



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 4:1–12

Gospel of Matthew

“The Temptation of the King”

TRANSCRIPT

In the continuation of our series of studies in the Gospel of Matthew, we have come to the fourth chapter in the Matthean account of the temptation of Jesus. You’ll remember that just preceding, Matthew has given us the account of the baptism of our Lord, and you’ll notice as you read through the temptation account that there is some relationship between them, particularly in the term, Son of God.

At the baptism the Father had said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” And now trading upon that voice from heaven, the Lord Jesus will be approached by the devil and tempted with reference to his sonship and Messiahship. We begin reading with the first verse of chapter 4 and read through the first 11 verses.

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward hungry. 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 put the Lord thy God to the test.’ 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, ‘Be gone, 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.

May God bless this reading of his Word.

The temptation is a story that is rich in color and in meaning. Against the background of the desert—mysterious, utterly isolated and infinitely remote—two figures are struggling for a huge stake, a commentator has said. Are they gambling, or are they involved in the relentless battle in this solitary place? And what’s at stake? We know the reason for the conflict. Here in the desert, far from the world of men, these two are struggling for the earth, and for man. And this earth is my world and yours, and this man is you and I. And those in conflict are God’s Son and Satan.

An hour or so later the conflict is over. The two figures leave the field. In a mysterious vision later, the Lord Jesus sees Satan fall from heaven like lightning. And the reflection of this lightning flashes on the horizon of the desert when the devil flees.

And his opponent in the wilderness, does he stride from the battlefield with head high and renewed might, crowned as the victor and bearing a name which henceforth, invisibly, is to be set up above every name? By no means. “How different is this victory from those of men,” our commentator continues. “He rises to his feet and immediately sets forth on his *via dolorosa*, the sad way. Is he not afterwards really the loser, a bankrupt king who has gambled away his crown as he sets

forth on his path from the desert toward the cross? Has he not won a pyrrhic victory, as he travels the path beset with pain which leads to the cross and not the way of glory and triumph, which is also the way of God?”

Perhaps this contest in the desert was, after all, a drawn game. Perhaps, in the long run, the dread opponent will prove to have won the victory and regained his power over the world. Is there any man alive in the 20th century who does not think that all the evidence points in this direction? But something more happens in the desert when the two go their ways. The angels came and ministered unto him. He must, after all, have won the victory.

One of these two men, one of these two persons, the last Adam, must retrace the history of Adam the first. Augustine once said the entire spiritual and moral history of the human race revolves around two people: Adam and Christ. The circumstances of the temptations in the Garden of Eden and the temptation in the wilderness are in sharp contrast. Adam was tempted in a garden. The Lord Jesus was tempted in a wilderness. Adam was tempted when he was well-fed. Jesus Christ was tempted after he had fasted for forty days and was hungry. Adam was the first attempt of Satan's in the temptation of men, but he comes to Jesus Christ after at least 4,000 years of practice.

There are many questions that crowd in upon us as we think about the temptation. I'm sure that one of them is simply this: Is the Lord Jesus impeccable? Are we to understand, as we look at this account in the light of the person of our Lord, that he was able not to sin, or, was he not able to sin?

We are not asking, is the Lord Jesus sinless. All students of the Scriptures know that the Lord Jesus was a sinless individual. We're asking the question, “Could our Lord have sinned?” Now students of the Scriptures, even among the orthodox, have differed over this question. Some of them have said the Lord Jesus was able to have sinned, but he did not sin. Others have said, no, he was not able to sin. If he is not able to sin, then he is an impeccable person.

I hope you will not be disturbed by these terms which can sometimes be confusing. I want you to remember that if you are to understand the Scriptures at all, you must learn a few of the terms

of the Word of God. Now when the doctors tell us their terms—and they are always somewhat recondite as far as I am concerned—we say, yes, yes doctor, yes doctor, and go home to our dictionaries immediately [laughter] to find out what they have been saying. Now in coming to Scripture, you will find people saying, “Do not use any big words, like justification or sanctification or glorification or impeccability.”

Well there are some words that will do us good to learn and to use, and impeccable is one of them. Is the Lord Jesus impeccable? Well the Scriptures, I think, make it fairly plain that Jesus is an impeccable person. After all, there is something higher than just choosing good. There is the happy necessity of good. And the impeccability, the inability of the Lord Jesus to sin is guaranteed by the union of the divine and human natures in the one, divine person. If we remember, the Lord Jesus was a divine person. He existed as the pre-existent and eternal Son before he took a human nature. It will help us in understanding the way in which our Lord Jesus approached the temptation through Satan.

So, his impeccability is guaranteed by the fact that he is a divine person who has taken to himself an additional nature. He is not a human person who has been raised to the power of deity, but a divine person who has taken an additional nature to himself. And consequently, he is as mighty to overcome sin as his mightiest nature. His mightiest nature is his divine nature, and because he has a divine nature, he is impeccable.

One of the most famous illustrations of this is the illustration that Professor Shedd has used. He has imagined a steel beam and a piece of iron wire—let’s just imagine that we have it here by the side of the pulpit. And let’s imagine that we were not being quite as formal as we are on Sunday morning. And I call out in the audience with my steel beam by the side of the pulpit, “Would any of you young men who think that you are strong like to come up and try to break the steel beam?” And suppose we have a few foolish volunteers, and they come up, and they attempt to bend the steel beam but are unable to do so, and shamefacedly retreat to their seats in the audience.

And then I have on the other side a little, small piece of iron wire. And I issue an invitation again, and I say, “Would anyone like to come up and break the iron wire?” And a number of hands go up and successfully come forward and break the iron wire. And then I ask them, “Now, you’re sure that you can break the iron wire?” And you say, yes, I’m sure. Then I take the iron wire and wrap it around the steel beam, and I invite you to come up again and break the iron wire, but you are unable to break the iron wire because now the iron wire has the strength of the steel beam.

Now in the person of our Lord Jesus, a divine person who took to himself a human nature, we have a divine person, and because his mightiest nature is his divine nature, while he is temptable and peccable in his human nature, since he is a divine person who possesses a divine nature as well as a human nature, he is temptable by virtue of his human nature, but impeccable by virtue of the divine and human in one divine person. Now I hope we understand, then, when we speak of the impeccability of the Lord Jesus, we are not saying that he is sinless. We are saying more. We are saying that he could not have sinned.

Now I think that that raises, immediately, the next question, which I’ve already referred to: “Well, if the Lord Jesus could not have sinned, could he be tempted?” Well yes, he could be tempted, because temptability depends upon the constitutional susceptibility of the human nature, and the Lord Jesus possessed a human nature. And so he could be tested, but he could not sin.

Now it’s evident that this temptation is in the realm of the human nature, for we read, after it is over, that angels came to him and ministered to him. Angels do not minister to deity in the sense of strengthening deity, and that of course is the force of that text. So we have then an evidence that the Lord Jesus is impeccable.

Is the story a genuine story? Where did they get it? After all, Matthew was not there. Luke was not there. And both recount in great detail the story of the temptation. One of the contemporary commentators has said what we have here is the reverent speculations of the members of the Christian community. In other words, desirous of placarding the greatness of the Son of God, this

story has been manufactured by the reverent members of the early Christian community and it has been incorporated in the Scriptures.

Now it seems to me that any story that is simply a story and is not truth at all could hardly be called reverent speculation. But nevertheless, where did this story come from? Someone has said it is a piece of spiritual autobiography. Well that, of course, is what it is. So evidently, if it is a piece of spiritual autobiography, it must have been given by the Lord Jesus himself to his disciples.

I've sometimes wondered just when in the account of the ministry of the Lord Jesus he should have given this account to the disciples. And while one can never be absolutely certain about this, it seems to me that there would have been a beautiful occasion for it in the 16th chapter in the 21st through the 23rd verses of this same Gospel of Matthew, when the Lord Jesus began to show to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took the Lord Jesus and began to rebuke him—can you imagine that? He began to rebuke the Lord Jesus and said, “Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee.” And the Lord Jesus turned to Peter and said, very brusquely, and almost rudely to him, “Get thee behind me Satan! Thou art an offense unto me, for thou savorest not the things that are of God but are of men.”

Peter, do you not realize that I must struggle with the will of God? And then at this point, he unfolded to them the struggle that has been going on between him and Satan down through the months to this present time. It's evident that Peter was not speaking *ex cathedra* in that particular incident.

Well let's look, now, at the temptation, noting the three classes of temptation, which really are all one aspect, or one particular temptation with three emphases. The first, I have called simply for the sake of a name, The Personal Temptation. It pertains to the body of the Son of God, and is introduced after the Lord Jesus has been led up by the Spirit to the wilderness to be tested by the devil, and after he had fasted forty days and forty nights and was hungry.

The tempter came to the Lord Jesus and said, “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” All the tests are variations of the one theme: renounce your messianic person and work. At the baptism the Father had said from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” It’s almost as if Satan were present at the baptism, for he comes with the very words that the Father has used concerning the Son. And he says if you are the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Demonstrate your Messiahship and sonship by the provision of a kingdom of bread, the messianic banquet.

You’ll notice that Satan does not begin with a point blank denial of the truth of God. He never does that. He did not do that in the Garden of Eden. He came to Eve in the Garden of Eden and said, “Yea, hath God said, ‘ye shall not eat of every tree which is in the garden?’” He never does that. He always aims his “ifs” at the Father’s honor as expressed in the revelation of Holy Scripture.

You’ll notice also as you ponder ways in which men have attacked the faith, when they are guided by Satan, they do not, as a general rule, attack point blank the revelation that is found in the Word of God. They usually come with some kind of questions that suggest doubt concerning the Scriptures. Ordinarily, you do not have a man who does not believe in the virgin birth stand in the pulpit and say, “I do not accept the biblical accounts of the virgin birth; the Lord Jesus was not born by a virgin.” They do not normally say that. They usually will say, “There are those who believe the Lord Jesus was born of a virgin, and there are those who believe the Lord Jesus was not born of a virgin; it is not necessary that we believe this doctrine.” That is the usual way in which unbelief appears. It is the kind of expression that casts doubt upon the Word of God: “it’s not necessary.”

Or if the subject is the deity of the Lord Jesus, the man who disbelieves in the deity but who is a Christian minister, supposedly, does not stand in the pulpit and say, “Now we must abandon the idea that the Lord Jesus is truly God and truly man which the church has believed down through the centuries. We must believe the Lord Jesus is the Son of God,” they say. “We must avoid the expressions that the Bible does not use because Jesus never said the words, ‘I am God’, but he does

say that he is the Son of God. He does say that he is the Messiah.” And see, so, we must use those terms and avoid any predication of the Lord Jesus as deity.

Some of the students and preachers have said, “We must believe with the Lord Jesus, not in the Lord Jesus. He was the greatest believer of all, and we must believe with him, but not in him in the sense that he is the object of our faith.” Isn’t it striking that Jesus, the so-called “greatest believer”—now I think he was the greatest believer, do not misunderstand me. Out of his human nature there never came an unbelieving thought. But if we think of the Lord Jesus as only the greatest believer among men, we have a hopeless contradiction in the life of the Lord as presented in the New Testament.

For example, he called upon others to repent, but he never repented himself. He called upon men to pray, and he prayed, but he never asked men to pray for him. It would be a strange thing if he were the greatest believer, and we never have any account of his repentance and turning from his own sin.

Now the Lord Jesus is approached by Satan and he says, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” Now it seems to me from the account and from the Greek text that what he seems to be saying is simply this: if, as the Father from heaven has said, you are the Son of God, then we may expect you to do this. We may expect you to provide bread for yourself from these stones. Demonstrate your sonship by virtue of a miracle. The reply of the Lord Jesus is simple and to the point, “Man shall not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Man lives first by God, not by food.

That doesn’t satisfy Satan, and so we read of the second temptation, which I have called in the Believer’s Bible Study, The National Temptation, simply because the stress of this testing rests upon the Davidic sonship and Messiahship. You’ll notice that in the fifth verse, “Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city (so the reference is to Jerusalem) and setteth him on the pinnacle of the Temple.” And so the conjunction of these words suggests that this is a testing of the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus.

And it's evident also that Satan has learned something from this first testing, for we read, “And saith unto him, ‘If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written’—he has learned from the first encounter with the Lord Jesus that the Word of God looms large in the thinking of the Son of God. And so this time, as he approaches the Lord Jesus with his test, he offers a quotation from Holy Scripture, “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 shalt dash thy foot against a stone.”

Demonstrate your Messiahship by virtue of a sensational sign, for did not the Old Testament Scriptures say that the Messiah would perform mighty miracles, and specifically in Psalm 91, does it not say that he shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and they shall bear thee up?” So leap from the pinnacle of the Temple and before you crash into the ground below, the angels, have the angels come and hold you up so you shall have a sensational, outstanding, convincing miracle to transform the unbelief of the people who are about to believe.

Now there are several mistakes that Satan makes here. In the first place, he makes the mistake of tempting the Lord Jesus to presumption, forcing God's hand in our time. Very often, Christians do this too. We're often guilty of presumption. We want God to perform all of his promises at our beck and call. We want him to do what he says in the Word of God he will do at our direction. And so, Satan tempts him to presumption. Call upon the promises of God—and, incidentally, the 91st Psalm is a messianic Psalm—call upon the promises of God, and call upon the promises of God right now. Failing to remember that the promises of God are promises which God guarantees at his time, and not at our time: a temptation to presumption.

Now the next thing that Satan does is that—and he commits a very common error here—he omits part of the text that he cites, because part of the text that he cites does not suit the use to which he wishes to put it. The text in the Old Testament says, “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in thy ways. They shall bear thee up in thy hands lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” If you carefully examine the 11th and 12th verses of Psalm 91, which he has cited, you notice immediately that he has omitted the second clause of the 11th verse which reads, “to keep

thee in all thy ways.” He shall give his angels charge concerning you *to keep thee in all thy ways*. In other words, the promises of God are designed to be our support and bulwark while we are in the will of God and also in that part of his plan which is in his plan.

The promises of God are not applicable at our direction. The sovereignty over the determination of the application of the promises of God remains with God. This is why often the saints pray, and God does not answer their prayers. It’s not their time to receive the answer. Always when we pray, we should remember the prayers of our Lord Jesus, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done.” I want to be kept in all my ways, the ways you have determined for me. And if the answer that you desire for me, and which is in your will for me is a “no,” give me the grace to accept that answer.

So, he makes the mistake of omitting Scripture. He hasn’t studied that messianic Psalm as he should have. He cites Scripture because he sees the Lord Jesus cite Scripture. But of course, he does not really understand the Scripture.

And finally, he makes the mistake of taking a Scripture out of its context, when there is another statement in Holy Scripture that contradicts what he is saying. And so, the Lord Jesus replies to him and states in verse 7, “Jesus said unto him, it is written, again”—notice that word, again—“it is written again, thou shalt not put the Lord thy God to the test.” So what he has done is taken a text of Scripture, put his own interpretation on it, but put his own interpretation upon it by the omission of a clause which results in contradiction of a text that is found in Holy Scripture.

You see, there is a great principle in the study of the Word of God which Satan has not learned. It is hermeneutics classes. And it is *scriptura ex scriptura explicanda est*. Scripture is to be explained by Scripture. And never must we take a text out of its context in such a way that it contradicts another plain text of the Word of God. There is a beautiful lesson here, and I am afraid that many Christians never learn it. I think I can say I have seen Christians 25 years old in the Lord who have never learned this simple principle. Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture. And I have often seen—I’m sure you’ve had the same experience—I have often seen sincere Christians who

have not learned this lesson, led astray by the quotation of Holy Scripture by heretical men. There is a beautiful significance in our Lord’s words in verse 7, “it is written again.”

There is not a single false teacher who has troubled the church of Jesus Christ, who has not an “it is written” for his doctrine. All of the false sects have “it is writtens” upon which they base their doctrine. The Jehovah’s Witnesses do not talk about disbelief in the Scriptures. They cite the texts of Holy Scripture. The Mormons do not talk about disbelief in the Scriptures in the Old and New Testaments. They talk about belief in the Scriptures, and they quote certain ones of them.

Garner Ted Armstrong does not talk about disbelief in the Scriptures, he talks about the importance of the “Law of God” and leads many simple-minded Christians, who often have been Christians for 25 years, into heretical teaching because they have not studied the Word of God to learn the “it is written agains” that are found in Scripture.

Most of the false ideas that are troubling the church of Jesus Christ today are ideas that are derived from the misapplication of certain words in the Word of God. The doctrine of universalism is grounded in certain texts of Scripture. The doctrine of soul sleep is grounded in certain texts of Holy Scripture. The denial of eternal punishment is grounded in certain texts of Holy Scripture. You will never find a false teacher saying, “I don’t believe the Word of God”—if they say that, then they are no trouble to the church of Jesus Christ. It’s when they come and cast doubt upon Scripture, or when they take Scripture and misapply Scripture, that they lead the church and the simple Christians astray.

It is of the greatest significance to study the Word of God. If you are not willing to study the Word of God, if you are not willing to make this Scripture, which is before us today, your meat and your drink, you will be at the mercy of the Satanic emissaries of heresy. Satan, it is written again, thou shalt not put the Lord thy God to the test. He will not pander to the Jews love of a sign, nor will he burgle the house of a man’s soul.

The final temptation follows. “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.’” Here is what might seem to be the very thing for which the Lord Jesus came. Did he not come in order to assume messianic authority over the whole of the earth? Is this not the legitimate end of everything he is doing, that he might be seen to be the messianic king, who has come, who has suffered, and through the shedding of his blood has won the battle, and by virtue of his conquest of the cross is now king of the world? Is that not the whole end of the ministry of the Lord Jesus?

And here it is offered to him by Satan. Why not accept? Why not take the shortcut? Why go to the misery and suffering of the death on the cross if Satan offers him the kingdom without a cross? World blessing without the cross. But the Lord Jesus knows that Abraham’s seed must die. Billy Bray once said, “To think, the old rascal, to offer the Lord Jesus the kingdoms of the world; why he never possessed so much as a tater skin.” But there is more to it than that. Evidently, this offer was thought by those who have given us this account, and specifically the Lord Jesus, as a statement of some worth. But the Lord is not a Jesuit. The end does not justify the means. He will not use the world’s methods even if there is offered to him a legitimate divine goal.

Now there is another great principle. For in Holy Scripture we are taught just as plain as we possibly can be taught, that the things that God desires, the things that he plans, the things that he accomplishes are to be accomplished by spiritual methods, by his methods, rather than by the methods of men or Satan. In other words, the methods by which God accomplishes his tasks are as significant as the accomplishment of the tasks themselves.

Now as you look back over this, incidentally, our Lord’s reply is again a citation from Scripture, “Be gone, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” Satan has misapplied Scripture again. As you look over these three tests, you notice immediately, of course, that the Lord Jesus has held the citadel, the foe is vanquished, and he has overcome. Angels come and minister to him, which is evidence of the victory [over] the temptation. The victory is his. Satan is defeated, not yet destroyed.

But the thing that stands out immediately is the threefold citation from Holy Scripture. In the 4th verse, “It is written, man shall not live by bread alone.” In the 7th verse, “It is written again, thou shalt not put the Lord thy God to the test.” In the 10th verse, “It is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God.” The supreme need of the Word of God is very beautifully and pointedly set forth here. We cannot ever expect to succeed in the trials that we encounter in life, or the temptations that we have from Satan, if we do not know Holy Scripture.

Now before you look at a margin of references, I want to ask you a little question. This is a silent quiz. You don’t have to answer. From what parts of the Bible are the answers of the Lord Jesus derived? Do you know? Do you recognize those texts? I’m sure you recognize some of them. Did you know that these three texts are derived from one book? It’s the book of Deuteronomy. Now I’m not going to play any tricks on you, but I surely would like to. [Laughter] I’d like right now to ask you, forgetting these three texts, and forgetting the fact that the Ten Commandments are repeated in the book of Deuteronomy—which most of you probably know—I’d like to ask you if you knew three other texts from the book of Deuteronomy.

I’d like for you to raise your hand in the meeting—I’m not going to do it; don’t do it [laughter]—I’d like for you to raise your hand and say I know three other texts from the book of Deuteronomy, and I’d like to repeat them. I’m not going to make you do it, but some of you are looking a little disturbed [laughter] already. And I must confess, if I were sitting in the audience, and someone were to call out to me this—now, I would know three texts—but I’m afraid I would know three texts because a long time ago I discovered that these three texts were from Deuteronomy and on the spur of the moment, preaching, in Nacogdoches, Texas, about twenty years ago, I did to a congregation what I refused to do to you, because you are so nice [laughter].

Now in this congregation when I did this, it was one night when we were having a meeting, it was near the conclusion of some meeting we had been having with them, night after night. We had come to know each other, and so I felt a little freer, I guess. It was an evening meeting. And when we came to this, I asked them to raise their hands if they knew three other texts from the book of

Deuteronomy. And the pastor of the church was a graduate—tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ashkelon, lest the uncircumcised Philistines from some other seminary hear—but he was from Dallas Theological Seminary. [Great laughter] And the people in the audience were former Presbyterians, for the most part. And Presbyterians are noted for their dignity, and when I called upon them to raise their hands, not a person raised their hands in that auditorium.

Well, I concluded the meeting and two ladies—they had been very good friends of mine, not only before that but after, too—they came to me right after the meeting and said, “Lewis, you may be interested in something that happened when you asked us to say those texts just a few moments ago. When you pronounced the benediction, we turned to each other, we were sitting by each other, and we both said, almost together, I know a text, I know a text”—I said, finally (incidentally, I had said three texts, then finally when I got no response I said one text from the book of Deuteronomy, and still not a hand went up.) And they said, “We turned immediately to one another and said, we know a text from Deuteronomy”—each one said that—“I know a text from the book of Deuteronomy.”

And I, the spokesman, said, Lewis said, “What was your text?” And she said, “Oh, my text was, ‘If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.’” Now very few of you are smiling, which may indicate you don’t know that that comes from Deuteronomy. [Laughter] And the other said, “When I said my text, it was a good thing you didn’t raise your hand, because that text isn’t from Deuteronomy.” And so then I said to her, well, what’s your text? And she said, “Well, my text was, ‘As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.’” [Laughter] Well it’s good thing you didn’t say that, that comes from Joshua.

It is a sad thing, you know, we as Christians attend the meeting, we hear the expositions of the Word of God, but I am afraid that many of us neglect the important thing in the Christian life, and that is the study of Holy Scripture. H. A. Ironside used to come to speak at Dallas Seminary, year after year, and we always looked forward to Dr. Ironside’s teaching. He was very simple, he was very

direct, and also he always had some interesting stories because he had had a wide Christian experience. And he used to tell us the story of Patrick, an Irish Catholic, who for years had longed for assurance of peace with God.

And a visiting tourist to Ireland fell into conversation with him one day, and left him a New Testament of the Douay version, approved by the officials of the church, and he began to read it. And as he read on in the New Testament, Pat was marvelously brought to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. And he began to study with great intentedness the Holy Scriptures. Well, the parish priest missed him from the regular services, and he came to visit Pat. And when he walked into the room where Pat was, he found him deep in the study of the Word of God. And he said, “Pat, what’s that book you’re reading?”

“Sure, your reverence, it’s the New Testament.”

In horrified accents, the priest exclaimed, “The New Testament?! Why Pat, that’s not a book for the likes of you! You’ll be getting all kinds of wild notions and running off into heresy.”

“But your reverence, I’ve just been reading here it’s the blessed Apostle Peter himself that wrote it, ‘As newborn babes desire the milk of the Word, that ye may grow by,’ and it’s the milk of the Word I’m after. So, I can’t see the harm of reading the Testament.”

“Ah,” said the priest, “It’s perfectly true, Patrick, that you need the milk of the Word, but the Almighty has appointed the clergy to be the milkmen. [Laughter] The clergy go to college and theological seminary and learn the meaning of the word, and when the people come to church we give it to them as they are able to bear it, and explain it in a way that they won’t misunderstand.”

“Well, sure, your reverence,” said Pat, “You know I keep a cow o’me own out there in the barn, and when I was sick some time ago I had to hire a man to milk the cow, and soon I found he was stealin’ half the milk and filling the bucket up with water, and sure it was awful weak milk I was gettin’. [Laughter] But now I’m well again, and I’ve let’im go, and I’m milkin’ me own cow. And it’s the cream of the milk that I’m getting once more.

“And your reverence, when I was depending on you for the milk of the Word, sure it was the blue, watery stuff you’re giving me. But now I’m milkin’ me own cow and enjoying the cream of the Word all the time [more laughter].”

I never have understood why it is that people come to church on Sunday morning and want to have someone else interpret the most important book in all the world for them, and have that be the end of their study of the Word of God. If it is really true, my dear Christian friend, that the Scriptures are the Word of God—and I believe it and am convinced that the great majority of you believe that—then of all the studies that you do, the Word of God should be the pre-eminent food and drink of your life. It is written. It is written. It is written.

Now let me sum up in just a sentence, what is meant by the temptation from the standpoint of the argument of the Gospel of Matthew? It’s evident by virtue of our Lord’s victory in the temptation, that he is seen to be qualified morally to be the Davidic sovereign. If there was any question about his moral qualifications, they vanish in the victory of the struggle with Satan. And second, he is perfectly qualified morally to be our Savior, impeccable in his holiness and righteousness, as well as loving in the plan and will of God. It’s interesting that Milton concluded his *Paradise Lost* with this.

And finally the Lord Jesus is seen to be perfectly qualified morally to be a sympathetic high priest. I know that you often think that your hope in the Christian life, when you run into difficulty, is to run into some other Christian and speak to them about your spiritual needs and troubles. I do not want to discourage you from doing this as occasion may suggest it. But I do want to suggest to you that the important counseling is done by the Lord Jesus himself. And the great psychologist and psychiatrist, the great source of truth and guidance for the Christian, is our great High Priest in heaven.

And he is the only infallible counselor, and the Word of God makes it so beautifully clear that he is available. And the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is recording the fact that he has learned by the things that he has suffered to be sympathetic with the people of God, and he has

entered into all of the experiences into which we have entered, and knows the tests to a far greater degree of intensity than you or I would ever know them. But he has the power to do his perfect will. It's no wonder then that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts his readers, “Come boldly to the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

If you are here this morning, and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus, we invite you to come to him who died for sinners. If you, by the Holy Spirit's work in your heart, have come to realize the need that you are a sinner, then the saving work of the Lord Jesus is for you. May God so work in your heart that you sense your need and that you come and receive the forgiveness of sins and life that is found in a Savior who has overcome, and is a great High Priest for the people of God. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Now may grace, mercy and peace from our great High Priest, Messiah and Lord, be and abide on all who know him in sincerity. And O Father if there is someone here who has not yet come, through the power of the Spirit if it please Thee, in effectual and regenerating grace, bring them to faith and life, for the glory of Thy name.

We pray in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.