

THE HUMANITY AND TEMPATIONS OF OUR LORD

THERE is peculiar appropriateness in the choice of the "shittim" or acacia wood for the tabernacle rather than the cedar or olive. These latter two were used in the construction of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6 : 15, 31-33), which prefigured millennial glory and the habitation of God among the restored nation, the very time referred to in the passage we have quoted. Perhaps the myrtle, used in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 8 : 15), may have been significant for its fragrance and foliage. The acacia, or *shittim*, however, was the only tree which grew in the desert—the only one practically available for the purpose intended—a habitation in the desert, made of the wood of the desert.

But there is special beauty in this when we look at the spiritual significance and remember that Christ is the key to all. Israel was, as we have said, a moral waste, and never more so than when, after their return from the captivity

in Babylon, our Lord came to them. True, idolatry had outwardly ceased, and tombs of prophets were built to honor those slain in the evil days for their faithful testimony for God and against sin. But this could not deceive the eyes of the Holy One who searches the heart. Much outward *religion* there was, a diligent round of fasting, of tithing, and of holy days; but in all this there was nothing for God, no fruit of divine life. Not without cause were the Pharisees, the religious and orthodox leaders, called "whited sepulchres" (Matt. 23 : 27), and "graves which appear not" (Luke 11 : 44)—abodes of death, like the body when the spirit has departed. True, a little remnant was there, the seed by grace of the new nation, but these were marked by their *confessions* of sin and barrenness.

And so when our Lord came, He was to the nation "as a root out of a dry ground." They saw nothing in Him to desire. But how different to the eye of God! Here was a "tender plant" growing in the midst of abounding dearth and desolation; life and vigor manifesting themselves in Him in the scene of death.

So when God bears witness to man's true condition he is described, not merely as one who has committed sins and is liable to punishment, which is perfectly true; nor as one who needs assistance to do that which is right; but he is declared to be *dead*—dead toward God. And this

is a responsible condition, for his *will* is against God and opposed to grace. The Pelagians taught that man only needed guidance to live for God; the semi-Pelagians admitted that he was sick, and needed help if he was to please God; while those who knew the truth contended that man's condition was *dead* toward God, needing the life-giving grace of God in Christ.

This then was, and is, the world in which the wondrous Plant grew up "before Him:" planted in the wilderness, for "the Word became flesh" (Jno. 1: 14), and as "the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself took part of the same" (Heb. 2: 14). But this root had life in itself, and from His birth the eye of God saw nothing but perfection in Him. As the tender plant grew "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2: 52), it bore all that was appropriate to the stage of its life. Had there been nothing resulting for man from this Life, it was a perfect refreshment and glory for God.

There are certain characteristics about the acacia tree which made it particularly suitable as a type of our Lord upon earth. It is the tree of the desert, as we have seen; and there are many varieties, which might suggest the varied characteristics of our blessed Lord. One yields a gum which has a healing effect; from another is obtained a tonic medicine; the leaves of another are peculiarly sensitive to outward

influences; and the wood, by its durability, particularly points to the incorruptibility of His humanity. Upon this last we must dwell in some detail, for it is the prominent material, not only in the framework of the tabernacle, but in all its furniture, except the laver and the candlestick.

We have already dwelt upon the passage in Hebrews 10: 5, but will recur to it because of one clause: "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me." The quotation is from the 40th psalm, where, instead of "A body hast Thou prepared Me," we have, "Mine ears hast Thou opened," or "digged." This illustrates the freedom with which the Spirit of God enlarges upon the thought originally given under His inspiration. In the psalm, as appropriate to its prophetic character, we have the opening or forming of the ears, suggesting the *obedience* of our Lord, as the ear is to receive the instruction to be obeyed. But in the New Testament passage, where His holy person has been fully revealed, the Spirit teaches us that His *body* was a specially prepared one for this obedience.

We are on holy ground here, but we need not refuse to draw nigh, if it be in reverence and godly fear. The person of the Son of God is a mystery which only God can fully comprehend, but we remember that He came to *reveal*, not to conceal, God; that the beloved apostle rested un-

reproved upon His bosom, and the sinful woman could kiss His feet. He invited His disciples to "handle Me and see." May we with Thomas do so; as with him we also say, "My Lord and my God" (Jno. 20: 27, 28).

There are dangers on every hand here: we may deny His true humanity, or unduly emphasize that and lose the thought of His perfect and absolute deity. We are distinctly told that He was, and is, Man: "There is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2: 5). He is the ideal, the only perfect Man that ever walked the earth—ininitely more so than the first man. But He was the perfect Man because He was also infinitely more. The Creator has come down into His creation and taken His place as its Head (Col. 1: 15). The Son of God became also the Son of Man. It was upon earth that the body was prepared Him. He was "made of a woman" (Gal. 4: 4), in fulfilment of the first word of gospel spoken by God, in the bruising of the serpent's head by the Seed of the woman. Some, in the true spirit of worship, have shrunk from speaking of our Lord as absolutely human; but the word of God must always direct intelligent worship. This assures us that He is in the fullest sense a Man, who was born and lived His life here.

"Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took

part of the same " (Heb. 2: 14). Here we have One who participated in humanity. The word which speaks of this participation is, however, different from that applied to "the children." Theirs is a complete identification with all that humanity is, now alas, as fallen. Therefore they were subject to death at the hand of him that had the power of death, and as a consequence, were all their lifetime subject to bondage through fear of death. He, on the contrary, in coming into the world voluntarily took a sinless, perfect human nature—a body, soul and spirit. The difference is expressed in the two words—identification and participation—so carefully does the Spirit guard against connecting our holy Lord's humanity with the slightest taint of the fall. As a result, His death is absolutely voluntary and divinely efficacious — "That through death He might destroy (or annul) him that had the power of death," and deliver His beloved ones. This deliverance is not merely *from* Satan's power and death, but it brings *into* the presence of the living God, for as a merciful and faithful High Priest, our Lord made propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb. 2: 17). Thus the Person and the work are divinely perfect; yet we are assured of the tender heart of sympathy and succor of a Man who suffered being tempted, but in whose holy heart there was no response to those temptations.

Thus, in the narrative of His incarnation, we are assured both of His absolute humanity and yet of the unique and sinless perfection of it. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman" (Gal. 4: 4). By the overshadowing power of the Highest the "Seed of the woman" has come, a reminder of her who "being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Tim. 2: 14). "Therefore that Holy Thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1: 35).

There is absolutely no taint in that "Son of Man." It is not said "that innocent thing," but "that *Holy* Thing." The first man before the fall was innocent, guiltless, but the condition was a negative and unstable one. He was of the earth, earthy—made of dust; with a spirit, but a creature, and nothing more. The Second Man is out of heaven (1 Cor. 15: 47). *He* was "holy," and had a positive, inherent, abiding character, utterly incapable of sin. He was a partaker of the divine nature as incarnate, with nothing of "the flesh" in any part of His person. His positive holiness was because of the direct, divine work of the Spirit in His incarnation—absolutely apart from fallen nature. We would veil our faces as we speak or think of this divine mystery, and adore the grace of Him who thus humbled Himself to be found in fashion as a man.

In the world He was, then, but absolutely free

from the taint of sin. A type of this we have in the red heifer, in Numbers 19, which had never borne yoke; from which we gather that nothing applied to Him that was the result or due of sin. Ever dwelling in perfect communion with God, there could be no sense of distance, of divine displeasure, or aught that spoke of the consequences of sin. Into the poverty, trials, sorrows, and all that in which man was found, He could enter; but, though surrounded by darkness, He was ever light and in the light. The very nature of God therefore—His goodness and righteousness—must give witness to His constant approval of and delight in this righteous One. The only reason why God has withdrawn the light of His countenance from man is because of sin—divine righteousness could not go on with that, and wicked man had no desire for Him. “Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil” (Jno. 3: 19). But here was One whose whole being desired and delighted in God alone, and therefore the Voice from the excellent glory but expressed the constant attitude of the righteous and holy God toward Him: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3: 17). This fact sets aside the thought of His being a substitute during His life: *that* was only upon the cross; *there* He was forsaken of God, when He was “made sin for us” (2 Cor. 5: 21).

It also follows that death had not the slightest claim upon Him. "The wages of *sin* is death." "By one man sin entered into the world, and *death by sin*; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 6: 23; 5: 12). Death is the precursor of judgment for man; the two cannot be separated. "As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9: 27). How impossible then that our holy Lord should be subject to death.

It has been taught that our Lord's humanity was of such a character that He was subject to the ills of life—to sickness or the decrepitude of age; that had He lived the appointed three-score years and ten, He would have been cut off like the rest of humanity. Let our inmost spirits revolt from such thoughts, though compelled to examine them. As we have just seen, death in Scripture is the universal witness of sin. Go into the dwellings of the poor or the palaces of the great, and we find the dark sign of death. It has reigned everywhere. It is the sentence of God upon man: "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2: 17). Shall we take that which is a witness of corrupt, fallen nature, a witness that man has forfeited the right which he had as a creature to live in God's world, and attach it to our Lord?—to Him "who knew no sin?" Did death pass upon Him then—we speak as fools—in that He had sinned?

It has been said, "Had He drank poison it would have killed Him." In the first place, He *would not* have done this, for His every act was in obedience to His Father; He would not cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. But, for the moment granting the act, shall we say that what He promised to His servants would not have been true of Him: "If they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them" (Mark 16 : 18)?

The truth is that all such thoughts are unholy, unprofitable speculations. Scripture does not suggest them nor afford the shadow of support to them. We look upon the One "made flesh," as One on whom no sentence of death rests; no subjection to sickness. If the men before the flood lived well-nigh a thousand years, shall we contract the age of the Unfallen to the "labor and sorrow" of those whose years are as a "tale that is told," because all their days are passed away in His wrath? (Ps. 90 : 9, 10). Can we think of His manhood reaching its zenith and declining toward the shadows of evening and the night of death? Ah no! Had He so chosen, or had there been need for it, He could have remained here until the present time, for death had no claim upon Him.

Here we take our stand, by God's grace, to confess the blessed truth and to reject with abhorrence the thought that the icy hand of death

could have been laid upon Him in any way, save as He voluntarily laid down His life: "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (Jno. 10: 18).

And is it not just this entire immunity from death or any of the consequences of sin which fitted Him to be the Substitute for us upon the cross? We would be robbed of our Saviour if He were personally, as a Man, a debtor to death. Reverently speaking, He would have needed a Saviour Himself, one to pay the debt which every son of fallen Adam owed. But the opposite of all this is true: "*As it is appointed unto men once to die . . . so Christ was once offered*" (Heb. 9: 27, 28)—not as a natural appointment, but in perfect grace as a willing Substitute—"God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law," not to die because He had broken it, but as the Substitute "*made a curse for us,*" "*to redeem them that were under the law*" (Gal. 4: 5; 3: 13). The entire truth of substitution, of atonement, rests upon this, whether it be in the Old Testament types which constantly emphasize the fact that "*your lamb shall be without blemish*" (Ex. 12: 5), or in the direct statements of the New, "*In Him is no sin*" (1 Jno. 3: 5).

Upon the truth of this God set His seal in raising up the body of our Lord from the grave. Let us remember it was the very body prepared by

God for Him, which had been laid in the manger, had thirsted and hungered, slept in the storm, and wept at the grave. Did not God ever behold in Him "that Holy Thing," even as to the body?—though man spits upon it and crowns it with thorns; scourges Him; pierces His hands and feet; even in death pierces His side! But at last, "having fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a sepulchre" (Acts 13: 29). His work being finished, not one thing more (which divine patience had permitted before) could man do to insult that body. It is taken down from the cross, wrapped in spices (suggestive of the sweetness and fragrance of that death to God), and laid in a new sepulchre, which had never been tainted with death. The ashes of the sacrifice were poured out in a clean place; and no corruption is suffered to touch that Holy One (Acts 13: 37). "Raised from the dead by the glory of the Father" in that same body in which He served God, and died and rose and will retain for ever, He appeared to His disciples, and now sits upon the throne of God.

But in opposing the irreverence of unbelief, let us beware of an opposite error. The body prepared was a perfectly natural body, *capable* of dying. Indeed, it was for this very purpose He became incarnate. To say that He was mortal, in the sense of being subject, or liable, to

death, would be blasphemy; to say that He took a body that was *capable* of dying is to declare the foundation of truth for our blessing.

Without descending into speculation about "secret things," which "belong to God," and which always tend to a degradation of Christ and the puffing up of the flesh (Col. 2: 18), we may say that Scripture does not state that had man remained unfallen he would have remained permanently dependent upon food to have maintained life. In other words, the state in Eden is not declared to have been the eternal state. The possession of bodies similar to those of "the beasts that perish" would suggest that, had human righteousness been a possibility, God would have brought in the eternal state by a divine change, analogous to the changing of the bodies of saints at the coming of the Lord (1 Cor. 15: 51, 52), though without the taint of sin. In like manner, had the cross not been a necessity for our salvation, our Lord could have passed without dying from the condition of bodily existence suited to earth to that glorified body which He now has. He never saw corruption, and in that sense His resurrection would answer to that "change," though as His incarnation was voluntary, so would the change have been—no question of infirmity in any case. We also gather from Scripture that the resurrection-body is one which does not depend upon earthly conditions,

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but at the same time can come into them. He ate the broiled fish and honeycomb to show them His body was truly material, and yet it was no longer a body for the earth (Luke 24: 42, 43).

We turn again briefly to another subject suggested by the acacia wood—the temptibility of our Lord. Just as error has made the incarnation to include liability to bodily infirmities and death, so it has taught that our Lord was capable of yielding to temptation. Let us stamp that at once as absolute untruth. How could One who was positively and only righteous, with a moral nature absolutely and only divine, to whom obedience to God was therefore His *life*, be capable of yielding to sin? “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me” (Jno. 14: 30).

But it will be said that while He *did not* yield to sin, He *could* have done so; and if not, of what use was the temptation? We might well ask, If He could have yielded to it, what need for the temptation? Perhaps an illustration may be helpful. There are tests to detect metals which look like gold, and are not. These tests are applied to true metal as well as the counterfeits, not to show it is capable of yielding to the test and becoming brass, but just the reverse, to show it to be absolutely incapable. In like manner the believer in Christ has “eternal life” and can *never* perish, yet the tests of profession are

applied to him, and they bring out the reality of the life he has. It is *impossible* for gold to respond to a test for brass, impossible for a true believer to fall away as a mere professor, and how much more impossible for our Lord to have yielded to temptation. But it will be said that the true child of God may yield to temptation, and why not our Lord? What is it that makes it possible for the child of God to yield to temptation? The presence of the fallen nature, the flesh. Did our Lord have *that*? "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he *cannot* sin, because he is born of God" (1 Jno. 3: 9). This is said of the believer, *as born of God*; is *less* to be said of that Holy One?

It may be further objected that unfallen Adam was capable of yielding to temptation, and in fact did. Quite true; and is the Last Adam the same? As we have already said, our Lord's humanity was not precisely like that of unfallen man. He had as Man the nature, and *only* that, which man gets from God in new birth. It was not *new* in His case, save as distinguished from the birth of all other men. He was only born once, and had no need to be born again.

We have purposely refrained from introducing the other great truth of our Lord's deity and the union of the divine and human natures in one person. This will come before us presently when

we consider the gold, and will be seen to confirm more fully what we have been dwelling upon. But we should be clear even without dwelling upon that side of His person, as to our Lord's absolute *incapability* of yielding to temptation.

Have we lost anything in thus seeing that our Saviour *could* not sin as well as *did* not? Is anything of "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" missed in learning that it was, and ever is, "sin apart" (Heb. 4: 15)? Is He for this less "able to succor them that are tempted" (Heb. 2: 18)? Let us then see in what sense He "suffered being tempted," and in that we will find the answer to these questions.

We have those special temptations by Satan recorded, doubtless as giving us the principle of all temptations that are "common to man." There may be a closer correspondence than we have thought between those three forms of temptation and that to which our first parents yielded. (See Matt. 4: 1-11.) There was much in the way of contrast too. Instead of a paradise, our Lord had a wilderness; instead of every need met, He was without food. The devil first appeals to Him as Son of God, or perhaps raises also the question whether He be that. He is hungry, yet able to make stones into bread; for had He not created all things? But our Lord was there as Man, and would not use His divine power. He will suffer hunger rather than yield

to the temptation to use His divine power. Could one of *us* have made stones into bread? Then He will not do aught that *man* cannot do.

The question raised by Satan is, impliedly at least, whether God really cares for Him. He has left Him to suffer—why not take His case in His own hands? This was the question raised with the woman: “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of *every* tree of the garden” (Gen. 3 : 1)? He insinuated the doubt of God’s goodness and love; and she took her case into her own hands—deceived, but responsibly deceived, for she turned from the word of God and listened to Satan. She did not suffer, if suffering it could possibly be called when God had met every need, and so she fell, and Adam fell with her. That ended the trial of the first man, eternally. He can never stand before God save as a guilty, lost sinner.

But the people of God, who have been brought to Him through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His infinite grace, are left in this world, and the malignity of the vanquished foe assails them in every possible way, to mar their communion and lead them to dishonor God. Again, therefore, he presents his specious lie, suggesting that God does not care, that we had better see to our own case and provide for ourselves. Forgetting those words of love that will abide forever, “He that spared not His own Son,

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but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not *with Him* also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8 : 32), we know not how to answer the tempter. But we turn to our Lord, and cry to Him for aid. Would it help us if we thought that He had had *desires, feelings, wishes*, to yield to this temptation—that His "feet had well-nigh slipped" (Ps. 73 : 2)? If it *did* help us, whose help would it be but that of Satan, leading us to think lightly of *sin* and lightly of the Holy One of God. The work of Satan is always seen in making us think sin is a little thing: the fear of God and the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ever show it in all its awful reality.

It may be said that the sympathy of those who have fallen into sin is more helpful to those tempted than of one who has never failed in that particular respect. It is not the *sympathy* of such persons necessarily that is helpful, but rather their counsel and testimony to the power of Christ to deliver. But apart from that, connecting our Lord with sin, save as the One who put it away by His atoning work, and as our Advocate on high, is blasphemy, and only a cloak to make Him the minister of sin. Would we dare think of Him as on the same level with our fellow-sinner?

After all, it is not sympathy with sin that is needed. Sin is not to be spared or condoned. We might as well nurse a viper and not expect

to be bitten as to crave sympathy for our sin. Sin is not a misfortune or an infirmity; it is that abominable thing which *God hates*, which murdered Christ. It would, if allowed, cast God from His throne and put Satan there. Oh, may God deepen in our hearts the abhorrence of disobedience to Him, which is *sin*.

The next form of temptation which Satan set before the Lord, to cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, would have been to abuse the goodness of God—the opposite of the former temptation. The very inducement, in Satan's mind, may have been to presume on the written Word. There may have been too in his mind the thought that our Lord would thus approve Himself to the people as Messiah. But not a thought of this kind was in Christ's holy mind. Messiah of His people He was, and longed that they should truly recognize Him as such, but it must be by true conviction of sin and turning to God, and not by some dazzling display of supernatural power. Miracles our Lord did, freely and constantly, as evidences of who He was, and as ministering to man's need—never to display Himself to the natural man. He walked upon the water to reach His disciples and to confirm their faith. After His resurrection also, He showed them how in His new relationship there was no longer limitation of material things. He was giving them, may we not say? illustrations

of what was to be their's too, as well as establishing the fact in their hearts of His mastery over all things.

But what was the element of suffering in our Lord in thus refusing the temptation? Most certainly not that His will or desire was to presume on God, but in refusing the wrong means to reach a desired end. The *means* were absolutely repulsive to Him, even though coated over with a misquoted scripture (Ps. 91: 11, 12)—though the end, to reach His beloved people, to awaken them, He could and did desire. And was it not pain to Him still to wait?—as the sorrow which later led Him to weep over Jerusalem? We use an illustration. The son of a godly father is justly imprisoned. The father's heart yearns over his son; he would love to pay his fine and set him at liberty, but has not the means: there is an opportunity to *steal* the money. How does it appeal to the father? Does it make him want to steal? No, but it pains him to turn away from his son, and the temptation has added to his pain by showing him that he cannot help his child. This is but a feeble illustration, and our poor hearts have been so accustomed to thoughts of self-will that we but feebly apprehend the absolute revulsion which our holy Lord felt at any suggestion of disobedience to His Father.

This comes out more plainly still in the last temptation; all the more clearly to us, perhaps,

because the issues are so sharply drawn. It is to worship some one (Satan has not declared himself) beside God, and the bait is the kingdoms and glory of the world. Our Lord at once discloses Satan and bids him depart; God, God alone, is to be worshiped and served—anything else was abominable to His holy soul.

But, again, what was the element of suffering in thus being tempted? We have already alluded to the pain it gives a pure soul to be brought in any way in contact with evil. Where the purity was absolute and perfect the pain must have been intense. We steel ourselves more than we think by indifference. There was none of that in Him. The suggestion of evil was not merely an insult to Him, but it outraged every faculty of a holy nature zealous for the glory of God. To Him the mere *presence* of sin was deep pain; to be in *company* with a being capable of making such suggestions was torture. Is it not pain for a pure person to be thrown in the company of a foul blasphemer and to be approached with suggestions of similar sin? Would it not be still more painful were the person outwardly pleasing in manner? Satan is none the less Satan when he is transformed into an angel of light.

The kingdoms of the world and their glory—to whom did they belong? Were they not rightly His? Could He not appreciate all that was attractive and beautiful, apart from sin? Did He

not read on many a bright page of prophecy that all was one day to be His? In a very real sense He could think of all that was there—the beauty of nature, the power of rule—as one day to be subject to Himself. But even that could have no attraction for Him save to subdue all things to His Father's authority. And He would remember, never could for a moment forget, that it was to be the Father's gift to Him: "Ask of *Me*, and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession" (Ps. 2: 8). They would then be put in His hands by His Father, and in His time and way. He will not anticipate, like Jacob, nor accept a lie, whatever show of power and glory there might be in it. *He* knew, as alas man refuses to know, that if God be turned from there is absolutely nothing left.

So He would go on in the path of suffering rather than yield for one moment to the tempter; for faithfulness to God means suffering in a world where all is against Him. Our Lord abides in that path, and thus He suffered being tempted, while not one motion is produced toward a relief proposed by Satan.

We have thus dwelt at some length, and yet how imperfectly, upon the incorruptibility of our Lord's humanity—a unique, a holy one; subjected to every form of temptation, to body, to soul, and to spirit—as perhaps suggested in the

threefold attack of Satan—but perfect in it all.

It may be well to call attention to two aspects of temptation spoken of in the first chapter of James: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (Jas. 1: 2, 3); “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed” (vers. 13, 14). The first of these passages speaks of temptation or trial assailing from without; the second, of desire or lust within. The first was that to which our Lord was subjected throughout His whole life; the second, He was absolutely incapable of. Perish the thought that would link His holy name with it.



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