

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him."— Matt. 4:1-11

CHRIST'S TEMPTATION AND OURS **A Sermon By Theodor Zahn**

THE Gospel for this Sunday, which has just been read, is one of the most mysterious passages in the Gospel narrative. Not every one who calls Jesus, Lord, is ready to accept it; yet the Lord is discerned in it, without any hesitation, by all who really know and honour Him—the holy and pure, the humble and strong, the simple and great Son of Man. But how strange the whole narrative is, how absolutely out of the range of our own experience! How repulsive is the company in which we here find Jesus! The devil is a very unedifying apparition, and has been an object of superstitious fear to many generations of men, as well as an object of mockery and the butt of popular wit for centuries past. And how can this gloomy nocturnal scene be suitable for this Epiphany season, when we are accustomed to rejoice in the glory of God, which shines in the face of Jesus Christ, and which shines forth from Him in words and deeds such as Israel, such as the world, had never before seen or heard ?

In the old Church Gospels for this season, we were wont to accompany the Lord from His visit to the Temple, when twelve years old, to the Mount of Transfiguration. We saw Him there in the splendour of His miracles, passing through the varied life of His people, wondered at by all, praised by many, and ever more and more fully and joyfully acknowledged by the faithful as the Saviour of men. In our text for to-day we see Him apart from all human society, with only the sand and stones of the wilderness around Him; and we find Him, denuded of all appearance of glory, a Man suffering from hunger, and then speaking only a few very simple words.

But the question whether Jesus will work a miracle such as becomes the Son of God or not, is the very cause of this conflict. He does no miracle, and is thus victorious over the Evil One. Is not this a manifestation of His glory? Yes, I say, this revelation of our Lord's mind is more necessary and more important for us than His greatest miracles. All the glory of His miraculous life on earth could not help us without the moral strength which He victoriously preserved in His conflict with the tempter. We should never rightly understand the Man, who, at the wedding, turned water into wine, and who fed thousands with bread in the wilderness, if we did not know Him, first of all, as the Man who hungered in the wilderness, and who refused to stir a step without God's command, or to speak one word to provide Himself with bread. The intrepid firmness and the unspotted purity of His will form the centre of all the glory that was manifested in Him. The devil shall not prevent our recognising this, and none of us need be hindered from rousing ourselves out of the indolence and weakness of our own will and deeds by the repulsive form of the old and wicked Enemy.

My friends, I do not wish to be misunderstood. From time immemorial there have been teachers, both inside the Church and outside the Church, and there are such also at the present day, who preach on the old Bible texts, and take the old sacred words into their mouths, speaking of the Son of God and His miracles, of the Atonement and of the Resurrection, and, if need be, of the devil also; but by it all they mean something quite different from that which Jesus and His apostles, and the community of the faithful, have ever understood by it. May God, in His mercy, preserve this pulpit of St. Paul's, at all times, so that none who are thus double-tongued may ever preach here! I, for my part, have no doubt that the history of the temptation proceeded from Jesus Himself, in whose mouth there was no deceit, and that it has come into our Gospels from the same source. No human witness but Jesus Himself, no other witness ever existed who could tell the story for the first time without making himself ridiculous. I know also that in the course of His later ministry Jesus referred more than once to this His first decisive conflict, and that He then spoke of the strong man who had been overcome and disarmed by one stronger than he. And every one knows that the men in whom Christian faith in God has proved a power that could move the world, like a Paul or a Luther, have spoken also in grim earnest of Satan's power and guile. But the question as to what we as Christians think of the devil may now be allowed to rest. Even those who think they are freed from the Evil One, by no means deny that evil is a power in the world, and that this power of evil draws near to tempt every one of us; that we have to fight with it as long as we live, and that all that is of any value in our lives, the peace of our souls and our eternal salvation, depends upon our being victorious and not defeated in our conflict with temptation. Whoever is engaged in that conflict does not find the story of the temptation of Jesus quite incomprehensible; it will be good for him to study it deeply. God give us grace that we may do so during this hour! Let us look at Jesus in temptation, let us consider how Jesus fought the fight, which is ordained for us all. We shall see-

That He was tempted in all points like as we are;

That He fought with the weapons which are also at our disposal;

That He fought and conquered that we, like Him, may also fight and conquer.

I.

Jesus had come from His baptism in the Jordan, where He had received consecration and anointing for His calling as Redeemer. The Spirit from on high which had seized Him must have deeply stirred His soul, and directed all His thoughts to the great work for which He knew He had been chosen, to the glorious goal of the world-embracing work of God, and to the ways and means which would lead to that goal. But yet it was not to the stage of public life that the same Spirit led Him, but to the solitude of the wilderness. The Spirit did not drive Him at first to outward acts, but to communion with self and quiet meditation. As we learn to know the Lord in His later life, we cannot doubt that He was determined from the very first to undertake the work of His life in obedience to His Heavenly Father; that He sought to know the will of God in persevering prayer, and that His resolutions and His prayers were upheld by the belief that God would be with Him in all His ways. But all that is good must also be tried by conflict, that it may be victorious in this wicked world. Thoughts, which could never have arisen of themselves in the pure soul of Jesus, were and are still powerful in the world. If Jesus was to break their destructive power in the world, and to give the sovereignty instead to true and eternal thoughts of God—if He was, in one word, to establish God's kingdom on earth—then such thoughts must rise up against Him, so that He might recognise them as the very opposite of the thoughts of His heart; they must force themselves upon Him that He might banish them.

He had taken no food for forty days and forty nights. The excitement of mind, the lofty thoughts which had laid hold of Him with new power, communion with God in prayer—all these things had thrust back His bodily wants. But the tension of soul gives way: the body demands its rights; Jesus hungers. And with this every-day matter, which is so natural, the tempter connects his first attack. “If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” But lately the cry had resounded in heaven, “This is My beloved Son,” and now, like an echo from the abyss, the words come back: “If Thou be the Son.” This is the voice of the old tempter: “Hath God said? is it true what God hath said?” Is it not an unbearable contradiction--to be the Son of God, to whom all the world should be subject as their God and Lord, and—to hunger?

It would not have been remarkable if Jesus had endured hunger till He returned to the dwellings of men, where He would be able to find food; if He had done what many a man has done willingly and unwillingly for days together. But the temptation was alluring because Jesus is to be, and will be, the Son of God; the Son of God who must needs be able to deliver Himself from every unworthy position, who could refute every one who doubted His Sonship to God by words of power, and who would assert His own dignity. Yes, He could have done it, if it had not been the Holy Ghost who led Him into the wilderness. He could have done it, if it had not been His Father in heaven who had allowed Him to hunger, and if He had not been verily the obedient Son, who will do nothing which He does not recognise as the Father's will, and who, therefore, does nothing without the Father. The caricature of the Sonship of God was intended to mislead Him; but the true Sonship of God led Him to victory. Jesus left the stones lying on the ground and continued to hunger, and thus He vanquished the first temptation, to which we have all more than once succumbed, either in this, or in some other way.

Perhaps there is not one amongst us who knows by personal experience what hunger feels like, and how it can serve as an incentive to the power of temptation. But we all do know that hunger is a mighty power on earth. You surely will not require me to relate fully some of the inhuman deeds to which men have been driven by hunger in extraordinary and terrible situations in life; of the mother who, during the siege of Jerusalem, did not spare her own child, or of the horrible deeds which have come to pass amongst Christian seamen, who have had to wrestle with death from starvation in the wastes of the sea. Rather let us picture to ourselves all that happens daily. I am not referring only to the hungry vagrants who no longer feel any compunction when seizing the goods of others, and who will even commit murder because they are hungry; or of the suicide of whole families because they do not know how they are to feed themselves any longer, or keep themselves warm during a hard winter. Let us think of the large districts in our Fatherland, in which the mass of the population do not earn enough to provide themselves with wholesome nourishment, and of the connection between hunger and sin, between deserved and undeserved poverty on the one hand, and crime on the other. Then let us think of all that precedes crime, the envy and hatred of the poor, who murmur and curse the well-to-do, as the hungry do the satisfied. The tempter whispers to all who hunger: “Are ye not men as well as the others who are so much better off? And if ye are, if ye are even the children of God as ye were taught at school, then prove your worth, then help yourselves that ye need no longer hunger.”

This voice is also heard by those who are not tormented by hunger for bread. Let us think of all that Luther counts up as daily bread in the Catechism. Let us think of all the needs which do not decrease, but increase rather in higher positions in life; of all of which man says: “I cannot do without it, I cannot live without it;” then the circle of the hungry and needy widens out so much that it includes all strata of society. And which of us can say that he does not desire what God has denied; that he has never felt hunger for enjoyment or possession; that he has never yet discontentedly compared his position in life with that of others; that he has only now and then preferred enjoyment to the hard fulfilment of duty; that he does not remember ever having given up his right to his birthright as the firstborn for a mess of pottage? Respectable people like ourselves have no difficulty in keeping

our mantle of virtue tolerably clean; our position in life, the moral laws which hedge in our lives, society where every one is looking at others, and very often all are looking at one—all these things oblige us to keep up to a certain standard. We must go into the wilderness, into the desert where God's eye only sees us. We must prove our virtue if it is to be believed in. But God's eye penetrates into the midst of the crowds of men, through all veils, even to the very bottom of the soul; our hearts lie open to Him, even in their innermost parts, by day and by night, and at the present time. But it is only in the heart of *one* Man that God has been able at all times to read, undimmed and undefaced, the words: "I would rather hunger than do the least thing in opposition to the will of God;" and that is in the heart of His Son Jesus Christ.

He conquered, but the war was not ended by *one* victory. The tempter receives new power over Jesus; he takes Him with him to the Holy City, and places Him on a pinnacle of the Temple, and says to Him: If Thou art the Son of God, prove it; cast Thyself down from this holy height into the depths, into which a man cannot look without feeling dizzy. Is it not enough for the Son of God to have power and to prove it? if piety and trust in God are also necessary, then let Jesus manifest them. Did not God promise that He would give His angels charge to bear up the righteous in their hands lest they should dash their feet against a stone? This was the second temptation. Is it unknown to us? I believe that this temptation lies very close to those who are not tormented by hunger for bread or any other external need. Men, who are favoured by other men and by circumstances, and who have received all that life can give, are in danger of, and are threatened by, a giddiness which may drag them down into the abyss. Whoever finds life run smoothly, whoever is filled with lofty and happy thoughts—above all the man who seems to succeed in all that he does; the youth, especially, whose limbs move freely and whose pulse beats quickly, is thus tempted when he feels that he must probe life in all its depths and heights, and must learn to know everything by experience. He is enticed by the dangers against which he has been warned. He runs into danger and perishes. The example of those who are more prudent is of no avail; they are only regarded as poor creatures. The warnings of those who have had experience are but seldom attended to; personal experience only makes one here and there more prudent. Neither does a remnant of piety, preserved from childhood, help much. It is so easily confused with natural tendencies, that it only makes them the more dangerous. We do not wish to find fault with the pretty picture in which we see an angel guarding children who are playing on the edge of a precipice; nor with another, where an angel, unseen, guides the children past the precipice by a dizzy path. Still less will we allow ourselves to be deprived of the consolatory promise that God does really give His angels charge to keep the righteous in the most dangerous paths. We will not allow such words of God to be spoilt for us because the devil quotes them; but we must realise that the devil also takes holy truths into his mouth, and whispers them to us at unseasonable times. We must also ask ourselves who really has the right to comfort himself at all times with the promise of Divine protection. No one dares to do this who is not walking in the ways of God. And where is the man who is always walking in God's ways? Who can always decide clearly between casual security and childlike trust in God? It is true only of the one Man, Jesus Christ.

There is yet a third temptation, which He withstood, and it is also ours. Once more the tempter receives power over the external life of our Lord. He sets Him on the top of a mountain, and conjures up a picture before His eyes, in which all that is great and beautiful, all that has been made by God's creative power and man's art and labour, unite in one glorious whole, and then he says: "All this will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." Jesus gives no answer. He could not say: "Of what concern is the world, and all the glory of the kingdom of the world to Me? I desire them not;" for to Him was due the lordship over all, and it had been promised to Him. Jesus must have known that all that the prophets and poets of the Old Covenant had said and sung of man's position as governor of all creatures, and of the world-wide rule of the King of Israel, referred to Himself, for He knew that God had chosen Him to be the Founder and King of His eternal kingdom. Jesus knew also, what this community confesses, that history can never reach its goal, and the world can never be at rest, till all

the inhabitants of the world bend the knee before Him, and all tongues confess that He is the Lord. The goal of all history is the goal of His own life, and it was this doubly brilliant goal that the tempter set before Him. Only one step was needed, and He would be at the goal. He had only to acknowledge for one moment that the Evil One was the prince of this world, and to do him homage, and then the tempter would abdicate his rule to Him for ever. The words of the tempter were not only foolish deceit and lying. Oh no! a half-truth, which makes the error more powerful and tempting, lies concealed therein. Any one, who has only a slight knowledge of life and history, knows that the world is pervaded throughout by evil powers, and that the men who attain quickly to power and rule in this world never reach their goal unstained, without having done homage to sin; and that, on the other hand, the righteous have much to endure, and must wait a long time. Jesus chose the long and wearisome path of obedience, and said to the tempter, who showed Him the short and easy path to the goal: "Get thee hence, Satan."

And we, how do we act when we are thus tempted? A king of France once said, "Paris is well worth a mass," and he denied the Evangelical faith, which he had heretofore defended. It is not necessary to be a king to fall so low. Whoever sets before himself a high external aim in life, who desires to gain credit to himself for his gifts and knowledge, and wishes to carry out his own will in the world, will be haunted by the tempter, who dangles the picture of speedy and brilliant results before his eyes, and points to the numbers who have arrived at their goal according to his instructions; while, on the other hand, he allows him the long and fruitless work of the faithful, the self-sacrifice, the misunderstanding, and, finally, the Cross. Only a little homage, a bending of the knee, whether to the mighty ones on earth, or the leading spirits, or possibly the populace—only a little adaptation to the mighty errors of the times, to the prevailing views and customs of the world, and the result is sure to follow: a career is made, and the devil has been proved to be right once more. And yet he has long been condemned. God be thanked; he was conquered for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, who was tempted in all points like as we are, and who conquered the tempter with the weapons which are also at our disposal.

II.

Here we see Jesus wielding no other sword than the Word of God, which has also been given to us; and no other shield than the shield of faith, which is able also to protect us vulnerable men against the attacks of the tempter. Jesus said three times to the tempter, "It is written," and He strikes the enemy with all the three sayings that He brings into the field, so that he is silenced, and has at last to leave Him. We see here how true it is that "a word can strike him down." But it must be the right word, and it must also come from the heart, as it came from the heart of Jesus Christ. Indeed, this narrative may be very easily misunderstood; viewed superficially, it might seem as though Jesus only repeated a couple of texts that He had learned by heart in school, instead of bringing to original expression the inner strength and truth of His own life. And it is not only here that it seems so. All His sermons in after-times were interwoven with thoughts and words from the Old Testament; and even on the Cross, when stirred to the depths of His soul, He prayed in the words of the Bible. He had learned the Holy Scriptures from His childhood, and many precious texts clung to His memory. He had sat certainly, more than once, amongst the Scribes, and had learned from them by questions and answers. But He never became, like them, a slave to the letter. Even when in the form of a servant, He was not a servant, but the Son. As in the Temple of Jerusalem, so also in the Temple of Nature, in the throngs of men who crowded round Him, and in the barren wilderness, He felt everywhere as a Son in His Father's house. Thus He passed through history and the Holy Scriptures of His people as the Son of the God who had led His people there and had spoken to His people. He lived and-moved in the Scriptures. He recognised Himself in the Scriptures, for they testified of Him, and the same voice of God, which was never silent in His heart, spoke plainly to Him also in the Law and the Prophets. All that God had said there found a clear and loud echo in His soul, and all that filled the heart of the Son

was in wonderful harmony with the words of the Father in the Holy Scriptures. Why should not the Son speak in the language of the Father? When He said, "It is written," it was not as though He turned to a dead instrument, or as though He appealed to a law which was strange to Him, under which He stood as a slave; but it was His own inner life, which revealed itself as great and victorious, in this robe of obedience and humility.

The forty days of solitude in the wilderness reminded Him of the forty years during which the forefathers of His people were obliged to wander in the wilderness; when He hungered He remembered that God had provided wonderful food for the starving people, and He remembered the words in which the lesson was summed up that the people were to learn from God's discipline in the wilderness, namely, that it is a small thing for God to provide food when the counsel and help of man have come to nought. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Every one who has not learned this simply by rote, but has treasured it in his heart, and can speak thus in faith even when he is hungering, will want no other weapon, when tempted in the hour of need to help himself by sin and injustice.

When the tempter tried to lead Jesus astray, and in presumption and self-will to demand miraculous help from God, He remembered again His forefathers in the wilderness, whose carnal minds led them to cry out for signs and wonders, and who had to repent bitterly. Jesus had learned what Israel ought to have learned: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." He stood firmly rooted in this word on the barren height where He had been placed. Dizziness could not affect Him, for by faith He held the invisible hand of His God and Father, and He knew that the power of God is no less strong when it is invisibly upholding and bearing up the great world and individual men, than when it causes the world to marvel by palpable deeds. He relied on this powerful support, and bore witness in humility that He could do nothing, and would do nothing, without Him, with whom He could do all things and dare all things.

Faith, rooted in the Word of God, was also the strength by which Jesus withstood the last attack of the tempter. He did not renounce lordship over all that He had been promised, neither did He deny that evil and the Evil One have great power in this world; but the splendour of the world, inasmuch as it was ruled over by evil, did not dazzle Him; for He knew that this wicked world will vanish away, and only those who do the will of God would live for ever. This is true of the very least one who desires to save his soul. "For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" But even the Most High, the King of the kingdom, the Son of God, was under the command: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." This law had stood in the Holy Scriptures for many centuries, and it had also been written on the consciences of many thousands of men, but it had not transformed the world. When Jesus, in whose heart it became strength and truth, spoke these words, the devil fled, and the angels came to minister to the Conqueror. The enemy was forced, as he fled, to see the good spirits spreading a table for the Son of God who hungered, and, even now, he must still listen to the song of praise of the congregation: "Thanks be to God, who has given us the victory through Jesus Christ."

III.

Has too much been said? Are we triumphing too soon? A conscientious man who takes this story to heart may well say to himself: These are temptations that have come to me many a time, and have again and again drawn near. How have I withstood them, and how shall I withstand them when they come again to-morrow? Such reflections always sadden us. When we look around, we see many who never seem to fight, but who follow their natural inclinations, the customs of the world, without any perceptible resistance; and yet they are baptized Christians, for whom, so it seems, Christ has lived,

fought, and conquered in vain. We see others, again, who confess the same Lord with us, and who have, as a matter of principle, renounced the Evil One, and yet we must close our eyes very tightly if we are not to see with sorrow that they never withstand the very simplest trial. We have also known other Christians who seemed to be brave fighters; we have seen them standing firm when others wavered; we have rejoiced over them; we have encouraged ourselves by their courage and strength. But in decisive moments we have seen them bend the knee to the Evil One who has power in the world. It is very saddening, even discouraging. It might almost tempt us to unbelief in the victorious power of truth, and to superstition as to the impossibility of conquering sin. But for this very reason, I say: "God be praised, that He sent His Son to us, that He might be tempted like as we are, and yet remain free from sin." Let every one who is tempted to despair in the midst of the battle, look, not on himself or his own strength or weakness; not on the thousands who fall on his left, and the ten thousands who fall on his right hand, but let him look at Jesus. "Behold the Man." There He still stands in the midst of history, and, in the midst of the generation now living, asking all: Who can convince Me of sin when I was tempted like as ye are? All who are silenced by this question, all who acknowledge that Jesus is right, believe in Him already, as their leader in the battle, and in the victory of His cause. They know also that it is not the destiny of man to live on in sinful weakness, and to die conquered by sin, but first of all to fight, and then to conquer under the Captain of salvation. They will also have gained fresh courage for the fight. They do not seek out many inventions to become holy, but they grasp with fresh courage the old weapons, which they, perhaps, had allowed to lie too long and to get rusty, the weapons which Jesus used--the old texts He learned at school, the prayers He was taught by His mother. Strength and skill increase with practice, and faith in victory is already victory, even the victory by which we may overcome the world, and evil in the world.

My friends, let us pray the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation." That is a necessary, I might almost say a natural prayer, and as necessary and as natural as the request for daily bread. We shall gladly pray it from our hearts, whenever we remember the defeats that we and others have suffered. But when we look at the conflict and the victory of Jesus, then another petition rises to our lips, and this prayer shall be my last word :—

If it be Thy holy will, O Father in heaven, that we are to be attacked on all sides and preserved in temptation, then let the image of Thy Son never vanish from our gaze, but help us in all temptation, and lead us out of it by the power of Thy grace. Amen.