God goes to the organisation of society, even to-day, in so-called Christian countries, we shall be ready to feel that in this boast the devil told more truth than we like to believe. Note that he acknowledges that the power has been given, and on the fact of the delegation of it rests the temptation to worship. He knew that Jesus looked forward to becoming the world's King, and he offers easy terms of winning the dignity. Very cunning he thought himself, but he had made one mistake. He did not know what kind of kingdom Jesus wished to establish. If it had been one of the bad old pattern, like Nebuchadnezzar's or Caesar's, his offer would have been tempting, but it had no bearing on One who meant to reign by love, and to win love by loving to the death.

Worshipping the devil could only help to set up a devil's kingdom. Jesus wanted nothing of the glorywhich had been givenhim. His answer, again taken from Deuteronomy, is His declaration that His kingdom is a kingdom of obedience, and that He will only reign as God's representative. It defines His own position and the genius of His dominion. It would come to the tempter's ears as the broken law, which makes his misery and turns all his gloryinto ashes. This is our Lord's decisive choice, at the outset of His public work, of the path of suffering and death. He renounces all aid from such arts and methods as have built up the kingdoms of earth, and presents Himself as the antagonist of Satan and his dominion. Henceforth it is war to the knife.

For us the lessons are plain. We have to learn what sort of kingdom Jesus sets up. We have to beware, in our own little lives, of ever seeking to accomplish good things by questionable means, of trying to carry on Christ's work with the devil's weapons. When churches lower the standard of Christian morality, because keeping it up would alienate wealthy or powerful men, when they wink hard at sin which pays, when they enlist envy, jealousy, emulation of the baser sort in the service of religious movements, are they not worshipping Satan? And will not their gains be such as he can give, and not such as Christ's kingdom grows by? Let us learn, too, to adore and be thankful for the calm and fixed decisiveness with which Jesus chose from the beginning, and trod until the end, with bleeding but unreluctant feet, the path of suffering on His road to His throne.

**III. The third temptation tempts the worshipping Son to tempt God.**

Luke arranges the temptations partly from a consideration of locality, the desert and the mountain being near each other, and partly in order to bring out a certain sequence in them. First comes the appeal to the physical nature, then that to the finer desires of the mind; and these having been repelled, and the resolve to worship God having been spoken by Jesus, Luke's third temptation is addressed to the devout soul, as it looks to the cunning but shallow eyes of the tempter. Matthew, on the other hand, in accordance with his point of view, puts the specially Messianic temptation last. The actual order is as undiscoverable as unimportant. In Luke's order there is substantially but one change of place--from the solitude of the wilderness to the Temple. As we have said, the change was probably not one of the Lord's body, but only of the scenes flashed before His mind's eye. The pinnacle of the Templemay have been the summit that looked down into the deep valley where the enormous stones of the lofty wall still stand, and which must have been at a dizzy height above the narrow glen on the one side and the Temple courts on the other. There is immense, suppressed rage and malignity in the recurrence of the sneer, If Thou art the Son of Godand in the use of Christ's own weapon of defence, the quotation of Scripture.

What was wrong in the act suggested? There is no reference to the effect on the beholders, as has often been supposed; and if we are correct in supposing that the whole temptation was transacted in the desert, there could be none. But plainly the point of it was the suggestion that Jesus should, of His own accord and needlessly, put Himself in danger, expecting God to deliver Him. It looked like devout confidence; it was really tempting God'. It looked like the very perfection of the trust with which, in the first round of this duel, Christ had conquered; it was really distrust, as putting God to proof whether He would keep His promises or no. It looked like the very perfection of that worship with which He had overcome in the second round of the fight; it wag really self-will in the mask of devoutness. It tempted God, because it sought to draw Him to fulfil to a man on self-chosen paths His promises to those who walk in ways which He has appointed.

We trust God when we look to Him to deliver us in perils met in meek acceptance of His will. We tempt Him when we expect Him to save us from those encountered on roads that we have picked oat for ourselves. Such presumption disguised as filial trust is the temptation besetting the higher regions of experience, to which the fumes of animal passions and the less gross but more dangerous airs from the desires of the mind do not ascend. Religious men who have conquered these have still this foe to meet. Spiritual pride, the belief that we may venture into dangers either to our natural or to our religious life, where no call of duty takes us, the thrusting ourselves, unbidden, into circumstances where nothing but a miracle can save us-these are the snares which Satan lays for souls that have broken his coarser nets. The three answers with which Jesus overcame are the mottoes by which we shall conquer. Trust God, by whose will we live. Worship God, in whose service we get all of this world that is good for us. Tempt not God, whose angels keep us in our ways, when they are His ways, and who reckons trust that is not submission to His ways to be tempting God, and not trusting Him.

All the temptationwas ended. So these three made a complete whole, and the quiver of the enemy was for the time empty. He departed for a season, or rather, until an opportunity. He was foiled when he tried to tempt by addressing desires. His next assault will be at Gethsemane and Calvary, when dread and the shrinking from pain and death will be assailed as vainly.