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The Testing of the Son and the Sons

by T. Austin-Sparks

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Mar-Apr 1929, Vol. 7-2.

Matthew 4; Deuteronomy 8.

At the outset of this meditation let us link together the two following fragments of scripture.

"Man shall not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord shall man live" (Matt. 4:4).

"I am the Bread of Life" (John 6:35).

No one will imagine that there is a contradiction in those statements for the second one swallows the first. While the first refers to the bread which is transient, and passing, temporal and of the earth, and is not the sole basis of man's life as life is according to the mind of God, not what man calls life, the Lord Jesus is the Bread which is that Life, and is Himself as the Bread, and as the Life, the Word, the living Word by which man shall live.

Now this wonderful account of the Lord's temptation in the wilderness is constructed upon that basic fact. You notice that He has come up out of Jordan, symbolically He has died, been buried, and raised from the dead. That is set at the outset of His ministry, and upon that everything proceeds, and out of that everything arises in life, in word, and in deed. We know that He is specifically "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead"; that that resurrection in His baptism symbolized, typified, and foreshadowed, is the ground upon which the heavens are opened and the voice of the Father is heard announcing "This is my Beloved Son," the

sonship on the ground of Resurrection, and the principle of that sonship the Resurrection Life which has proved triumphant over death; that Life resident within Himself as the Son to become the basis of all future triumphs, and that Life to be imparted as Bread to all who are in that faith union with Him of which He speaks: "He that believeth into Me shall never hunger. He that is believing shall never thirst." That is the background or the foundation of this thing. It is well to be perfectly clear as to what it is that is behind this temptation in the wilderness. Now it is a remarkable thing and full of significance that this has been foreshadowed in every detail in the life of Israel in the wilderness. You break up the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy and the fourth chapter of Matthew and what have you.

In the second verse of the former you have, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness."

In the chapter of Matthew -

"Forty days and forty nights in the wilderness."

In the former, 3rd verse -

"He suffered thee to hunger."

In the latter, 2nd verse -

"Afterward, He hungered."

In the former, 2nd verse,

"To prove thee."

In the latter, 2nd verse -

"To be tempted (or tried, or proved, the same word) of the devil."

In the former, 5th verse -

"Thou shalt consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee."

In the latter, 3rd verse -

"If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

In the former, 3rd verse -

"He fed thee with manna."

In the latter, 11th verse -

"Angels ministered unto Him."

Life-Union with the Lord

Now you see the relationship of these two things. It is only a study of marginal references so far as the material is concerned, the inner secret the Lord must unfold. You see the principles lying behind both these accounts are the same. Israel has come out by the mighty hand of God from Egypt through the Red Sea - "baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea," and raised as from the dead - Israel now called Son. Exodus 4:22-23; Hosea 11:1. Israel now "Son" on the ground of Resurrection. Israel now in Life Union with the Lord of Life in victory over the lord of death who was defeated by the sprinkled blood, and robbed of his prey. Israel delivered from the destroyer - out on resurrection ground, sharing typically and *in figure* (not actually) that Life triumphant over death in sonship, and on that basis Israel was tested, tried, proved. "He suffered thee to hunger - He tried (proved) thee that He might make thee know what was in thine heart whether thou wouldest keep his

commandments" (His word). "That He might make thee know that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word (the living word) that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord shall man (not exist), but live." This life, you see, is going to prove itself through testing; this life is going to manifest its marvellous properties as the thing which is triumphant in the presence of a deep trial. Israel on that basis, and then the spiritual administration of divine sustenance in a wilderness, God coming in in the barrenness by - shall I use the word? I am afraid of it - a mystic Life, a secret Life in the manna. "What is it?" The mystery of their sustenance: "what is it?" they said, when they saw the manna, that mystic sustenance, the basis of their survival in temptation.

Now forty years in the wilderness. Forty a compound of five and eight. Five - Grace. Eight - Resurrection. Forty always in the Bible is the number of testing, and triumph; chastisement, discipline, and glory resultant. Israel there forty years. In the case of the Son, on Resurrection ground, possessing the Divine Life - "Though He was a Son yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." He suffered being tempted. Here is probation; here is Son-training; Son-discipline, Son-testing, but all that that secret thing, that Life, that mystic Life, which is not drawn from earth, but drawn from above might be demonstrated through faith in the universe in the power of this mighty triumph.

Now take these three temptations, and you will find that they have their illustration in Israel's history here. In Deut. 8 you have the first temptation: "He suffered thee to hunger."

"Afterward He hungered. Then the tempter came and said if thou be the Son of God command that these stones become bread." He answered, quoting from this scripture, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4).

Faith, Sonship, and Sense

What is the nature of this temptation in Israel and in Christ? "He suffered thee to hunger" - "He hungered." He is in the wilderness; they were in the wilderness; cut off absolutely from every earthly resource, bereft of everything upon which to place any fleshly confidence. Think, forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, undoubtedly in a state of severe spiritual pressure, a time of real spiritual anguish, and anguish which was of this character I am quite sure - "you are left alone. God has left you, everything else has dried up. God is not with you; there are no evidences whatever, no proofs, no demonstrations, you are alone, you are forsaken." Everything outside spoke of desolation, and that desolation was seeking to envelop His spirit. He was cut off; He was deliberately led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. You know Israel's temptation all along that line - "you have been trapped, ensnared into this wilderness, you have been ensnared out here, and now you are left with nothing: you were fairly safe when you were in Egypt, you could see where your next meal was coming from. However difficult it may have been, there - at any rate - were all the apparent resources of sustenance and maintenance, a world of sense." Out here there is nothing, and everything around Israel shouted desolation, and everything around the Son of God was shouting desolation, forsakenness, nothingness.

Now what is the basis of triumph? The devil gets right at it, he disputes the innermost reality, the sonship. He challenges that and disputes that - "If thou be the Son of God..." "This does not look very much like Your being a beloved Son, does it?" He is trying to throw doubt upon that. What is the answer? The answer which brings defeat to the enemy on that count is the answer of faith in the inner reality. There is something more than external demonstration, something infinitely superior to

that. The fact of sonship exists when everything outside has dried up. The Life remains within, even in a wilderness, in the desert, cut off: all demonstrations, all proofs, all feeling, or sight, everything that would give some assurance to the flesh cut off. And then the devil comes down and says in the presence of all that death and desolation, "You are not the child of God. God has given you up. If you were the child of God do you think He would allow this? Do you think He would let you suffer like this?" You see the cruelty; but the victory comes by taking up the position upon a bedrock fact which exists in spite of no feelings and no appearances, "I have been raised together with Him, having been crucified with Christ." "Joined with Him in the likeness of His death, I have been raised together with Him." I am on Resurrection ground, a child, a son on the basis of that Life. It is deeper than feeling, deeper than outward sense and proofs and demonstrations: it is a thing which exists deeper than my own soul. This is the effect of it. "It is written that my life as a son of God is not the life which depends upon this temporal bread of outward sense, my life exists upon the basis of a life union with God which is obedient by faith when there is no outward sign to encourage that obedience, or strengthen that faith." That is the ground of triumph. Sonship, Life on Resurrection ground by Resurrection union, but deeper than all our sense.

If, beloved, our life consists in the bread which satisfies our emotions and our reason, our lust for activity and enterprise and work and service, the devil will score sooner or later, for the works will come to an end. The heats of our emotions will die, our minds will get to an end of everything, then the test of sonship will arise, and the enemy will come in upon us. What have you been living on? Have you been living upon religious excitability and been kept going by the many activities of religious life and work? If you have been upheld by the stimuli of religious emotions and atmospheres they are destined to be brought to an end, and the enemy will come in on that point and say. "God has given you up." Mark you, God sees to that. "Then was He led up of the Spirit." God takes the initiative in this thing to lay the foundation of His great eternal mission, and that foundation is laid in His spirit in a Sonship which is deeper than all the rest.

Now you follow that through His life. If Christ for the accomplishment of His eternal work in the three and a half years had been dependent upon the popular applause, the outward success, the signs and demonstrations, He would have had a very chequered career, and when that day came when the shouting and applauding gave place to another which said, "Away with Him, crucify Him"; when the disciples forsook Him, walked no more with Him; when the innermost circle slumbered in the hour of His deepest need of fellowship; if He had been living upon that, He would never have got through, but He had a deeper basis than that which carried Him through when everything outside fell away. He triumphed on that thing and got through to the end, right through the Cross, and although the dark moment came of necessity with Him when He had to cry, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me." He got through that and finished up, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit." There is triumph in the end because the Spirit of Sonship was the basis of everything, but He was tested on that. "To try thee, to prove thee whether thou wouldest keep His commandment, or no."

Faith, Sonship, and Divine Non-intervention

The second temptation. "Satan taketh Him up to the holy city and setteth Him upon the wing of the temple. 'If Thou art the Son of God cast Thyself down, for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee: and on their hands they shall bear thee up, lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone.' Jesus said unto him, 'Again it is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'" Where is it written? It is written in the 6th chapter of Deuteronomy, 16th verse, "Ye shall not tempt the Lord thy God as ye tempted Him in Massah," and that takes you back to Massah in Exodus 17:-

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Pass on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel: and thy rod wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb: and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the striving of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?"

"It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," quoting from Deuteronomy and Exodus. What is this temptation? "Is the Lord among us, or not?" You see the similarity of this thing, what the enemy is after in this wilderness, in this desolation, this apparent aloneness, this apparent God-forsakenness. The battle of the Cross is being pre-fought, and what the enemy is after is to get Him to act in a way that calls God into question, as to whether God is with Him, to involve the Lord by an act of unbelief. If He did this it would be acting to test whether the Lord was with Him, moving out to put it to the test whether the Lord was with Him; and that puts up a big question, is the Lord with us, or is He not? Here is the test of the basic Sonship, basic life.

Oh, my dear friends, the Lord does want to get us well grounded on this thing, the nature of our union with Him, the only kind of relationship that is going to be triumphant. Is Christ in you, the hope of glory? Is the Lord amongst us, or no? Have you a faith in the fact that if you are really born of God, born from above, joined to the Lord, one Spirit, the Lord is in you. He is not external to you, He is in you, and that fact has got ultimately to be demonstrated in the midst of death. Why does the Lord take us into a wilderness, into barrenness, into death, into desolation, down where it seems that nothing will survive? Just to demonstrate the principle of survival when there seems to have been an engulfing of death that He, Who is the Life, the Bread of Life has been taken into the very constitution of this New Man, and though the outward man perish that inward man is being renewed day by day, and God is allowing us, nay, causing us by His Spirit to go down into the wilderness, and to have everything cut off of our natural life and natural resource in order to raise up in the midst of death the testimony of His Resurrection. Now that has got to be true in spiritual experience.

You see He was pre-fighting the battle of Calvary, because in Calvary He had got to descend into Hades. It is not simply the laying of His body in a tomb - "He went and preached to the spirits in prison which were sometime disobedient," "He descended into the lower parts"; He became wrapped about by all the powers of darkness, the hosts of evil they swirled upon Him. Oh, but the testimony of Jesus is that God raised Him from the dead: that He survived hell; He survived the whole Satanic hierarchy; He survived the whole range and realm and power of universal sin from Adam onward. How? By that Sonship with the Divine life which could not be holden of death. That is the Testimony of Jesus. We shall never have to go to that depth, and to that extent, but we shall share that kind of suffering. These are the sufferings that we may share. That is why Paul puts the spiritual order thus, "That I may know Him, and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death." - The fellowship of His sufferings on the ground of the power of His Resurrection.

The Lord may take away everything in which we trust as men; the Lord may take us in our natural man right into the realm of death; the Lord may allow our spirit to be wrapped around by death and something of hell and the powers of darkness, in order that, there in death, the testimony of the power of His Resurrection might be established. That battle was fought out in the wilderness in the case of the Lord Jesus. Beloved, we are called to share in the "forties" in that testing unto that

victory. We never get into the forties until we have got out on to Resurrection ground, thank God! Forty days; the Church's probation was after His Resurrection: forty days of the Lord's probation was after His symbolic Resurrection from Jordan; forty years of Israel was after their emergence from the Red Sea. Forties follow the Resurrection, and the Resurrection is demonstrated through the forties, the probation and testing time, always issuing in the glory. The issue is certain because already the thing has been done. When did the Lord give Canaan into the hand of Israel? Long before ever they put a foot inside of Canaan it was done. "I have given, Go in and possess." Potentially the Lord has got it all a long way ahead. The conclusion is the proof of what has already been done, and the demonstration of faith in a thing that has happened.

Well now, the enemy is seeking to raise a question in the presence of death. The Lord is seeking to raise a testimony, as we have put it, that, in the midst of death we are in Life.

Faith, Sonship, and World-Dominion

Third temptation. "The devil taketh Him up unto an exceeding high mountain and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them: and he said unto Him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." And the answer: "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."

"It is written." Where does that throw you back to? Deut. 6:12,19. "Then beware lest thou forget the Lord which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and Him shalt thou serve, and shall swear by His Name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples which are round about you; for the Lord thy God in the midst of thee, is a jealous God; lest the anger of the Lord thy God be kindled against thee, and he destroy thee from off the face of the earth.... That thou mayest go in and possess the land which the Lord sware.... to thrust out all thine enemies."

You see what the enemy was after. Well what is the meaning of this? World dominion! Yes, that is Christ's quest. That is what He has come for. He has come for the kingdoms of this world, and the devil knows it. It is the Son's. The devil knows quite well, "Whom He appointed Heir of all things. By Whom He made the worlds"; and He knows the Son is the Heir, and He has said, "Here is the Heir, let us kill Him." How can we do it? Get Him to compromise and to worship in another direction and God will be compelled to destroy Him. That is what Deuteronomy says, "Thou shalt not worship the gods of the other peoples, lest the anger of the Lord be kindled and He destroy thee." The Lord destroyed all the nations because they would persist in their allegiance to false gods; not to idols, they were only the outward expression of the spiritual system behind. The system behind here is the "other god" and if the Lord Jesus can by any means be switched over to divide His allegiance with God and to just recognise the "other god" and the other gods, God will be compelled to destroy Him. He will not get the kingdoms of the world.

So what is the lesson? It is this world dominion on a basis of utter, absolute allegiance to God demonstrated under the fiercest trial. "Not unto the angels did He subject the inhabited earth to come whereof we speak, but one in a certain place has testified saying, What is man that thou shouldest make mention of him, or the son of man that thou shouldest put him in charge." We are called to share the dominion, the sovereignty. Called to share the throne of the Son; "if we suffer with Him, we shall reign with Him." "He that overcometh, I will give to sit down with Me in My throne,

as I also overcame and sat down with My Father in His throne." You see we are called into the partnership of world dominion. The enemy is launching his fiercest attacks upon us to get some compromise, some acceptance of his bait, some doubt in us about God; and the Lord allows us to come into the wilderness where we are subject to that in order that we might learn how to reign, and when you have learned to reign in Life by the One Man Jesus Christ you have attained to the state to reign over the inhabited earth to come.

Now His temptation is our temptation - we share that in a limited sense. The enemy, beloved, is out to rob us of the kingdom, the dominion, and in times of trial the Lord does not prevent the enemy from coming with all his cruelty trying to press the thing beyond the measure of endurance, so that in some way we shall cry out against God; deny God, question God, doubt God, take back our allegiance from God, withdraw our faithfulness, become bitter Godward, and any of these simply give ourselves into the hands of the enemy and give him a hold upon us. When he has done that he has robbed us of the dominion, of our joint heritage with the Heir of all things. You see what we are called into, and you see how the enemy does it. This dominion is upon a basis of undivided loyalty established at the utmost extremity of trial.

In closing let us point out that this testing and proving was the basis of the great work which Christ came to do. He did a unique thing in which we can and need have no share, but there is a work out from that into which He calls us. Every bit of God's work in union with Christ is upon the same basis, and the most deeply proved will always be the most greatly used. There is that in the Sonship of the Lord Jesus which is exclusive in the Godhead, to which we cannot attain; but there is that in the begetting of God which makes us vitally one with Christ in a common life and fellowship unto the eternal purpose.

"God dealeth with us as with Sons."