

The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

"The Tempter"

Matthew 3.16-4.11

January 22, 2017

After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You is the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." ⁴ But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" ⁵ Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ 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, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" ⁷ Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; ⁹ and he said to Him, "All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

Today begins a series looking at the life of Jesus Christ as narrated in the Gospels According to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. This is our normal routine at this time of the year (between Christmas and Easter).

And this is an excellent time to sort of JUMP IN if you or someone you know wants to know MORE about the central Figure in Christianity. These four accounts are the "source material" on this Person; this is the Authorized Story ...and as I mentioned last week, people are still fascinated BY this Person, Jesus of Nazareth (not always fascinated by the church or by religion or spirituality) but still very interested in this UNIQUE Person.

So, stick with us and invite some friends to look at the real story and let people arrive at their own conclusions from the Authorized Accounts.

We're looking at the cast of characters who come in and out of the story... we get to know the main Character as He relates to others. Today we meet a character first introduced at the very start of the Bible...that appears from time to time...

Here, in Matthew's account this character goes by three names: the devil, Satan and the Tempter. And his appearance is a kind of foreshadowing of things to come: it's the whole story in miniature/microcosm. This original story of Jesus Christ is about a conflict, a cosmic battle that has been brewing from the start of human history...and progresses throughout the Bible and here...is the showdown...the opponents finally meet ("two riders were approaching and the wind began to howl") – the lines are drawn and the final confrontation takes shape.

Today, we think about evil...about temptation... about what really IS the purpose of Jesus Christ's coming and what it all has to do with YOU and with your daily routine (WHY you do WHAT you do) – a charged event that brings a lot of things together– The Tempter.

Let's think of this character and what THIS encounter tells us about the MAIN Character:

- 1) The Devil and the Details
- 2) I Went Down to the Crossroads and
- 3) Lead Us Not Into Temptation

This cast member goes by three names in THIS passage and by other names at others places in the Bible; here, it's the devil, the tempter and last (v.10), Satan.

There's a lot we could say about this character but following C.S Lewis I'll just say, mostly people EITHER dismiss the idea of a devil and a demonic world OR get way too obsessed about him... The devil himself is happy with either error!

The world of spirits is real but the devil and unclean spirits appear to be fallen angels. He's NEVER portrayed as the equal of God (dualism). He is never presented as perfect evil (in the way that God is presented as perfect GOOD)... The devil is NOT a creator of good OR evil but a vandalizer of the good, a parasite. He has to rely on the good and he can't do his destructive work without the good. He can't create pleasure but can advertise and urge that pleasure be misused and distorted and dis-ordered.

Advertising is his specialty and casting doubt/slander on what God has said. Think of A.W. Tozer's famous words: "Satan's first attack upon the human race was his sly effort to destroy Eve's confidence in the kindness of God."

In this episode, you really SEE the devil's basic strategy in raw form, the confidence he wants to destroy, to slander or cast doubt on the WORD from God. The slanderer wants to discredit the word that came to Jesus Christ in the Baptism.

The Voice from heaven SPEAKS and the Spirit (third Person of the Trinity appears) and Jesus Christ are confirmed personally and publically in HIS IDENTITY: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

And then immediately, the Spirit leads Jesus Christ, the Beloved Son of God into the wilderness where that CORE identity is repeatedly called into question: "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

The temptations themselves, the details, have been analyzed "ad nauseam" through the ages. Luke switches the order of the pinnacle and the mountain. Mark doesn't identify the temptations at all – just that Jesus Christ was baptized, heard the Father's blessing, His identity "You are My beloved Son in whom I delight" and then was impelled/driven by the Spirit, the Helper, "into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him." That's ALL Mark says about the whole event (two verses!)

Matthew's order may be focused on the appetites (make bread) and the desire to draw attention to one's self (throw yourself from a tall building) and then to take the great short-cut, ends-justifies-the-means: just worship me and I'll give you dominion over all the earth...isn't that what you came for?

And Jesus Christ, secure in His identity, with the Helper, the Spirit, and with angels maybe there to remind Him (maybe to sing to Him...we don't know what the angels did for Him...something!) but Jesus Christ knows who He is and He uses Scripture to refute the advertiser (slanderer).

And when this unique Person succeeds in resisting these temptations, when He quotes the words of God and when IT'S CRYSTAL CLEAR what the devil really wants is to de-throne God and claim worship for himself... Then Jesus Christ says simply, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'you shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" (10)

And Luke adds at this point, "When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time." (Luke 4.13) Ominous!

So that's The Devil and the Details...now let's Go Down to the Crossroads... that's a reference to the legend of Robert Leroy Johnson, the famous Mississippi Blues musician...who...according to legend went to meet the devil at midnight at the Crossroads and traded his soul to become the greatest Delta Blues artist of all times...then died tragically at 27 years old... one of many such legends and stories...like Faust...and the Little Mermaid.

But I have something a LITTLE different in mind and that is that THIS episode is a crossroads, a junction or a hub where SO MANY THREADS IN THE BIBLE are joined together.

There are all these themes from the very start of the Bible that converge here. The original temptation when the serpent asks, “Has God really said...?”

And here “If you really ARE the Son of God” as if to say, “Has God really said ‘YOU are My Beloved Son?’”

Adam was given a counterpart, a helper but Adam was seemingly passive or absent from his helper... and here is the Better Adam, WITH HIS HELPER, the Holy Spirit (whom Jesus will call, “The Helper” [John 14.16 et al]) Jesus Christ is come WITH HIS HELPER to meet the serpent in a way the first Adam failed to do.

He is the Champion we need to defeat “our ancient foe” who is too strong for us. He is the New Adam and the progenitor of a New Race, a New Creation. That thread connects to this junction...crossroads.

And all these significant references to 40 days in the Bible – Noah (40 days and 40 nights of rain), Elijah fasts for 40 days, Moses fasts for 40 days...and the book we’ve been studying for the last several months... the Book of Numbers... the 40 years of wandering in which Israel, God’s Beloved Son is called out of Egypt to worship God and receive the Promised Land... but the son, Israel was rebellious and unbelieving and SEVEN TIMES REBELLED and worshipped the serpent (Num 21) and had to LOOK AT THEIR SIN (the Serpent on the Pole...remember?)

And did you notice (were you listening?) did you notice the Hebrew title of the book that tells of the Israelite’s rebellions and the wanderings, did you see the TITLE right there in Matthew 4, verse 1? Remember, “BaMidbar”, “in the wilderness”? “Jesus was led up by the Spirit in the wilderness” (4.1)

This is Israel’s Redeemer, come to redeem those wasted wandering years and to defeat the serpent “BaMidbar”, “in the wilderness” for 40 days...He’s come to reclaim the wilderness and make it a garden.

Is it only coincidence that all the verses Jesus quotes are from the Book of Deuteronomy – that’s the new generation who WILL ENTER THE PROMISED LAND? He’s saying, “I am come to fulfill the calling of my failed brothers and sisters – to resolutely trust My Father, to NOT MARCH UNDER THE SERPENTS FLAG but to defeat him... who defeated My people”

Why did Jesus Christ come into the world? Ask John the Apostle – he wrote these words, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.” (1John 3.8)

And eventually that “opportune time” would come and the slanderer would impugn/smear the character of Jesus Christ and convince sinful people that WE WOULD BE HAPPIER WITHOUT this Jesus... and the slanderer would celebrate that he had won again... and YET in the wisdom of

God, Jesus Christ's death would destroy the works of the devil, "the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1Corinthians 2.8)

It was the "deeper magic" (Narnia) – a Champion who had no sin/guilt of His own could give Himself out of love for the guilty, weak, sinners that He loved... and if He were truly WITHOUT SIN...death could NOT hold Him...

In slandering Jesus Christ... and inciting His crucifixion the demonic powers led to their own defeat...and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, history's best attested event...it proves that the enemy of our souls is DEFEATED... the Seed of Abraham, the True Israel, the Better Adam, the Beloved Son has lived the life I failed to live, died the death I deserved to die and ROSE AGAIN AS THE BEGINNING OF A NEW CREATION... a Champion for the weak... a Victor for everyone who TRUSTS IN HIM.

Now, how does this translate into life as WE PRAY, "lead us not into temptation"?

Well, some people say, "We defeat the devil just like Jesus did – just quote the Bible and the tempter will leave you alone" ...and... there really IS something TO that! So, let me urge you to read, study, memorize the Bible... those are the promises we're given and the directions for the Good Life...and God's PROMISES when quoted in faith...ARE POWERFUL!

It's not a good luck charm or magic mantra and notice that even the devil quotes it in v 6, "go ahead and jump from the tower – God said 'He would command HIS angels to catch You so you won't even strike Your foot on a stone' – so jump!"

That's a quote from the 91st Psalm and the next verse says this, "You will tread upon the lion and cobra... and the serpent you will trample down." (91.13)

So remember, if you're going to quote the Bible – pay attention to context.

But the real HELP this episode gives is NOT so much an example of Jesus Christ's we can imitate but a victory we celebrate! "Were NOT the Right Man on our side, our striving would be losing!" But HE IS ON OUR SIDE! And He has defeated our ancient foe!

His life, death and resurrection is FOR all who receive it as a gift. He is our Champion in the wilderness and in the garden...where we fail, HE SUCCEEDS! He defeats the dragon FOR US.

He enables us to hear the voice He heard... Because I am IN Jesus Christ and represented BY Him, I HAVE NOW BECOME A CHILD OF GOD...a beloved son or daughter of God. "In Jesus", says the Father, "YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON IN WHOM I DELIGHT!"

“Yeah but that’s just the problem T.J. – I DON’T FEEL LIKE A DELIGHT and I have given in to temptation so often that I’m not even sure I AM a child of God... I’m a failure...I’m a sinner...I’m more like the devil than I am like Jesus!...and I’m always trying to prove myself to others or myself...or ignore my faults/flaws...”

Well, let me give you two thoughts on that: #1 – YOU MAY NOT BE A CHILD OF GOD... not everyone is. You have to be adopted and God has to give you NEW LIFE (a new birth). BUT if you really do see that you are MORE LIKE THE TEMPTER than like Jesus, God may be convincing you within that YOU NEED A SAVIOR AND A CHAMPION and right now, TODAY, you can ask Him to represent YOU...and just say, “Lord Jesus Christ, be my Champion...only YOU can defeat my enemy the devil...So, take my life; rule me; work in me.” THEN tell someone that you prayed that.

2nd: for many others...you may really BE an adopted child of God ...but may not look like it...but this quote is so helpful: “It is an item of faith that we are children of God; there is plenty of evidence IN us against it. The faith that surmounts this evidence and that is able to warm itself at the fire of God's love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, (THAT FAITH) is actually the root of holiness. . . . We are not saved by the love we exercise, but by the love we trust.” (Richard Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life [p. 213])

We printed it in today’s bulletin – read it later. Cut it out and carry it around. Constantly think about it: “We are not saved by the love we exercise, but by the love we trust.”