

Treating Temptation

by Bubba Garner

Two of the gospel writers record the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). They not only demonstrate the Son of God's superiority over Satan and reveal the tactics and ploys of our enemy. The temptation accounts solidify Jesus as our great High Priest who can sympathize with our situation and help us to overcome our own battles with the devil. While the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years, failing and falling, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, giving us a pattern to follow when we encounter temptation.

What can we learn from His encounter with the tempter?

Temptation is inevitable. If the devil can find Jesus in the wilderness, what makes you think he doesn't know where you are? And if He is not afraid to slither up to the Son of God, what's going to keep him away from your house, or your office, of your classroom, or your car, or your mind? Paul said that temptation is "common to man" (1 Cor. 10:13). You will search in vain for some loophole or clause in your contract that makes you the exception.

Since we are assured that temptation is not a probability but a certainty, perhaps we ought to make better preparations for its arrival. That means you look for it even when things are going well, even during the times you feel strong. Right before Jesus was led into the wilderness, He was baptized in the Jordan River, He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, He heard the voice of His Father from heaven. This is the last place you would expect the devil to show up. That's just what he wants you to think.

Temptation is inevitable; giving in is optional. Jesus was God in the flesh. But there is no evidence that He used any supernatural powers during this confrontation with the devil. Remember, His response to the temptation to turn the stones to bread was, "man shall not live by bread alone" (Matt. 4:4). Otherwise, if He miraculously escaped, He could not "be tempted in all things as we are" (Heb. 4:15) or "be made like His brethren in all things" (Heb. 2:17)?

In reality, Jesus used what every Christian has at his disposal—the word of God. Three times Satan challenged Him. Three times Jesus responded, "It is written." He never said, "well, I'm only human" or "I'll try harder next time." He was only interested in what God said. And He didn't wait until the heat of the battle to do His research. If you want the word of God on your lips, you have to put it in your head and on your heart.

When temptation comes along, we don't have to face it alone. "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). Jesus claimed the ultimate victory over Satan

because He won every battle along the way. That makes His uniquely qualified to answer our cries for help and deliver us from the hand of the tempter.

Yet, we seem so willing to exhaust all other resources before we take it to the Lord in prayer. Even the help we receive from one another ought to be supplemental to the aid from Him who knows exactly what we're feeling but never gave in to that feeling. And Jesus wants you to know what it feels like to win. "He is able. With Him, so are we" (Gary Holloway).

Two examples of behavior in the wilderness are given to us—the children of Israel and the Son of God. Which one will shape your life? I'm tempted to follow Jesus.