



The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

Published as a PDF by Austin-Sparks.net
Email: info@austin-sparks.net

In keeping with T. Austin-Sparks' wishes that what was freely received should be freely given and not sold for profit, and that his messages be reproduced word for word, we ask if you choose to share these messages with others, to please respect his wishes and offer them freely - free of any changes, free of any charge (except necessary distribution costs) and with this statement included.

The Temptations

by T. Austin-Sparks

Message given on July 5, 1934. Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.

Reading Matt. 4:1-11.

There are some things in this portion of the Word which are tremendously important for us, the Lord's people. It is very clear, in the first place, that there is a very solemn and large background to this event in the life of the Lord Jesus, these temptations in the wilderness. The fact that there is a so much larger background is clearly indicated by the Old Testament Scriptures which were brought up; and not only the Old Testament Scriptures which were brought forward, but what those Scriptures were and the connection of them. If you look at these Scriptures and get their connection, you will see that three things in the main are at issue, and they are very big things indeed.

1. God associating Himself with man

In the first place there was God linking Himself with man, committing Himself to man, becoming bound up with man. That is no small matter. You notice that all these Scriptures come out of the life of Israel, and the one thing above all others, and including all others in the life of Israel, was that God was in the midst of them, God was with them, and God had committed Himself to them, had become bound up with their life, had associated Himself in a peculiar way with Israel. That contains something very much bigger than just the immediate association, and we shall see that as we go on.

2. God divinely supporting man

The question of the manna in the wilderness is then brought forward. The passage: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God", has a spiritual meaning. It means, as the Lord Jesus clearly pointed out in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, that man's true life is from above, and the manna was something which was heavenly and not earthly; something from God, and not from man; something with a spiritual meaning, and not the product of man's effort or energy; and it was a type of the Word of God. God brought Israel out into the wilderness in order that He might have a people in this world living not upon a merely natural basis of life, but living out from Himself upon a spiritual basis. This second great truth, which is much bigger than the type or the illustration in the case of Israel, is God divinely supporting man, with whom He has associated Himself.

3. God revealing Himself and expressing His supremacy through man

Israel was brought out by God, separated from all other nations, in order that God might reveal Himself through Israel to the whole world, and that through Israel God might express His absolute supremacy.

These are three great truths illustrated in the life of Israel. Those three things represent God's mind, God's thought, God's desire, God's will for all time. They are only illustrated in the case of Israel, but they represent great spiritual truths which God desires to establish and to embody in His own people through all ages.

Israel was an elect vessel for that purpose, a chosen instrument to these ends, but Israel failed God. We have the terrible story of their failure gathered up in a somewhat lengthy and tragic Psalm. If you read Psalm 106 you find the whole history of Israel in failure gathered up, despite the infinite patience and longsuffering of God. Israel, chosen for God, failed Him.

The Lord Jesus comes and takes the place of Israel, in order to bring in the church, which through the present dispensation, and on beyond this present dispensation in the ages to come, might do and will do what Israel failed to do. These three things will be embodied in the church, which is the Body of Christ. God associated: "I will dwell with them, saith the Lord"; God divinely supporting; and God revealing Himself and expressing His supremacy, through the church. Of course, that is spiritual in this age. It will be literal in the age to come.

The Lord Jesus comes as the Head of the church, which is His Body, and therefore in Him as Head, first of all there must be established an absolute triumph and success. The Lord Jesus comes to take up Israel's failure, and in His own Person turn Israel's failure to a great and glorious success; and then by His Spirit to bring His church, member by member, into His own success, being the Head of the church.

Now we are able to appreciate the significance of the time and the place of these temptations. These temptations in Matthew 4 follow immediately upon God having committed Himself in a special way to the Lord Jesus. When He came up out of Jordan where He had been baptized, the heavens were opened to Him, and a voice out of heaven was heard saying: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Spirit of God descended and lighted upon Him. That is God committing Himself, God associating Himself, God acknowledging, attesting, saying: "I am with and in this work". It is a declaration from heaven that God is bound up with this Life, and the Two are One. It is significant, I say, that these temptations took place just at that time, when God had thus committed Himself. God

having committed Himself, this Life had got to be a heavenly Life lived out from God, lived upon heavenly resources. This Life had got to know divine support. To put that the other way; this One had not just to live on the ordinary, natural level and basis of life; He had to live upon something more than the natural man lived upon; He had to know the secret, spiritual resources of Life in God.

The temptation was: "If thou be the Son of God". In other words: "If God is with You and You are one with God, command these stones that they be made bread; in Your hunger, and need, and weakness, turn to the resources of nature and use Your divine power in that realm, for your own support."

All these temptations can be gathered up into one phrase: "Come down! Come down from the high ground that You are taking; come down from that exalted position spiritually; come down to an earth level of life." That is the effect of the whole thing; and the object of the temptation was to bring about another failure, such as had taken place in the case of Israel, and to defeat the ends of God. God has committed Himself and is going to divinely sustain with secret resources. Now the temptation: under pressure, under trial, under extenuating circumstances, is to accept a lower level, to take a natural line, turn to earthly resources, even using spiritual position in that direction.

You can see the wide background. If God is going to succeed in His original intention, His instrument must be an instrument living in real fellowship with Him, and knowing Him as its life, its resource, its provision. God must be the supply of that instrument. These temptations are all set directly against spiritual life. When you read in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John about the Bread which cometh down from heaven, you find that the Lord Jesus says that He is that Bread, that Manna, and then He says: "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you"; "I am the bread of *life*". It is only as we live upon the Lord that we have Life triumphant over death. It was only as Israel lived upon that mystic manna in the wilderness that they did not perish, but overcame death in the wilderness. That manna was their life from heaven. They would have perished but for the manna. The Lord Jesus takes the place of the manna, and says: "I am the bread of *life*". If we are going to *live* in this sense ("living" here is something more than existing, having ordinary, natural life; this is mighty Life that is death-less), we can only do so as we draw continually upon the Lord above.

Note what the Lord Jesus says, using the Scripture with that great background of divine Life triumphant over death: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread only (that will but meet his bodily need), but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." It is a question of Life, and it is necessary to have spiritual Life - something more than bodily sustaining - to make you triumphant over spiritual death. So it was a big battle which was being fought out here. It was the battle of Life victorious over death, and what Satan was after was to strike a blow at Him as the One from whom and through whom many were going to receive eternal Life. This thing came out just at the point where God, having committed Himself, was seeking that basis of fellowship which is not a natural basis, but a spiritual one where He sustains the life from above, He supports divinely.

In the second temptation, from the pinnacle of the Temple, the Lord Jesus again quotes from the Old Testament. In the first temptation the reference gives the book of Deuteronomy chapter 8. In the second temptation it is chapter 6 of that book, and the Lord here quotes the words: "Thou shalt not *tempt* the Lord thy God". When you look to see how Israel tempted the Lord their God, you turn to the book of Exodus chapter 17 verse 7, and you find: "...they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?" That was the temptation with which Israel tempted the Lord, and He was very

wrath with them. Here is an interesting thing, that that temptation of the Lord was in relation to the water, and the bringing of the water out of the rock. That bringing of the water out of the rock was a type of the Holy Spirit becoming the Life of the Lord's people in the wilderness on this earth. The Lord Jesus, referring to the Holy Spirit's coming, used words like these: "He that believeth on Me, out of his inward parts shall flow rivers of living water." Now, out from the rock gushed rivers of living water, and this is the Holy Spirit. It was in connection with that that Israel had tempted the Lord, saying: "Is the Lord among us or not?" in Matthew 4 the Holy Spirit has just come to the Lord Jesus through the open heaven, and then there follows a time of tryings for forty days and forty nights, hunger and thirst, a time of intense spiritual conflict when Satan seems unveiled, and working with all the intensity of his presence against the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, and all the time trying to get a doubt into His mind as to whether, after all, the Lord is with Him.

A remarkable thing, but we know it too well! We may have had a great experience, a great time with the Lord, something akin to that coming up out of Jordan, and the heavens being opened, and the Holy Spirit coming. We may have had the realisation of the Lord with us in a wonderful way, a revelation, a voice. Yes, a great uplift! Then, so soon afterwards, a time of intense trial, when the sense of the Lord's presence gives place to an awful sense of the devil, conflict, stress, and pressure; the heavens seem closed, like brass; we are alone, hungry, thirsty, longing and not satisfied. And the devil comes and says: "The Lord has left you, the Lord has forsaken you, the Lord is not with you." That is exactly what he was doing with the Lord Jesus. "If Thou be the Son...!" There is something of a leer in that, "Try it out with God! Put it to the test! Cast Yourself down! Prove it!" There are times when to try and prove our faith is only to admit a doubt. Sometimes faith is at its highest when we simply stand our ground, and sometimes faith is at its lowest when we want to demonstrate our faith. Sometimes to do something like this is only presumption.

Satan very often tries to get the Lord's children to do something which really, secretly and in essence, would be the expression of a doubt; to do something to prove their ground; to try God out, and see if, after all, it is all true. That is what Satan did here. If the Lord Jesus had done that, as His very quoting of Scripture shows, it would have been a questioning of God. The much higher ground is to say: "There is no sense of God's presence; there is a sense of evil, the devil, weakness, loneliness, darkness; but *I believe God!*" That is faith triumphant; not trying to find out from God by some risky act as to whether really, after all, He is with you. That is what Israel did in the wilderness, and provoked the Lord. The Lord Jesus was having no questions or doubts at all: "Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord, to prove whether He is with you or not."

It is a question of Life again: the Holy Spirit given in the form of the water, typically in the wilderness, now given from heaven in dove-like form to the Lord Jesus. You and I do not move every hour in the full consciousness of the Holy Spirit being within us. We do not go through every day fully alive to the fact that the mighty, death-conquering Spirit of God fills our being. If the truth were known, we have a great many more days without any such consciousness. What are we going to do? Are we going to do some risky things in order to test the Lord out, to make trial of the Lord; or are we going to believe? Are we going to say: "I feel everything to the contrary, but I believe that the Spirit whom God has given to me is in me. I cannot feel anything, I cannot see anything, but I believe that He is there! The Life which He has given He has not taken away; I have no sense today of any spiritual measure of Life; I may have a very special sense of death, with the devil very much about; nevertheless I believe!" It is a question of Life again. On what ground are we going to overcome? Sheer faith in God, when we do not feel anything!

The third temptation relates to the kingdoms of this world, and the glory thereof; offered as a reward for falling down and worshipping the devil. The Scripture quoted again comes from the sixth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and *Him only* shalt thou serve". If you go back to the Old Testament part from which that is quoted, and read all around the quotation, you will see that the Lord is offering dominion to His people, world dominion, conquest. But He is offering it to them upon one basis, and the basis of world dominion, possession of the earth, is utter abandonment to Himself and unquestioning loyalty. So there is a big background to the Lord's answer. The attitude that the Lord Jesus takes towards Satan is this: "Satan, you may be prince of this world, and you may have all these kingdoms and all this glory in your power. I do not dispute that you can give them, and that you have given glory and power to many a man who has worshipped you. But that is not My concern; My concern at this moment is not world dominion, but utter loyalty to My God. All the rest I can leave with Him. Ultimately the disposing of the kingdoms of this world are with Him, and I am perfectly confident that, though for the time being I have to wait, lose, and suffer, in the end He will give Me those kingdoms, if I am faithful." That takes you back to the garden with Adam; that takes you right through the history of the world. "*Him only* shalt thou serve".

I wonder if we have come to the "*Him only*..." whatever it costs? The doom of Satan was settled, the lake of fire was prepared for him and his angels. So that, looking ahead, it is a question of Life again. Life is in loyalty to the Father; death must come by surrender to the devil.

All this was what Israel was called to. All this was that of which Israel failed. The Lord Jesus comes and takes the place of Israel and triumphs on every point, but He does so as Head of the church, His Body, and brings in the Body when He has accomplished His own triumph.

The issues for us are simple and clear, although very searching and very testing. The Lord has committed Himself to us, if we are His truly born-again children. He has not promised that every day and every hour we shall know that He is there in our hearts; but He has told us: "I am with you... I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." He will spiritually support us from above, if we will live on that basis. We shall know divine support if we recognise that man does not live by bread alone, but he lives upon the Lord, and his life is the will of God. Through trial, pressure, adversity, suffering and sorrow the enemy is always pressing in with suggestions that you are not in the will of the Lord, you must have gone wrong somewhere, the Lord is not with you. He tells you to look at yourself, at your own state, misfortune, weakness, hunger or thirst and says that this cannot mean that the Lord is with you. Through it all we shall know divine support. The enemy is always trying to get the mind to accept a doubt as to the faithfulness of God, and once he gets that doubt in, we are done for. But the great issue is the church, all the members of Christ, being brought to a place where God, committed, supported, reveals Himself and shows His supremacy through that instrument. Satan is against that, and that is the reason for all these suggestions, insinuations, and temptations. Satan is against the revelation of God and the manifestation of His supremacy through His people.

It is a question of God's supremacy, and that has got to be expressed in us and through us, and we know that every day brings its test along that line. Who is going to express supremacy in our lives? Satan or the Lord? One thing the devil is after is to get us as instruments for the expression of his power. One thing the Lord is after is to get us for the same purpose. This is the victory that overcomes, even our faith. It is not the measure of our faith; it may not be the quality of our faith; it is the *object* of our faith - God! Pin your faith to God and you are victorious! It is not the merit of

faith; we can never boast of our faith; it is the Lord in whom we trust. The quality is determined by the Object. We have to believe in the faithfulness of God.

There is a background to this, and we have only just touched the fringe of it. The Lord help us by our meditation.