

a Bible Lesson from MATTHEW 4:1-11:

TO RESIST THE TEMPTATIONS OF SINFUL PLEASURE, PRIDE AND POWER

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I. INTRODUCTION – ON THESE FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS

In this season of Lent, it seems good that we should consider The Example of how our Lord JESUS CHRIST resisted the temptations of the devil in the wilderness - the allures of sinful pleasure, pride and power. This ties in directly to our study of the proper use and function of earthly wealth, that it should always serve The Kingdom of GOD by serving The Lord and other men as ordained by The Giver of all good things, CHRIST Himself.

There is the proper use and enjoyment of pleasures for men that are ordained by The Creator. But when they become as gods to men, they are then idolatrous sins. There is the proper calling of pride, not that men should boast in themselves or any works they may do, but that we may boast in CHRIST as His faithful servants. But when pride becomes as gods to men, they are then idolatrous sins. And there is the right administration and application of power by duly ordained godly rulers in The Church and the secular. But when power becomes as gods to men, they are then idolatrous sins.

Saint Tertullian says, “Of sins, some are carnal, that is, physical. Others are spiritual... The source by which sins are named ‘spiritual’ and ‘physical’ is the fact that every sin is a matter either of action or else of thought.”¹ Man is made both body and soul, both physical and spiritual. So we are liable to be tempted to sin in both action and thought. Sins of the second, in fact, lead to sins of the first. Therefore the need to be cleansed from within by The Spirit of GOD at The Cross of CHRIST.

How are we, as mere men, to resist the temptations to sin in pleasure, pride and power? By being in CHRIST. And when we are so, our pain becomes His, and His victory becomes ours. Our victory over sin is possible for us as His saints because He Himself was victorious over sin, being fully GOD and fully Man but without sin in The Incarnation. So CHRIST both saves us from sin’s consequences, separation from GOD, and enables us to resist the temptations that would lead us into sin, both spiritual and physical. As Saint John declares in I JOHN 5:5, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that JESUS is the Son of GOD?”²

The first stanza of the “O Lord, on These Forty Days and Forty Nights,” reads:

“Should we not Your sorrow share
and from all desires abstain,
fasting with unceasing prayer,
strong with You to suffer pain?”³

¹ 1, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, entry “Sin, I. Classes of Sin,” p 616, 3rd entry. “Tertullian (c. 203, W), 3.658-659.”

² 2, KJV, I JOHN 5:5.

³ 3, Hymn, “Lord, on These Forty Days and Forty Nights.” Words: George Hunt Smyttan, 1856. Music: Heinlein Martin Herbst, 1676. Stanza 2.

http://www.missionstclare.com/music/lent/hymns/Forty_days/forty.html

II. TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION OF SINFUL PLEASURE!

Of the temptation of sinful pleasure, we first read in MATTHEW 4:1-4, “Then was JESUS led up of The Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be The Son of GOD, command that these stones be made bread. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceedeth out of The Mouth of GOD!”⁴

Recall that the ancient Israelites were prideful before The Almighty. Therefore, their journey to dwell in The Presence of The LORD lasted 40 years, that the people of GOD might come to know that The Word of GOD both creates and sustains, as well as blesses and saves, according to His will. Not to be consumed by sinful abuse of pleasure, but that they have their proper place in our lives as ordained by GOD.

So Moses writes in DEUTERONOMY 8:1-3, “All The Commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess The Land which The LORD sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which The LORD thy GOD led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His Commandments, or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna...; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every Word that proceedeth out of the mouth of The LORD doth man live!”⁵

Saint Clement of Alexandria adds his voice, “Wealth, when not properly governed, is a stronghold of evil. Many, because of casting their eyes on it, will never reach The Kingdom of Heaven. For they are sick for the things of the world, and are living proudly through luxury...” Love of pleasures in worldly things, when they displace GOD as first in our lives, become “the stronghold of evil... But the best riches is poverty of desires” of worldly pleasures, that we may seek to dwell before The Presence of The LORD first in all things!⁶

Now consider the utter outrageous, blind absurdity of the devil here in tempting JESUS! He is attempting to tempt The Son of GOD to abuse his Divine power to transform stones, aplenty apparently at that place in the desert, into bread! But this title, “The Son of GOD,” conveys what the devil apparently did not understand, that JESUS CHRIST is not only fully Man but without sin, but fully GOD! CHRIST was there at the beginning of creation. He is before all creation, equal with The Father. He made all the physical universe and the spiritual world with The Word of His mouth.

⁴ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 4:1-4.

⁵ 2, KJV, DEUTERONOMY 8:1-3.

⁶ 1, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, entry “Materialism,” p 440, 6th entry. “Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.248.”

He made the stones that lay at His feet and at the devil's. He made all matter. He made all life. He made even the devil! As Saint John says in JOHN 1:1-3, "In the beginning was The Word, and The Word was with GOD, and The Word was GOD. The Same was in the beginning with GOD. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made!"⁷ So The Son of GOD waves His hand and declares, quoting The very Law which He Himself had revealed to Moses, "...man doth not live by bread only, but by every Word that proceedeth out of the mouth of The LORD doth man live!"⁸

Make these stones into bread, indeed! CHRIST obtains the victory in not giving in to the temptation of the devil to abuse His Divine Nature to experience the bodily pleasure of eating physical bread to meet His Body's physical needs, when in fact it is His spiritual bread that is more needful, The very Word of GOD, by the mouth of The LORD, for The Word of GOD Incarnate! When we are in CHRIST, His victory over temptations to sinful pleasures is our victory as well! His authority over the devil is our victory! He gives us His saints the power and authority to both resist temptation and rebuke the devil!

So the second stanza of "O Lord, on These Forty Days and Forty Nights" reads:

"Then if evil on us press,
JESUS, Savior, hear our call!
Victor in the wilderness,
grant we may not faint nor fall!"⁹

III. TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION OF SINFUL PRIDE!

Of the temptation of sinful pride, we second read in MATTHEW 4:5-7, "Then the devil taketh Him up into The Holy City, and setteth him on a pinnacle of The Temple, And saith unto Him, If Thou be The Son of GOD, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. JESUS said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt The Lord thy GOD!"¹⁰

See here the devil is becoming most desperate, for he dares to tempt The Word of GOD Incarnate with The Word of GOD! "Come JESUS," says Satan, "You know what suffering lies ahead of You at The Cross for the sake of these miserable creatures, these ungrateful men and women! GOD The Father did not appreciate me, for He cast me and my host down from Heaven when I tried to keep Him from elevating man above the angelic realm! Does He appreciate what You will do at Calvary? Test Him! It would be

⁷ 2, KJV, JOHN 1:1-3.

⁸ 2, KJV, DEUTERONOMY 8:3.

⁹ 3, Hymn, "Lord, on These Forty Days and Forty Nights." Words: George Hunt Smyttan, 1856. Music: Heinlein Martin Herbst, 1676. Stanza 3.

http://www.missionstclare.com/music/lent/hymns/Forty_days/forty.html

¹⁰ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 4:5-7.

a small sign of His reliability if You cast yourself down from this pinnacle, that He should send His angels to lift You up!”

So the devil dares to quote the psalmist from PSALM 91:9-12, “Because thou hast made The LORD, which is My refuge, even The Most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. 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.”¹¹ As Saint Augustine says, “CHRIST was raised up in the hands of Angels, when He was taken up into Heaven: not that, if Angels had not sustained Him, He would have fallen: but because they were attending on their King!”¹² Who but The Son of GOD Himself could now so completely resist and rebuke the devil and his wiles Face to face, and in doing so, give us His victory!

Now the devil tries the same trick upon The Son of GOD that worked so well for him against Adam and Eve in The Garden of Eden, as he had said to Eve in GENESIS 3:1, “...Yea, hath GOD said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”¹³ First Satan misuses Holy Scripture, then he questions if GOD had even said what is said in Those same Scriptures! Forever twisting, casting doubt and lying, that he might entice others into joining him in his hopeless rebellion against The Most High! To dare to tempt even The Lord Himself in the wilderness!

As The Catechism of The Catholic Church says, “Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to GOD, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and The church’s Tradition sees in this being a fallen angel, called ‘Satan’ or the ‘devil.’”¹⁴ Indeed, there is no greater prideful creature that the devil himself, who with the fallen angels under his command, chose by their free will, who “radically and irrevocably rejected GOD and His reign.”¹⁵

So Satan, in his pride, “sinned from the beginning” and is “a liar and the father of lies.”¹⁶ And so he seeks to tempt men into sin, that they might be his eternal spiritual food and fodder in Hell. For “there is no repentance for the angels after there fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death!”¹⁷ Truly, as it is written in PROVERBS 16:18, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall!”¹⁸

¹¹ 2, KJV, PSALM 91:9-12.

¹² 4, Augustine, Exposition on The PSALMS, PSALM XCI, 16 (Ver. 12), p 688.

¹³ 2, KJV, GENESIS 3:1.

¹⁴ 5, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 391, p 110.

¹⁵ 5, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 392, p 110.

¹⁶ 5, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 392, p 110.

¹⁷ 5, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 393, p 110-111.

¹⁸ 2, KJV, PROVERBS 16:18.

O man, beware the snare of pride! If a man is to boast, let him boast only in The LORD GOD, and the great and wondrous Grace that saves! We may say with David, as in PSALM 34:1-3, "...I will bless The LORD at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in The LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify The LORD with me, and let us exalt His Name together!"¹⁹ And with Paul, as in GALATIANS 6:14, "But GOD forbid that I should glory, save in The Cross of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world!"²⁰

So the third stanza of "O Lord, on These Forty Days and Forty Nights" reads:

"So shall we have Peace Divine
holy gladness ever new;
round us, too, shall angels shine,
such as ministered to You!"²¹

IV. TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION OF SINFUL POWER!

Of the temptation to sinful power, we third read in MATTHEW 4:8-11, "Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto Him, All these things will I give thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith JESUS unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship The Lord thy GOD, and Him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him!"²²

Desperate, the devil lastly tries to buy off JESUS by offering Him what is not his to give! For GOD alone is sovereign over all the world, as The Apostle Paul declares in I TIMOTHY 1:17, "Now unto The King eternal, immortal, invisible, The only wise GOD, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen!"²³ The power of the devil over this world is illusory. He has been cast down from Heaven by The Almighty, confined to the earth until The Last Judgement, and he roams the world of men in desperate rage! As Saint John declares in REVELATION 12:12, "...Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time!"²⁴

¹⁹ 2, KJV, PSALM 34:1-3.

²⁰ 2, KJV, GALATIANS 6:14.

²¹ 3, Hymn, "Lord, on These Forty Days and Forty Nights." Words: George Hunt Smytton, 1856. Music: Heinlein Martin Herbst, 1676. Stanza 4.

http://www.missionstclare.com/music/lent/hymns/Forty_days/forty.html

²² 2, KJV, MATTHEW 4:8-11.

²³ 2, KJV, I TIMOTHY 1:17.

²⁴ 2, KJV, REVELATION 12:2.

But GOD the son responds in rebuke to Satan, showing the absurd notion of this once greatest created being, that The Creator should bow down to the creature! So JESUS quotes The First Great Commandment from His Own Law as given to us via Moses from DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our GOD is One LORD: And thou shalt love The LORD thy GOD with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might!”²⁵ This is The same First Great Commandment that our Lord declares to the prideful mere human lawyer of The Law of Moses²⁶ in MATTHEW 22:37, “...Thou shalt love The LORD thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind!”²⁷

As Matthew Henry observes, “Satan tempted CHRIST to idolatry with the offer of the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. The glory of the world is the most charming temptation to the unthinking and unwary; by that men are most easily imposed upon. CHRIST was tempted to worship Satan. He rejected the proposal with abhorrence. ‘Get thee hence, Satan!’”²⁸

Are we not secure in the Lord? Then confront the evil and rebuke the wicked that tempts into sin! Stand fast in The Authority and Glory of JESUS CHRIST our Rock, our Righteousness, as He rebuked the devil in MATTHEW 4:10, “...Get thee hence, Satan!” Turn away from tempting situations and seek not its allures! Rebuke the devil with The Word of GOD! Repent and be renewed by The Word Incarnate in The Words of His mouth breathed upon us by His Spirit in The Holy Scriptures! For as David declares in PSALM 18:30, so may we trust, “As for GOD, His Way is perfect: The Word of The LORD is tried: He is a buckler to all those that trust in Him!”²⁹

So the fourth stanza of “O Lord, on These Forty Days and Forty Nights” reads:

“Keep, O keep us, Savior dear,
ever constant by Your side;
that with You we may appear
at eternal Eastertide!”³⁰

²⁵ 2, KJV, DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5.

²⁶ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 22:35-40, “Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, which is The Great Commandment in The Law? JESUS said unto him, Thou shalt love The Lord thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is The First and Great Commandment. And The Second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On These Two Commandments hang all The Law and the prophets.”

²⁷ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 22:37.

²⁸ 6, Matthew Henry, Condensed Commentary on The Bible, MATTHEW 4, Vs. 1-11, 3.

²⁹ 2, KJV, PSALM 18:30.

³⁰ 3, Hymn, “Lord, on These Forty Days and Forty Nights.” Words: George Hunt Smyttan, 1856. Music: Heinlein Martin Herbst, 1676. Stanza 5.

http://www.missionstclare.com/music/lent/hymns/Forty_days/forty.html

V. IN CONCLUSION – O LORD, KEEP US SAFE FROM SIN!

So we are to resist the temptations of the devil to sin in JESUS our Saviour. He resisted and overcame the temptations of sinful pleasure, pride and power. He rebuked the devil and the devil fled. And more, CHRIST conquers the wages of sin, death and damnation, so that He may give us the same victories in Himself! As The Apostle Paul declares in I CORINTHIANS 15:55-57, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is The Law. But thanks be to GOD, Which giveth us the victory through our Lord JESUS CHRIST!”³¹

Saint Augustine says, “If in CHRIST we have been tempted, in Him we overcome the devil. Do you think only of CHRIST’s temptations and fail to think of His victory? See yourself as tempted in Him, and see yourself as victorious in Him. He could have kept the devil from Himself; but if He were not tempted He could not teach you how to triumph over temptation!”³² Let us then take heart, for we do not face temptations to sin by ourselves if we are bought by The Blood of CHRIST! He is there with us, and His Spirit is in us, to give us The Victory over sin and death that He has already won for us!

What does Saint James say? He declares to us this very thing in JAMES 4:6-10, “But He giveth more Grace. Wherefore He saith, GOD resisteth the proud, but giveth Grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to GOD. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to GOD, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded... Humble yourselves in the sight of The Lord, and He shall lift you up!”³³

As Matthew Henry observes, see by Whom our victory to resist temptation to sin arises, at The cross of CHRIST! And if we are His, then His Spirit dwells in us. Therefore, “...if The HOLY SPIRIT witness to our being adopted as children of GOD, that will answer all the suggestions of the evil spirit.” But we must not tempt The LORD by inviting temptation. “If we presume upon our own strength, and tempt the devil to tempt us, we provoke GOD to leave us to ourselves,” thus for chastening being left to face the wiles of the devil in our own inadequate strength!³⁴

We see that Satan our enemy is highly “subtle, spiteful, and very daring; but he can be resisted” when we stand in the victory of our Lord JESUS CHRIST! So “it is a comfort to us that CHRIST suffered, being tempted; for thus it appears that our temptations, if not yielded to, are not sins, they are afflictions only. Satan aimed in all his temptations, to bring CHRIST to sin against GOD.”³⁵ He could not tempt our Saviour to enter into sin! And if we keep hold of The Cross, though the devil will tempt us, we need not enter into sin! As Saint James says in JAMES 1:12, “Blessed is the man that

³¹ 2, KJV, CORINTHIANS 15:55-57.

³² 7, Liturgy of The Hours, Book II, p 88, paragraph 2. “From a commentary on The PSALMS by Saint Augustine, Bishop. (PS. 60, 2-3: CCL 39, 766) In CHRIST we suffered temptation, and in Him we overcame the devil.”

³³ 2, KJV, JAMES 4:6-10.

³⁴ 6, Matthew Henry, Condensed Commentary on The Bible, MATTHEW 4, Vs. 1-11.

³⁵ 6, Matthew Henry, Condensed Commentary on The Bible, MATTHEW 4, Vs. 1-11.

endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which The Lord hath promised to them that love Him!”³⁶

Let us then resist the devil’s temptations in our lives to sin, whether they be temptations of sinful pleasure, pride or power, in our Lord JESUS CHRIST, and we shall overcome all these things! What are the temptations to sin in the world, the flesh and the devil compared to the might and power of The Cross? For in Him is our victory! In The Name of GOD The Father, The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN!

³⁶2, KJV, JAMES 1:12.

VI. REFERENCES

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