

MATTHEW 4:1-11

LED BY THE SPIRIT ... TO BE TEMPTED?

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written,

“Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.””

“Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you,”

and

“On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.””

“Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

‘You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve.’”

“Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.”¹

Christians often lay claim to the Spirit’s leading. Frequently, the person making such a claim for himself or for herself is defending what they define as bold speech, even justifying abrasive actions or attitudes that are clearly unchristian. To justify the rebuff they deliver, the individual will claim to be led by the Spirit. At other times, we speak in generalities of being led by the Spirit to describe a particular lifestyle or a given course of action.

I don’t deny that the Spirit of God leads those who are submitted to the Master, but what if the Spirit leads His people into temptation? Can we accept that He would do such a thing? Before you respond that the Spirit of God would never lead anyone into temptation, consider what Matthew has written concerning the Master after His baptism. After baptism by John, “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness *to be tempted by the devil*” [MATTHEW 4:1]. The Spirit of God deliberately led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted; and He would not face some run-of-the-mill tempter—the devil himself would be tempting the Master!

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The temptation Jesus endured at that time is recorded for all believers. Paul has written, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:13].

You may be inclined to argue that Jesus doesn't understand the temptations you endure; but when tempted in the very areas where each of us is tempted, He did not succumb to the tempter. Therefore, we read, “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” [HEBREWS 4:15]. Thus, we are encouraged, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” [HEBREWS 4:16].

TEMPTATION FOLLOWS SPIRITUAL VICTORY — “Then...” Don't read so fast that you skip over little words; don't take conjunctions for granted. Jesus had just been baptised. Matthew provided vital background information when he wrote, “Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptised by him. John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptised, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” [MATTHEW 3:13-17]. We can expect temptation following spiritual victory. We are most vulnerable after a great victory.

John the Baptist is identified as “the forerunner” [see LUKE 1:17 NASV]. John was assigned a ministry of preparing a people for the coming of Messiah. This he did in powerful fashion. Mark describes his ministry this way, “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” [MARK 1:4, 5].

The Baptist was unsparing in his denunciation of sin; he called everyone to repentance. Here's an excerpt from his message recorded by Matthew. “When [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father,” for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

“I baptise you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” [MATTHEW 3:7-12]. Clearly, this is not the way to win friends and influence people! Religious leaders seldom welcome such plain language, especially when the message exposes tolerated sin.

It was during this period of service before the Lord God Who sent John that Jesus came requesting baptism. John resisted baptising Jesus; in fact, he confessed his need to be baptised by Jesus. Jesus, however, insisted on receiving baptism, citing the need to fulfil all righteousness. Through this act, Jesus identified with mankind even while initiating His ministry in Judea. Baptism was the initial evidence that “the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” [MATTHEW 20:28].

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It was what occurred as Jesus was baptised that sets the stage for our text. Jesus was immersed by John, picturing His death and His resurrection. As He came up from the watery grave, the heavens were opened. Those present at that time witnessed an exceptional scene, though few realised what had occurred. The Baptist, however, was fully aware of what had happened, for God had sent him for this precise reason. John would later testify, “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptise with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptises with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” [JOHN 1:32-34].

There is mystery in Jesus’ baptism—I cannot explain it; nevertheless, it is written and I accept that God included this information for the benefit of all believers. At His baptism, Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit [see LUKE 4:1; cf. ACTS 10:38]. I am not suggesting that twice-born disciples must be baptised to be filled with the Spirit, but I do observe that those who are baptised in obedience to the teaching of the Word experience an enduement equipping them for service. I note that very often those who cling to a rite performed when they were mere infants or who would reduce the act of baptism to a mere formality are bereft of such blessing.

Here is the point that we must note if we will understand what was about to take place, and if we will understand what we can expect at different points in our spiritual pilgrimage. Jesus had just experienced a great victory. He identified with mankind in their weakness. The heavens were split open and the Spirit of God descended in bodily form as a dove. God spoke from heaven, saying, “This is My Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” [MATTHEW 13:17]. All that is described speaks of a mighty spiritual victory.

OFTEN, THE SPIRIT HIMSELF LEADS US TO THE PLACE OF TEMPTATION — “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit...” How God works in each life is often a mystery. God does not tempt anyone; but God does permit us to be tested. We are taught, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one” [JAMES 1:13]. Nevertheless, great victories seem inevitably to expose us to severe temptation, if for no other reason than our propensity to focus on *our* accomplishments, to depend upon *our* abilities, to trust in *our* strength.

My father was always singing hymns as he worked in his blacksmith shop. I cannot tell how often I awakened on a spring or summer morning to the sound of a four-pound maul shaping a ploughshare or a hammer riveting teeth to a sickle. As the hammer beat out the rhythm, my dad’s sweet baritone would be singing songs or hymns loudly. Among the hymns that I often heard was a hymn written by George A. Young. Two of the verses are as follows:

Sometimes on the mount where the sun shines so bright,
God leads His dear children along;
Sometimes in the valley, in darkest of night,
God leads His dear children along.

Though sorrows befall us and Satan oppose,
God leads His dear children along;
Through grace we can conquer, defeat all our foes,
God leads His dear children along.²

² George A. Young, “God Leads Us,” 1903

God does lead His dear children along. The Psalmist has testified,

“The steps of a man are established by the LORD,
when He delights in his way.”

[PSALM 37:23a]

As God directs our steps, our path may well lead us toward temptation. In fact, it is certain that Christians will experience trials, opposition and bitter vituperation from those identified with this fallen world! The Apostle Peter writes, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” [1 PETER 4:12]. This is the expected situation if John’s warning is received as valid. Remember that the Beloved Disciple has written to fellow believers, “Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you” [1 JOHN 3:13]. *The default position of the world is hatred toward followers of Christ the Lord.*

It is not that God sends trials upon His people, but He does permit trials to come. Temptation speaks of the permissive will of God. As he opens his first letter to Christians of the Diaspora, Peter writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” [1 PETER 1:3-9].

GOD PERMITS US TO GO TO THE PLACE OF TEMPTATION “TO BE TEMPTED” — “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” Jesus was not only led into the wilderness, but He was led there specifically so that He could be tempted. The Spirit deliberately directed the Son to a place where He would be tempted. In similar fashion, the child of God may anticipate that God will sometimes lead him or her to be tempted.

Perhaps you wonder why God would permit His own beloved child to experience trials. Even more perplexing is why His Spirit should lead one who is twice-born to the place of trial! God does not delight in our pain; but God is at work in our distress to bring glory to Himself. Paul experienced a great privilege at one point in his ministry before the Lord. He writes of being “caught up to the third heaven” where he “heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” [2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-6].

Paul heard, and no doubt saw, things that are so wonderful that they must not be divulged. Imagine the temptation he must have felt when he was engaged in conflict with the Judaizers! He would have been tempted to say, “Who are these theological pipsqueaks?” Just in case he did begin to think that way, he reveals what God allowed into his life. “So, to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited” [2 CORINTHIANS 12:7]. God allowed Satan to drive a stake into Paul’s body! Quite literally, that is what the Apostle writes; a stake, “a messenger of Satan,” became a constant trial for Paul.

It is a real shame that Paul didn't have the advantage of many churches today—churches that teach that it is never God's will for one of His saints to experience trouble or trials. Instead, the Apostle writes, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" [2 CORINTHIANS 12:8-10]. God not only led Paul to the place of trial and testing, God ensured that Paul would be thereafter hindered by receiving the devil's intense focus.

In similar fashion, God does permit His people to experience testing, trouble, temptation. Undoubtedly, I'm speaking to people who know something about testing. You've experienced troubles that arose through no fault of your own. You could say something about trials. Perhaps we are not surprised at the tribulations we experience, but I believe there are some among us this day who could speak with authority of demonic opposition. Maybe you are hesitant to say that you have felt the fiery blast of the dragon's breath, but you have heard the lion's roar as you faced trials of various kinds. You were trying to follow the leadership of the Spirit, trying to do what is right when you seemingly stumbled into unexpected temptation. Satan doesn't fight fair; he is a master of the ambush. Though we are often taken by surprise, the Spirit of God who led us is never surprised—our God is omnipotent, He knows all things.

As I prepared this message, my mind turned to the account of Job and his extreme trials. The opening verse of the book provides the setting of what is to follow for this good man. "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" [JOB 1:1]. You will remember the unimaginable trials Job faced—the loss of all his wealth, the tragic death of all his children, the onset of a loathsome disease so severe that even his wife counselled him "Curse God and die" [JOB 2:9].

What Job could not know was that behind his extreme testing was Satan, the Accuser. Moreover, Satan launched and conducted his vile attacks against this godly man only with God's permission! Refresh your memories by looking at a scene unfolding before the throne of God. "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, 'From where have you come?' Satan answered the LORD and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.' And the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?' Then Satan answered the LORD and said, 'Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.' And the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.' So, Satan went out from the presence of the LORD" [JOB 1:6-12].

Following this exchange, Job suffered the loss of all livestock. Livestock was the primary means of wealth for people in that ancient day; and with God's permission, Satan took everything Job owned. The poor man was reduced to poverty! As if that was not enough sorrow and grief for anyone, Satan then struck all Job's children dead. A servant came to Job with the announcement that while his children were all gathered for a feast, a great wind came, striking the house they were in, killing them all! Surely, this constitutes unimaginable grief.

The reader is transported once again to God's throne where Satan again seeks permission to destroy God's righteous servant, Job. "Again, there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, 'From where have you come?' Satan answered the LORD and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.' And the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason.' Then Satan answered the LORD and said, 'Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.' And the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life'" [JOB 2:1-6].

Then, we read the final, awful insult that Satan delivered to the poor, persecuted saint. "So, Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes" [JOB 2:7, 8]. This is temptation with a vengeance. It is hard for us to imagine suffering such as described in this account of a righteous man.

There is a truth that Job likely did not know, though each Christian knows it and loves it. "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" [1 CORINTHIANS 10:13]. ***No test, no trial, no temptation is beyond your ability to withstand, to bear up under any given examination!*** God will not permit you to experience more than you can bear.

When you fear that your last milligram of stamina has evaporated, you may be assured that God will not permit you to pass beyond that stage if you are a child of the Living God. When reading how the devil tempted the Master, the emphasis must always be on Satan's failure. Though we are prone to emphasise the particular trials Jesus faced, the narrative provided in each of the synoptic Gospels details the truth that Satan is a loser. When Satan tested Job, the emphasis must always be upon Satan's failure. Rather than focusing on the particular challenge you face, focus on the failure of the evil one to turn you from serving God. You may be assured that through Christ our Lord you will be the winner and Satan will be the loser in every testing.

What I want each believer to note is that all that occurred to Job was only—***ONLY***—with God's permission; Satan was unable to go beyond what the True and Living God had permitted. In the same manner, nothing comes into your life as a Christian without God's divine permission. Nothing comes into your life as a child of God without His permission; and God has set boundaries beyond which no demons of hell can ever go. Hold this truth and never forget—***we serve a God too good to needlessly injure us and too wise to make a mistake.*** Here is the truth to which each Christian must tightly cling—***the child of God is immortal until God says, "Come home."*** When wickedness has done its worst, God's child will go home.

I listened again to a sermon by Dr. E. V. Hill, one of the great black preachers of this time. It was his wife's funeral sermon which he preached at her request. In that powerful message, he observed something that I wish to share with you now. He was focused on Job's affirmation of faith after the initial satanic blows had been delivered: "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away" [JOB 1:21].

In this powerful message, Dr. Hill observed that "the LORD has taken away." It was not the devil who took away his wife; the Lord took her home.

He continued by noting that the devil cannot take what is not his. This is what he said. “[Some people] say the devil takes away. They say the devil has come to steal and to kill. But the Bible didn’t say he would do it; it said he came to do it. And if you don’t have no shepherd, he will do it. But when the Lord is your shepherd, [the devil] can come to do whatever he wants to; but he’s got to get permission.”³

THE TEMPTATIONS — Jesus was tempted by the desires of the flesh, by the desires of the eyes and by the pride of life. Jesus our Master was tempted in the same areas each of us is tempted. John warns believers, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” [1 JOHN 2:15-17]. *The desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life* are the same areas that cause us to stumble; and our Saviour was tempted in these very areas.

Satan tempted Jesus to use His power to turn stones into loaves of bread—the desires of the flesh. Then, he tempted the Master to defy the will of God by compelling Him to send angels to rescue Him—the desires of the eyes. Finally, the evil one tempted the Saviour to desert the Father by giving worship to Satan—the pride of life. Let’s think through these temptations, discovering how they relate to each of us in our own lives.

The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. There, away from human interaction and alone with the Spirit who drove Him there, Jesus fasted for forty days. Fasting is a discipline that is forgotten, if not ignored in this day. Perhaps that is not surprising in a nation dotted with shrines to the Golden Arches and multiplied Pizza Temples; nevertheless, fasting is a biblical discipline that was employed by our Master. After forty days of fasting, He was quite naturally hungry. The devil challenged Jesus first with the desires of the flesh.

Jesus was physically vulnerable when this test was sprung on Him. “The temptation, to have force, must be assumed as true. The devil knew it to be true. He accepts that fact as a working hypothesis in the temptation.”⁴ The devil knew Jesus was the Son of God, and he knew that Jesus had power to change the stones into bread. The temptation was for Jesus to act independently of the Father in satisfying His own normal desire.

Something like this happens with Christians to this day. It is natural to want to eat, but over-indulgence dishonours the Father. It is natural to want a nice house, a fine automobile, an easy life, but chasing these aspects of modern life while neglecting the Master dishonours Him. It is natural to enjoy the love of our spouse, but seeking gratification outside of the marriage relationship dishonours the One who gave us marriage. When we exalt the natural desire above the will of the Father, we have succumbed to temptation, we have failed the test, we have sinned.

Then, the devil took Jesus to the holy city, setting Him on the pinnacle of the temple. The devil’s language again agrees that Jesus is the Son of God. The temptation was for the Master to challenge the Father’s protection by placing Himself in a dangerous situation. By throwing Himself off the Temple, the devil suggested that Jesus would test the Father’s commitment to Him by forcing the Father to send His angels to protect Jesus from harm. By distorting Scripture, the devil suggested that Jesus would demonstrate the Father’s faithfulness.

³ Evangelist E. V. Hill Preaching Wife’s Funeral (Full Sermon) Job 1:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_CDtEERSiE, accessed 20 April 2017

⁴ A. T. Robertson, **A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research** (Logos Bible Software, 2006) 1009

Jesus, of course, refused the suggestion, pointing out that Satan had misapplied the Word. God's promise would have been distorted had Jesus accepted the devil's interpretation. It is wrong to insist that God accede to our demands. It is wrong to demand that God prove Himself faithful to His promises by giving us what He has promised on our terms. We are responsible to trust God; we are responsible to obey God. "*Testing is not trusting.*"⁵

Finally, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain. From that vantage, he made all the kingdoms of the world to pass in review. Jesus was being tempted to short-circuit the Father's plan to redeem fallen mankind by becoming ruler of the world. Make no mistake, it lay within the devil's power to make this offer since he is the ruler of this fallen world. Though He shall be deposed and cast into the lake of fire, for the moment, Satan is the ruler of this world. Jesus was tempted to embrace the diabolical doctrine that describes much of the religious world today—that *the ends justify the means*. In effect, Satan tempted Jesus to agree that so long as He obtained universal sovereignty in the end, it did not matter how He reached that goal.

Multitudes have adopted this view; they order their lives by it. Why bother honouring God through marriage when we can simply enjoy the benefits of life together without the commitment? Why bother being righteous so long as we give an hour or so each week to go to church? Why bother with honesty when we can hide some of our wealth from the government? For much of the church world, the ends justify the means. Without realising what we are doing, we have too often succumbed to the siren allure of the demonic song.

What I would have you see is that we serve a God who has shared our condition. We read, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" [**HEBREWS 4:15**]. Jesus was without sin; yet, He was tested in every respect as we are tested. This is great encouragement for the child of God. Our God is not some distant, austere deity who has no concern for us; our Saviour shared our condition, demonstrating the wisdom of the Father in sending His Son.

Through the tests to which Jesus submitted Himself, tests to which the Spirit led the Saviour, God the Father was demonstrating the character of His Son. God was revealing that Jesus was obedient to the will of the Father. In submitting to these tests, Jesus proved His obedience and loyalty in preparation for His appointed work on the cross. The devil attempted to lead the Master to surrender His position as the Anointed One of God for a political calling.

Just as Jesus' temptations demonstrated His obedience to the will of the Father, when we are tested, it is not to demonstrate what miserable failures we are, our tests are meant to reveal the perfection of Christ's work in us. When we fail a test, and each of us knows what it is to fail, we are encouraged in the knowledge that God is not finished with us. God is still working in each one of His children; and when He is finished, we shall come forth as pure gold.

I've already cited the passage, but it bears noting again the words that Peter has written. "In this"—*in the knowledge of all that God has reserved for His own dear children*, "In this,"—*in the knowledge of our inheritance in Heaven*, "In this,"—*in the knowledge that He is always guarding His own*, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" [**1 PETER 4:6, 7**]. Of course, we rejoice! We have these precious promises! The tests reveal the "genuineness of your faith." And the genuine quality of your faith is more precious than gold.

⁵ J. W. Shepard, **The Christ of the Gospels** (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1939) 190, cited in Tom Constable, **Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible** (Galaxie Software, 2003) Mt 4:5

Though he suffered greatly, and though his comforters were useless, Job testified:

“[God] knows the way that I take;
when He has tried me, I shall come out as gold.

[JOB 23:10]

Just so, you shall come out as gold when the testing is finished. God is revealing His glory through you even as you are tested. The perfection of His work is being revealed as you win each succeeding victory.

There is a precious promise found in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. I want to look at it. “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” [HEBREWS 2:14-18].

Jesus was tested for our sake; He shared our condition, just as He shared our temptations. This was all used by the Father to destroy the devil, a task that was completed at the cross. Then, the divine author encourages us by pointing out that because our Master suffered just as we suffer, He is able to provide help when we are tempted. Blessed be His Name!

ONLY AFTER THE DIVINELY PERMITTED TEMPTATION DID THE ANGELS COME — “Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him” [MATTHEW 4:11]. I dare not miss this final, essential note. Victory brings relief—greater relief than we could ever imagine; and we are on the winning side. After the devil left, angels came and ministered to the Master. Likewise, after you have been tested, you may anticipate the ministry of God’s holy angels.

I do not want any believer in the Living Son of God to despair—temptation does not continue indefinitely. At some point, the temptation must cease; and when it does, the Living God sends His angels to serve His child. When you stand firm, God is honoured and His Name is glorified, the devil is vanquished and the demonic powers must slink away in defeat. At such times, the angels minister to the saints.

The final, great test that Jesus endured was the cross. Facing that test, He prayed, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” [MATTHEW 26:39]. Looking back to that agony in the garden, the divine writer informs readers, “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” [HEBREWS 5:7-9].

It is divine mystery shrouded in the darkness of God’s perfect work how the Saviour made atonement for our sin. It is enough that we should read the words of the Apostle Paul, “You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” [COLOSSIANS 2:12-15]. Christ triumphed through obedience, even obedience to the cross.

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LED BY THE SPIRIT ... TO BE TEMPTED?

I am speaking to twice-born believers, urging each one to strive for obedience. There is no need to plead with outsiders to be obedient—they could not be obedient if they wanted. Victory over the temptations thrown at the child of God is possible only when we are in Christ. Outside of the Saviour, there is no possibility of victory. Those who attempt to be godly without God's presence are engaged in a fool's errand in which they shall assuredly fail. Believers, however, have the Spirit of God directing their steps; and when He leads them toward temptation, they are assured of victory over temptation with His help.

There is a dark vision recorded in the Apocalypse; but flowing out of that dark vision is rich encouragement for the people of God. Listen as I read what John has written of the dreadful days of God's awesome judgements that shall soon be poured out on the earth. He writes, "Another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name'" [**REVELATION 14:9-11**].

Then, having written this dark warning, the Revelator writes, "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them'" [**REVELATION 14:12, 13**]!

When the evil one has done his worst, we win. When the last tempter has exhausted all the energy the wicked one can supply, we win. When the final opposition to righteousness has expended itself in a futile attempt to wound and destroy, we win. The devil quits and those who do his nefarious work cease trying to injure and sully the saints, and we win. Those who have rested in the Lord are blessed because when the temptations cease, Christ is Victor and we reign with Him. This is the victory God gives His dear people. Amen.