

The Last Temptation of Christ ***Mark 15:25-32***

***A road that branches like a tree
Is either-or, not ever and.
We cannot cross the canyoned sea
And journey to the promised land***

***Yet stay at Goshen, eating leeks.
Nor can we shun Passover's Lamb
Yet celebrate the Feast of Weeks.
And so it was the Great I AM***

***Was faced with an eternal choice.
A thief looked in His bloodied face;
"Save both yourself and us," his voice
Gasp'd out. Ah, but to purchase grace***

***The Son could not do both of those.
To bring us life He had to give
His own. And since He died, He rose
That death might die and dead might live.***

Deep in the blistering desert wilderness of Judea, Satan assaulted our Savior with three carefully crafted temptations. Then the devil left our Lord. But that doesn't mean he gave up.

At Gethsemane, the adversary tried to soil the sinless Son of God again and failed. Now the Savior hung in agony with the weight of a world of sin within His pure and perfect body. Blood flowed from His head, hands and feet. And death was only hours away.

Lucifer knows God's Word. He knew *the wages of sin is death* long before Paul wrote those words. And at the cross, he understood his earthly kingdom, indeed eternity itself was on the line.

Christ was paying the price of blood and death for sin. And the devil was desperate to keep Him from enduring the agony of the cross to the point of death. So in a last ditch effort, the adversary aimed three final temptations at God's Son as He hung on the cross.

This time, our eternal enemy planted words in the mouths of wicked men. Some were merely passing by on their way to the temple to salve their sin and rebellion with empty rituals.

Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him... Verse 29

Others wore embroidered robes and silk slippers and stroked long, perfumed beards. These were temple priests and ruling Jews.

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him... Verse 31

A single theme echoed in the abuse those men hurled up at Christ on the cross. They said it again and again.

...save Yourself, and come down from the cross! Verse 30

The men who added abuse to our Lord's agony thought their words were just jokes: snide satire to add a sting to the Savior's final hours. They were smug and sure our Savior was utterly incapable of obeying their challenge to come down from the cross.

But they were wrong. And the evil spirit who planted those words in their minds knew it. He knew God's Son had merely to nod His head or murmur a word and an army of angels would instantly rescue Him. At Gethsemane, Jesus had said so Himself.

...do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? Matthew 26:53

Our Lord was powerfully tempted to call out to His eternal Father to be tenderly carried down from the cross by a heavenly host of angels. That was the last temptation of Christ.

We must never forget that. It reminds us that the cross wasn't the result of Judas' betrayal, weak politicians or the priests' plots.

It was our Lord's choice to lay down His life. He consciously chose to die drenched in His own blood and stained with foul phlegm coughed up from the throats of the proud and the powerful.

Our Savior could have spared Himself at any point. But our Redeemer resisted Satan's last temptation. He endured all the agony and abuse of the cross till He hung limp and lifeless against the nails.

And He did so out of love for us. By staying on the cross, Christ purchased gifts for us: gifts that are expensive beyond the imagination of all mankind. Those gifts are so precious, they cost the Father His Son, and the Son His life.

There on Golgotha, the devil understood the Savior's eternal mission. So he urged Christ to come down, to stop short of dying and walk triumphantly back down execution hill into Jerusalem as the King He was and is and ever shall be.

May God be forever praised that our Redeemer resisted that temptation.

For by doing so He purchased three gifts for us.

Resurrection

Wherever and whenever our Savior spoke, Pharisees listened on the edge of every crowd. And what the Carpenter said was like acid in their ears. But one of the first things they heard Jesus say stuck in their throats like a jagged bone.

And try as they might, they could neither expel it nor explain it. Now in their rage, they threw His words back at Him.

Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross! Verses 29-30

But in their exultation, the Jews misquoted the Master. He offered those words as a challenge three years earlier after He drove the moneychangers off the temple courtyard.

The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."...But He was speaking of the temple of His body. John 2:18-19,21

Christ never said *He* would destroy the temple of His body. He challenged His enemies to do so.

And He promised when they did, He would raise it up again in three short days. Now our Lord's enemies were doing precisely that. They were destroying the temple of our Lord's body.

That is what the devil dreaded. At all costs, he didn't want the Lord Jesus to lay down His life and walk out of His tomb three days later. The book of Hebrews tells us why.

...since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same,

that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. Hebrews 2:14-15

That is why Satan had his servants cry out to Christ, "Don't die! Come down from the cross."

The devil knew when Jesus died, He would taste death for all of mankind. And death is the chain that has shackled the human race in slavery to sin and Satan since Adam first disobeyed God deep in the green shadows of Eden.

That is why God's Son had to die. He could only free us from our fear of death by dying in our place.

And He could only grant us the promise of resurrection by His own resurrection. That is His promise to us.

...because I live, you will live also. John 14:19

So Jesus had to stay on the cross. If He didn't, every grave heaped with flowers would be another aching agony.

But we who trust in Christ as our Savior and loving Lord don't await our own death in despair, dreading the arching agony of eternal darkness that looms beyond death's door.

With His own blood, our Savior forever defeated death.

Redemption

The bloody Friday Jesus died was also the first day of the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread. So it was always a busy time for temple priests.

But this year, they weren't at the temple, supervising sacrifices. They were standing at the foot of the cross, shouting abuse into the Master's bloodied ears.

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself." Verse 31

The chief priests and scribes didn't intend to speak such a startling spiritual truth. But they did. They thought their words were merely mockery. But our Lord's enemies described the essence of the choice that faced God's Son.

During His days here on earth, Jesus saved demoniacs from darkness, lepers from crippling disease, and the dead from early graves. That was His choice.

Now He faced another choice. He could save sinners by dying alone and abandoned on a Roman cross. Or He could come down from the cross and save Himself.

But He couldn't do both. It was one or the other. And with spikes skewering His hands and feet, Christ made His choice. For within His tortured body, He carried a crushing load.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, 1 Peter 2:24

The book of Hebrews teaches that *without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*. So by His shedding His blood, Jesus was purchasing forgiveness for all those *others*: for you and me.

Since Adam, Satan had ruled over mankind through sin. But if our Redeemer refused to come down from the cross, His blood would break the power of sin.

Christ's death would purchase forgiveness and forever free men from slavery to sin. Now, because our Redeemer resisted the devil's temptation to come down from the cross, full and free forgiveness is available to everyone on earth.

...the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

The blood Christ shed can cleanse us from sin so completely, it is even erased from the mind of our omniscient God. No sin is so hideous and heinous that our Lord's blood can't cleanse it. Neither is any sin too deeply embedded to be uprooted by Christ's blood.

Because of the cross, our sins can be washed away and buried in the sea of forgetfulness. And

they can never be resurrected or remembered to be thrown in our face.

Our Lord resisted Satan's temptation. He didn't call upon the legions of angels that waited His slightest command to be rescued.

He chose to die that He might pay the price of blood and death that we might be forgiven and redeemed from the power of sin.

Regeneration

In the desert wilderness, Satan saved his strongest temptation for last. And he did the same thing on execution hill.

Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe! Verse 32

Jesus shared a love-hate relationship with the powerful Jews who stood, sneering at the foot of His cross. They hated Him. And He loved them.

Even when they beat Him with their fists and turned Him over to Roman soldiers who beat His back, Jesus loved His enemies. And He harbored no malice for those wicked men.

Our loving Lord dreaded that the fire of God's wrath would one day be heaped upon their heads. That is why He prayed for their forgiveness even as He hung on the cross.

More than anything in all the world, He wanted to see those Jews honestly and humbly believe in Him as their Maker and their Messiah. The Jews didn't know that.

But Satan did. So he had them offer Christ a challenge. If He would come down from the cross, they would believe in Him and serve Him as their one and only King.

Still, our Savior knew that was a paper-mache promise. They admitted that He saved others. But when He called Lazarus out of his a hillside grave, those same Jews not only refused to believe in Him. They tried to murder the man He raised.

If an earthquake and the darkness at noon prophesied by Amos couldn't persuade them, even seeing a sky full of angels rescuing the Redeemer wouldn't have breathed faith into those wicked men.

"It will come about in that day," declares the Lord God, "that I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight." Amos 8:9

Seeing wouldn't have made them believers, because faith isn't the result of sight. It never grows from positive, irrefutable proof.

...faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1 (KJV)

Faith is always a choice. It is based, not upon proof, but on the truth of God's infallibly inspired Word. It comes to life only when we choose to believe what God says.

...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17 (NKJV)

The Jews were promising what they couldn't deliver. If Jesus had come down from the cross, they still wouldn't have believed in Him as their Savior and King.

And even if they had, it would have done them no lasting good. If angels had lifted our Lord from the cross and He had marched triumphantly back into Jerusalem, it wouldn't have helped the Jews.

Even if He forgave all their sins. it wouldn't have done our Savior's enemies any good. They needed more than forgiveness. A new start in life wouldn't have helped them for long.

It won't help for us, either. They had the same problem we do. They weren't only condemned for what they did, but also for what they were. Their problem was the same as ours.

They were sinners. Like every son and daughter of Adam, they were diseased with sin. They

had an unquenchable craving for lusts and lies. And they had no more desire to come to Christ and serve Him as their Sovereign Lord than we do.

Soiled by sin, addicted to sin, and servants of sin, they were so poisoned and polluted with wickedness, simply being forgiven couldn't heal them. And it can't heal us.

Even if Christ had forgiven those Jews, in a matter of hours they would have been as full of sin as ever. They were their own worst enemies. And so are we. We are sinners who can't stop sinning.

Even if Jesus had come down from the cross and they had responded by believing in Him, they would still have been sinners. Their dark disease would have gone uncured.

That is why Jesus stayed on the cross. He did it for them and for us. His blood and death does much more than grant us forgiveness of our sins. It also enables us to be transformed from sinners to saints.

It is the glorious truth of the Gospel that the power of Christ's cross can grant us what we really need. A new heart!

I will give you anew heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. Ezekiel 36:26-27

By dying the death we deserve, our Lord purchased the cure for our dark disease by enabling us to receive the powerful presence of His Holy Spirit. When we accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, that Sovereign Spirit takes up residence within our physical bodies.

And when the Spirit comes into our lives, He breaks the power of sin within us, utterly and absolutely transforming all our aims and affections. In fact, He changes our very nature from lost sinners to loving sons of the eternal Father.

With God's Spirit inside, for the first time in our lives we can reflect our Redeemer's loving heart. We can be ruled, not by desires to sin, but by a hunger to know and serve the Savior who loved us so much He died for us.

Jesus could have done precisely what those who mocked Him demanded. He could have come down from the cross.

He didn't do so because He was purchasing an eternally expensive and indescribably precious gift for us. His own presence within us as a faithful Friend, a loving Lord and a matchless Savior!

But a gift is meaningless if it isn't received. By shedding His blood and giving His life, our Lord provided all we need to live an abundant life that even death cannot mar.

In fact, there is only one thing Jesus did not and will not do. He won't force us to receive the gift He purchased for us. We must freely choose to do that.

Or we will live and die in darkness, defeat, and despair.