

LUKE 4

IN THE SYNAGOGUES OF GALILEE

The temptation of Jesus (verses 1-13) was the last step in the preparation for His public ministry; and for many of His followers also, the final discipline for service consists in such a trial that results in a new determination to live not for self – but for God! For the Lord Jesus, the place of temptation was the wilderness; and in our case also, there is a sense in which the experience of moral struggle is always one of intense loneliness. Living in a literal desert or as a hermit does not free one from the temptation to sin. Nevertheless, wherever a child of God may be, he or she may be assured of the presence and sympathy of Christ; and victory is possible through faith in Him! This is the supreme message of this narrative.

In both Matthew and Luke, three different temptations of Jesus are mentioned; and they can stand very well as symbols of the different categories under which all the moral trials of mankind can be grouped. It is interesting to note, however, that the order of the temptations given by Luke differs from that of Matthew. In both accounts, the first temptation is to make bread from stones; but Luke mentions as the second temptation that which is last in the account of Matthew – the temptation which offered to Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. This was a fitting climax to the testing of the King, as Matthew's Gospel particularly portrays Jesus to be. Luke, however, finishes this part of his record with the temptation of Jesus to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple – thereby testing God. It is a temptation in the sphere of intellectual desire, and it comes in the subtle form of presumptuous “trust”; and hence it forms a true climax in the testing of the ideal Man – the picture of Jesus that Luke especially emphasizes. The order given by Matthew is suggested by the Apostle John, when he mentions “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.” But the order of Luke takes us back to the history of Eden and the first human sin – which was due to a love for that which was “good for food,” “a delight to the eyes,” and “to be desired to make one wise.” Just as in the Garden of Eden, the first temptation was to doubt the goodness of God; the second was to doubt His power; and the third was to distrust His wisdom. But Jesus secured the victory over the devil; and in the case of all the tempted people of God, faith is still “the victory which overcomes the world.” The life of faith is a life of repeated moral conflicts, but victory is assured to all those who trust in the goodness and power and wisdom of God!

After His baptism and temptation, Jesus remained for a time in Jerusalem and in Judea; and then He returned to Galilee, where He began that ministry to

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness – verses 1-13
- ❖ He preaches a sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth – verses 14-30
- ❖ He casts out an evil spirit and heals the sick – verses 31-44

which Luke devotes the next six chapters of His Gospel. Of this ministry, he mentions three features. First, it was worked in the power of the Holy Spirit; second, its fame extended throughout the entire country; and third, its essence consisted in the most interesting and impressive public teaching. The first recorded sermon of Jesus (verses 14-30) was preached in the synagogue at Nazareth, the town in which He had spent His youth and early manhood. Luke places this sermon at the very opening of his record of the public ministry of Jesus, probably because he regarded it as containing the general overview of that ministry. It formed the proclamation of the saving work of our Lord.

It was a Sabbath Day. The place of worship was crowded with the relatives and friends and neighbors of Jesus. All were eager to hear the One Whom they knew so well, and Who had attained to so much sudden fame. Either at His own request or Providentially, Jesus was handed the scroll containing the words of the prophet Isaiah, so that He might lead in the reading of the Scriptures. He found the place in the prophecy where, in terms of the joy of Jubilee, the writer is describing the gladness of those who were to return from their long captivity in Babylon. When Jesus had finished the reading, He sat down – thereby taking the attitude of a public teacher. As all gazed upon Him intently, He undertook to show that the prophecy was to be fulfilled by Himself – claiming thereby to be the promised Messiah! The prophecy began with the words, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” When applied to Jesus, this phrase indicates that He had not been anointed with oil, as a prophet or priest or king; but rather, He had been anointed with the Holy Spirit, as the Messiah of God (the word *Messiah* means “Anointed One”). As such, He was “to preach good tidings to the poor” – that is, to those in spiritual poverty, as well as in physical hardship. He was to proclaim deliverance for those who were enslaved by sin, and He was to establish those principles which will result in true freedom for all mankind. He was “to set at liberty them that are bruised” – that is, He would remove the consequences and the cruelties of selfishness and crime. He was to proclaim the era of universal blessedness which will ultimately result from His perfected reign. In these words, which combine the pictures of deliverance from captivity with those of the joy of Jubilee, Jesus expressed the gracious and beneficent character of His ministry.

His audience listened in amazement – unable to resist the charm of His address, or to deny the fascinating beauty of His words; but also unable to acknowledge His claim. They received His predictions with stubborn unbelief. They expressed their incredulity; and at the same time, they explained it by their question, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” They were essentially saying, “Is not this man our neighbor, the carpenter, with whom we have all been acquainted? Do we not know Him and His family? Surely He cannot be the Messiah!” Jesus replied by telling them that their unwillingness to accept Him was partially due to the fact that He had not worked the same miracles among them which had



marked His ministry in other places. This is what He meant by quoting the proverb, “Physician, heal thyself” – that is, “Establish your claim here as you have done elsewhere, if you expect to be received as the Christ.” Jesus also quoted another proverb, in order to more fully explain their jealous doubts: “No prophet is accepted in his own country.”

Those who are most familiar with great persons are usually the least able to appreciate their greatness. “Familiarity breeds contempt” because people are so inclined to judge one another by false standards, and by that which is trivial and external; and also because they frequently do not truly know those whom they think they know the best. This same stupid lack of appreciation shadows human lives today, and makes us fail to realize the worth of our friends and the value of our opportunities until it is too late. It even has its tragic bearing upon the present ministry of Christ. Even today, some still reject Him for reasons that are entirely superficial and foolish – thinking that they know Him perfectly because they been familiar with His name for a long time; when, in reality, they fail to understand the real beauty of His person and the transforming power of His grace.

But the unbelief of Jesus’ listeners that day was turned to mad hatred as He gave two examples from Old Testament history – both of which indicated that His townsmen, who knew Him best, were less worthy of His saving ministry than even the people of heathen nations. He even compared himself with Elijah and Elisha – indicating that just as the former brought a great blessing to a widow who lived in Sidon, and the latter brought healing to a prince in Syria, while the people in Israel were suffering for their unbelief; so also, the nations of the world would accept the blessed salvation of Christ, while those who knew Him best would suffer for their unbelief. So angered were His hearers by this severe rebuke that they drove Him from the city and tried to take His life by throwing Him down from the hill upon which the town was built; but He, with majestic calmness and Divine strength, “passing through the midst of them went his way.”

Alas! It is still true that those who have enjoyed the best opportunities for knowing Christ often reject Him. Nevertheless, where faith is present, broken hearts are healed, as by Elijah of old; and lepers are cleansed, as was Naaman by the word of Elisha. Thus, in this scene in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus indicated not only the grace of His ministry, but also its universal power. He came to relieve all the needs and miseries of sinful mankind, in all the world!

The Sabbath Day at Nazareth is placed in sudden contrast with another Sabbath, which was spent in Capernaum (verses 31-44). On the former occasion, as the story opened, Jesus was surrounded by His friends and towns-

men; but as it closed, they had turned into a fierce mob which was seeking His death. However, in Capernaum, as the scene opened, Jesus was faced by a demon; but as it closed, He was surrounded by an admiring throng who were eager to have Him remain in their midst. Jesus was again in a synagogue, and He was awakening surprise by the character of His message. Unlike the teachers of His day, He spoke with authority – instead of quoting reputed “authorities” – as He unfolded the Scriptures. But suddenly, the service was interrupted by the cries of a man who was possessed by an evil spirit! Jesus rebuked the demon and compelled him to come out of the man. This evil spirit which Jesus thus conquered had been physically controlling the body of the poor sufferer whom Jesus graciously relieved; yet such an “unclean spirit” is a picture of the demon-like power of envy and lust and anger, and of the whole host of debasing passions in a person’s heart, from which Christ alone can give relief.

The second scene of this memorable Sabbath is in the home of Simon Peter. Here, by a single word, Jesus relieved a poor sufferer from a severe fever. The cure was so instantaneous that the woman who had been sick immediately “rose up and ministered unto them.” It is probably true that in many homes there are those who are not necessarily afflicted by the power of evil passions; but nevertheless, they are suffering from worry and anxiety and fretfulness and unrest – and so they are unable to render to others the gracious service which they might perform if they could only hear the quieting word of Christ, and feel the soothing power of His touch.

The third scene is of peculiar beauty. When the sun had set, a great multitude gathered around the home of Peter – attracted by the report of the miracle that He had done in the synagogue that day. They brought with them great numbers of those who were sick or possessed by demons, and Jesus healed them all. This is a picture which, in reality, is being reproduced to this very day. Amidst the shadows and mysteries of suffering and pain, the Savior is standing; around Him are gathered those whom sin has stricken with its disease – the sad, the loveless, the lonely, the tempted, the hopeless, and the lost. And His touch still has its ancient power! In His mercy, He is healing them all; and in joy, they are going away.

The last scene in these verses is at dawn the next morning. Jesus had withdrawn to “a desert place”; but the eager multitudes had found Him, and they were beseeching Him to not go away from them. He reminded them, however, of the other cities which needed to hear “the good tidings of the kingdom of God.” We ourselves have felt the healing touch of Christ, but do we have some portion of His sympathy for those who have not yet heard the good news of His grace?

Thank You, Lord Jesus for coming to earth to fulfill the beautiful prophecy of Isaiah by Your own gracious and merciful ministry of love. Thank You for proclaiming deliverance to those who are enslaved by sin! Amen.