

1st Hymn by J Neander 1650-80 (T Richmond, T Haweis 1734-1820)

1. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation,
O my soul, praise Him for He is thy health and salvation,
all ye who hear, brothers and sisters draw near, praise Him in glad adoration.
2. Praise to the Lord who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;
surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do, if with His love He befriend thee.
3. Praise to the Lord who when darkness of sin is abounding,
who when the godless do triumph all virtue confounding
Sheddeth His light, chaseth the horrors of night, saints with His mercy surrounding.
4. Praise to the Lord: O let all that is in me adore Him:
all that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him
Let the Amen sound from His people again: gladly for aye we adore Him.

Prayer

Dear Father, we are glad to be in your presence, and gladly acknowledge that you have deigned to hear our prayers, and receive our worship. We ask you to lead our thoughts and our worship. Preside by your Holy Spirit over our time together, as we are met in your presence to hear your word, and edify us. For we meet in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

2nd hymn by J Newton (T Amazing grace American folk hymn melody)

1. Amazing grace (how sweet the sound) that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved,
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.
3. Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come,
'tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.
4. The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures,
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

Readings:

- Isaiah 40: 28-31
- Matthew 4:1-11

Prayers incl. intercession:

Dear Father, we are so grateful for your word – a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path; sweet to our taste, sweeter than honey to us. We believe the Psalmist judged rightly as your Spirit led him! We believe that the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul - it certainly does ours; it enlightens our eyes, and rejoices our hearts. The contrast with the daily news we receive from this world often has the opposite effect. We are grateful for the encouragement we receive from your word - help us therefore Father to become skilled in our reading and understanding of your word! We hear often of the evils that abound, of the bad things done by some to their communities, and at times even their friends.

The Temptations of Jesus

We pray again today as we have often done before, for Ukraine, invaded and attacked by their neighbour Russia. We pray for your over-ruling of this action. Strengthen your people there, for we believe there are many there who believe in you - enable them to look to you and trust you daily for your keeping power. And so we pray that your Kingdom will come and your will indeed be done according to your plan.

For we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

3rd hymn by H Lyte (T. by John Goss 1800-80)

1. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven, to His feet thy tribute bring:
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like thee His praise should sing?
Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise the everlasting King.
2. Praise him for His grace and favour to our fathers in distress,
praise Him still the same forever, slow to chide and swift to bless,
praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, glorious in His faithfulness.
3. Father-like He tends and spares us, well our feeble frame He knows,
in His hands He gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes,
Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, widely as His mercy flows.
4. Angels in the height adore Him, ye behold Him face to face,
Sun and moon bow down before Him, dwellers all in time and space,
Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise with us the God of grace.

Message: The temptations of Jesus

From our point of view we might think Jesus had a rough start at the beginning of his ministry, following his baptism. In the Hebrew tradition he was 30, the time ministries usually began, and we could say his baptism was essential, in that it showed his complete identification with sinners. John knew Jesus did not need his baptism of repentance for himself; rather he was baptised on behalf of those whose sins he would later bear! This was how he fully identified with us. This pre-figured Christian baptism which is the sign of entry into the Kingdom of God, representing our death (when we go down into the water), followed by our resurrection (when we come up out of the water).

At the same time he was affirmed in his Messiah-ship by God himself who spoke audibly, sending upon him the Holy Spirit without whom of course he would not have been the Christ! (Christ and Messiah both mean "anointed").

There is another lesson in it for humanity - if the Messiah himself did not begin his ministry without the Spirit coming upon him, neither could any other human being expect to have a ministry *of* God and *for* God without having the Spirit of God. The second book of Dr. Luke makes this clear - the disciples were commanded to wait in Jerusalem until they were "clothed with power from on high" (Acts 1:4) only after which they could serve God adequately.

Today's reading begins with Jesus, being filled with the Spirit, having returned from the Jordan, being immediately "led by the Spirit into the wilderness" where he was "tempted by the devil". (Matthew says "...led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the

devil"!)) Hence this says it was *God's plan that* he be tempted. It is interesting that God's plan includes being tempted by the devil - we are told God himself tempts no-one, but He incorporates the devil into His plans - He is content to *accept* and *allow* Satan to tempt us! In 1 Samuel we are told the Holy Spirit departed from King Saul, and "*an evil spirit from God troubled him*". (1 Samuel 16:13) So much for "dualism"! Only God is in charge, and Satan only acts as God allows him (In 1700s Leibniz wrote a book pointing out that this world is the *best possible world only because there is evil in the world!* (Would God allow it if this was not the case? This constitutes the subject of theodicy = the justification of God's allowing of evil in His world!))

The first temptation doesn't seem subtle on the surface of it - Jesus was fasting and so of course, relatively weak physically and he was hungry! The temptation of turning a stone into bread, given that he was "*The Son...by whom He (God) created the world*" (Heb 1:2) was probably obvious - so "how about creating some bread"! But to Jesus this was quite unacceptable for these reasons:

- 1) The temptation gets its kick from the insinuation "*If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread*". It raised the question of *doubt*! That seems to be the main thrust of the temptation. But Jesus had no doubt - as if the voice of His Father was still ringing in his ears - "You are my beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased".
- 2) To have commanded a stone to be made bread would have been entirely "self-serving" - that was never part of the signs that Jesus did. Usually he was meeting a need that was within the Messiah's role, to aid in seeing God's Kingdom extended, and helping people to hear His words. So to turn a stone to bread was not in the plan of God.
- 3) It might have seemed an easy way out of his hardship - the devil often works that way. But the true battle set before him was usually a hard one; he resisted!
- 4) It was against the principles that seemed to apply to his miracles.

C. S. Lewis points to two types of miracles that he performed: miracles of the Old Creation and of the New Creation. In the first Jesus was doing "small and in close focus" what God does normally, but on so large a scale that humankind doesn't notice it.

For instance when he turned the water into wine at Cana instantly, we forget that God is *always* turning water, via the soil and sunlight, into grapes, the juice of which ferments "naturally," so wine *was* the automatic product (which was sterile and "safe" in days when water was not normally sterile!) In Cana Jesus short-circuited the process - using a large volume, about 180 gallons, in large jars! When he fed the 5000 he multiplied a little (5 small barley loaves and two small fish) into much, as God does all the time - look in every grain-field; and at the fish in every bay and river. We call it "Nature" and do not notice anything remarkable. I could add that God is *always healing* - 99.9% of all healing is "natural, built into the system". A cut heals, the immune system with its cells and hormones overcome infection. We call it "normal", and are not surprised! It takes time, and we accept that. Jesus' miracles and healing were instant, and we "call" it a miracle therefore!

But when Jesus walked on the water, that was something we do not see normally now. Maybe it was a sign of the future - of the New Creation

The Temptations of Jesus

breaking in on the old! Even Peter did it for a few moments as we would remember - till he suddenly realised "What am I doing - this is impossible?", then immediately he sank! He cried out "save me" and Jesus did. But he then said "O ye of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matt 14:31) Lewis called this a "snow-drop miracle" - a sign of the coming spring! This and the raising of the dead were miracles of the New Creation.

Jesus quoted the scriptures to answer Satan It is written "*man shall not live by bread alone*". (Deut 8:3) He *knew* the Word of God.

The second temptation was to show Jesus the kingdoms of the world (Matthew says Satan took Jesus to a very high mountain to say this), "which have been delivered to me" - (a false claim really - Satan didn't really own them.) He said he would give these to Jesus if he worshipped Satan at that time, the temptation being instant fame and acceptance - a *short cut* to power, but almost certainly also allowing the possibility of corruption! What Satan *did* have was an understanding of the thinking men use in their rebellion against God! Jesus saw through that immediately. God was going to give these things to Jesus in due time, but it would be "hard-won"! In any case he would not worship Satan. He answered his tempter from the Shema of Israel, as well from the 1st of the 10 commandments. Jesus said simply "It is written '*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shalt thou serve*'". (Deut 6:13)

The third temptation was to leap from the pinnacle of the temple and call upon God to save him. Satan quoted (actually mis-quoted), from Psalm 91 "It is written 'He will give his angels charge of you to guard you' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

But the protection of God was a part of the covenant of Israel, for those who "dwelt in the shelter of the most High" - they would be protected while obeying the Covenant. This temptation would again be an attempt to glorify himself by a self-centred show. It was outside his Father's will, and against His express order. So Jesus answered "it is written '*You shall not tempt the Lord your God.*'" (Deut 6:16) Thus he was emphasising who he was, as well as quoting their law.

So Jesus knew both the law and its context well (like the devil didn't)! So again he quoted that law countermanding it. Jesus had once much later been asked to put on a show, and "do a miracle" for Herod, and he wouldn't even answer! The time was to come when Jesus said "*False prophets and false Messiahs will arise and show signs and wonders and lead astray, if possible, even the elect. But take heed, I have warned you.*" (Mk 13:22) St Paul reinforces that warning (in 2 Thess 2:9), saying the lawless one would do the same with "*pretended signs and wonders*". So we must never be naive, or be caught up chasing miracles, seeking mere phenomena. These would not be in the plan of God or lead to the glory of God.

Jesus won the battle of minds, as well as the battle for the truth in this encounter with the devil. He knew his Father's mind only too well! So Satan "left him for a season."

The Temptations of Jesus

These temptations were all directed against Jesus' divine Sonship, all designed to make him misuse his divine power, by which Satan planned to gain his purposes by obedience to the devil rather than to his Father, and also to doubt the reality of his Father's love and care. They were not so much against his Messianic office as against the relationship he had with his Father. Clearly Jesus understood the scriptures and their context, and would not be led into a mis-representation of them. He answered all the temptations from the Scriptures. His example teaches us to do the same.

We should now be able to see reasons why temptation by evil is allowed and could be necessary in the interests of developing our strength of character, and growth to maturity. Our safeguard always is to know the word of God, that is to know God's mind, and so be able to pick the attacks of the evil one and see through them.

St Paul also said "*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*" (1 Cor 10:13) To resist temptation in this way can only strengthen us and give us resilience and wisdom. Surely this is why God allows such testing, and I believe it pleases Him every time we take this step.

Amen.

4th hymn by N L von Zinzendorf (T Fulda William Gardiner 1770-83)

- 1) Jesus Thy blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress,
midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head.
- 2) Bold shall I stand in that great day for who shall my accuser be?
Fully absolved through Thee I am, from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.
- 3) Jesus, be endless praise to thee, whose boundless mercy hath for me,
for me, a full atonement made, and everlasting ransom paid.
- 4) Ah! give to all Thy servants, Lord, with power to speak Thy gracious word,
that all who to Thy wounds will flee may find eternal life in Thee.
- 5) O let the dead now hear Thy voice! now bid Thy banished ones rejoice;
their beauty this, their glorious dress, Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness.

Benediction:

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father,
and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus
Christ with love undying. Amen.

This service was prepared by Neil McIntosh (M.B.B.S. F.R.A.C.S.) for HopeNet SA