

THE TEMPTATION.

The question of temptation—the temptation of our divine Lord—has connected with it that which baffles all human understanding, and yet truths are revealed relative to it which give us lessons of instruction and illustrations of great encouragement.

Concerning Christ's experience in the great temptation, Mark says, "the spirit driveth him into the wilderness," and Matthew adds a startling reason, "to be tempted of the devil."

One of the primary meanings of this term driveth is, "to cast out by force—to force away." It is used in the parable of the vineyard (Mark 12:8) to describe the violence of the husbandmen in their treatment of the heir of the inheritance; after killing him they "cast him out of the vineyard." When the enraged populace of Nazareth sought to destroy Jesus, because of his close preaching, the record says (Luke 4:29), they "thrust him out of the city," plainly suggesting the violence of their treatment. This word "driveth," indicates haste, as does Mark otherwise state it.

Matthew uses a milder term and says, "Jesus was led of the spirit," suggesting that the haste and seeming force that Mark's language carries, were entirely voluntary upon the part of our Lord.

"Immediately," says Mark, "the spirit driveth him," i. e., as soon as ever the anointing from the Spirit came upon him, the same Spirit impelled him into the wilderness for the great ordeal to which he needs be subjected.

Then was Jesus taken to the wilderness. This adverb of time not only points to a particular hour when something was done, but it suggests that not until then was Jesus personally equipped for that unprecedented trial which he was to meet in the face-to-face encounter with the arch-enemy of souls.

We are assured that Jesus lacked no purity—this he always had—he was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners;" and we will not say that he lacked power, but we do say that all he did was said to be done by the Spirit of God. Because of his mission, the Spirit was said to be given "without measure" unto him. From his conception in the womb of Mary to his resurrection, the Spirit was the active agent of power in his life and ministry. That the miracles Jesus wrought were by the power of the Holy Ghost, he himself indicates in the words, "If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils," and it was through the Spirit that the commandments were given to the Apostles, as Acts 1:2 teaches.

The personal character of Jesus, and his official work are not the same, as they are not with others. What he was in personal character, as well as what he did in his official relation to the Divine kingdom, was by the Spirit of God. He came into being as the Son of God, through the operation of the Holy Ghost. The nature of Jesus, as to its holiness, was by the Spirit—the Spirit of holiness caused his holiness. The Holy Spirit was not the father of Christ, though by him he came; the Spirit was the Agent the Father used to bring into the human arena him, who as to his essential existence was not a

creature, but was the second person in the divine Trinity from all eternity.

This holy Being—this One of spotless purity—was not only possessed of a nature capable of temptation in common with human-kind, he was actually tempted. How one can be tempted to do wrong who has no condition of wrongness and no desires in that direction, may be a question and evidently is one that perplexes many devout and intelligent people, and at least to them be unanswerable; but the fact remains that Jesus was holy and yet was tempted.

Our first parents were created holy—they had no sin as a condition of character, nor as a course of conduct, up to a certain hour. It is hardly becoming in any to suggest that they had such a negative self-hood—had such an absence of real character—as to be moral weaklings, if not to be morally worthless, in the presence of the fact that they were created in the Divine image and declared by God himself, to be very good.

Why should such beings be subjected to trial—to the trial of temptation? We confess that we may not know; but our conviction is that God desires, if He does not demand, that all have responsible character—that they have a moral self-hood that comes from the voice of good above its opposite. God would have all possess an excellence that comes from a choice of it.

Man possesses no such virtue in a holy creation. He had no choice relative to what he should be. God, we say without hesitation, could do nothing other than to make man upright, since He is infinite Good; God would desire nothing other for His creatures than a moral rightness; but He would have them make this their own.

Here, we think, comes in the philosophy of temptation; here is the why of it in human history, and since Jesus took the nature of man, it reveals why He himself was tempted.

If Jesus was a representative man—a man with a probation—He must stand at the head of the tempted race for them. He has stood temptation for Himself, but He must grant to them the fact and force of deliverance as one of them, in order that they may have it in the stress of their life. The scriptures announce the assurance of deliverance from temptation based on the experience of the Son of man Himself—"For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted."

Jesus said to his servant Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee." This statement was based on His actual experience. Jesus had announced to Paul that he should suffer "great things" for Christ. But Paul and none other were ever tempted so fiercely and none ever will be, as was the Lord himself.

Jesus tested his own grace—actually put it to a practical test before He assured any of its value in the struggles of life. Not long since we visited one of the navy yards of our government. Among other things that were shown was the testing of the anchor-chains. There was a machine that could pull a million pounds. One link of every chain was tested "to destruction." That is just what the trial is called. It means what the language indicates—it was to be destroyed

by the test which this great machine was to give it; it was to be pulled until it broke.

There was an indicator which told at just what point it yielded and went to pieces. This link was like all the rest in the great cable; what this could bear without breaking, they could. The test is always far above what is demanded in actual service.

Jesus could not be "tested to destruction." There was no tempting power sufficiently strong to do this. His character was stronger than any and all the power that could be brought against it.

But this must be proved. And it was. Then Jesus could say to Paul, "My Grace is sufficient for thee." He proved it.

Paul could pass along this great assurance from his own relation to trial. It is undoubtedly true that no Christian in the history of discipleship has ever been so conspicuous a sufferer for the Lord as Paul; if he could stand up under it and prove that the grace of Christ was sufficient, none others need fear.

"The devil." There are other sources of temptation and many of them. There are other intelligences and powerful ones who are engaged in the hellish business of seeking to destroy the faith of the saints of God. There are demons, and wicked spirits of all grades of intelligence and power, so the scriptures teach, but to none of these was committed the undertaking of assaulting our Lord—He was tempted of the devil, Diablosos himself.

The strength of one, against the weakness of the other. Our Lord was not permitted to receive the assault from hell's power until the weakness of the forty days and nights of fasting, aggravated by His solitude and His peril from wild beasts, was upon Him. Then were the powers of the devil allowed to avert themselves against this humble man who is in His greatest weakness could triumph over all and give assurance to the tempted ones of all time that He is able to succor them that are tempted, in that He himself has been tempted.

He who is the same yesterday, today and forever will feel today and tomorrow as he felt when in the earth-life, and as the scriptures represent him to have felt when they were written.—Christian Witness.

AN EVANGELISTIC EMERGENCY.

United States Methodism is facing the largest membership loss in its history. In 1918 there was a loss of 7,000 in the home field, but a gain of 37,000 in the foreign field more than offset this. But in 1919 the situation was decidedly worse. The white Conferences of the Church show a loss of over 71,000, and the whole Church, including both the home and foreign fields, show a net loss of nearly 56,000 for the year. This is a serious state of affairs. What does it mean? No doubt the "flu" last year took heavy toll, but this does not explain the situation entirely, for there are other disquieting facts. There were 28,000 fewer baptisms in 1918 than in the preceding year; 30,000 fewer accessions to the Church from the Sunday schools; and 72,000 fewer probationers.