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## Satan Departing, Angels Ministering

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*“And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.”—Luke 4:13*  
*“Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”—Matthew 4:11*

BELOVED friends, we have very much to learn from our Lord's temptation. He was tempted in all points like as we are. If you will study the temptation of Christ, you will not be ignorant of Satan's devices. If you see how he worsted the enemy, you will learn what weapons to use against your great adversary. If you see how our Lord conquers throughout the whole battle, you will learn that, as you keep close to him, you will be more than conqueror through him that loved you. From our Lord's temptation, we learn, especially, to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” Let us never mistake the meaning of that petition. We are to pray that we may not be tempted, for we are poor flesh and blood, and very frail, and it is for us to cry to God, “Lead us not into temptation.” But, if we must be tempted, deliver us from the evil,” or, as some render it, and very correctly, too, “Deliver us from the evil one.” First, we pray that we may not be tempted at all; and then, as a supplement to that prayer, yielding the whole matter to divine wisdom, “If it be needful for our manhood, for our growth in grace, for the verification of our graces, and for God's glory, that we should be tempted, Lord, deliver us from the evil; and especially deliver us from the impersonation of evil, the evil one!”

With that as an introduction, for a short time to-night let me call upon you to notice in our text, first, *the devil leaving the tempted One*: “Then the devil leaveth him.” Secondly, we shall keep to Matthew's Gospel, and notice *the angels ministering to the tempted One* after the fallen angel had left him; and then, thirdly, *the limitation of the rest which we may expect*, the limitation of the time in which Satan will be gone, for Luke puts it, “When the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him *for a season*,” or, as some put it, “until a fit opportunity,” when he would again return, and our great Lord and Master would once more be tried by his wicked wiles.

I. First, we have as the subject for our happy consideration, THE DEVIL LEAVING THE TEMPTED ONE.

When did the devil leave our Lord? *When he had finished the temptation.* It must have been a great relief to our divine Master when Satan left him; the very air must have been purer, and fitter to be breathed. His soul must have felt a great relief when the evil spirit had gone away; but he went not, we are told, until he had finished the temptation. So Luke puts it: "When the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season." Satan will not go till he has shot the last arrow from his quiver. Such is his malice that, as long as he can tempt, he will tempt. His will desires our total destruction; but his power is not equal to his will. God does not give him power such as he would like to possess; there is always a limit set to his assaults. When Satan has tempted you throughout, and ended all his temptation, then he will leave you. You have not yet undergone all forms of temptation; so you may not expect absolutely and altogether to be left by the arch-enemy. It may be a long time, when you are suffering from his attacks, before he will hold his hand, for he will try all that he possibly can to lead you into evil, and to destroy the grace that is in you. Still, he does come to an end with his temptations sooner than he desires; for, as God had said to the mighty sea, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed," so says he to the devil. When he permitted Satan to try the graces of Job, and to prove his sincerity, he let him go just so far, and no farther; and when he asked for a further stretch of power, still there was a limit. There is always a limit to Satan's power; and when he reaches that point, he will be pulled up short, he can do no more. You are never so in the hand of Satan as to be pulled out by God. You are never so tempted, if you are a believer, that there is not a way of escape for you. God permits you to be tried for many reasons which, perhaps, you could not altogether understand, but which his infinite wisdom understands for you; but he will not suffer the rod of the wicked to rest upon the lot of the righteous. It may fall there, but it shall not rest there. The Lord may let you be put into the fire; but the fire shall be heated no hotter than you are able to bear. "When the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him."

Satan did not depart from Christ, however, until *he had also failed in every temptation.* When the Lord had foiled him at every point, had met every temptation with a text of Holy Scripture, and had proved his own determination to hold fast his integrity, and not let it go, it was not till then that the enemy departed. Oh, brothers and sisters, if you can hold out, if you can stand against this and then against that, if you are proof against frowns and proof against flatteries, if you are proof against prosperity and proof against adversity, if you are proof against sly insinuations and open attacks, when you have won the day, as by God's grace you will do, even as your Master did, then the enemy will depart from you! "Well," says one, "I wish that he would depart from me, for I have been sorely troubled by him," to which I say most heartily, "Amen."

Let us think, for a minute or two, about when Satan will depart from the child of God, as he did from the great Son of God.

I have no doubt that he will do that when he finds that it is necessary for him to be somewhere else. Satan is not everywhere, and cannot be, for he is not divine. He is not omnipresent; but as one has said, although he is not everywhere present, it would be hard to say where he is not, for he moves so swiftly, he is such an agile spirit, that he seems to be here and there and everywhere; and where he is not in person, he is represented by that vast host, the legions of fallen spirits, who are under his control; and even where they are not, he carries out his devices, so that he leaves the leaven to work, the evil seeds grow, when he himself has gone else where. Yet it is, probably, not many times in one's life that any man is called actually into conflict with Satan himself personally. There are too many of us now for him to give all his time and strength to one; he has to be somewhere else. Oh, I long to be the means of multiplying the number of God's people by the preaching of the Word, that the gospel of the grace of God may fly abroad, and bring in myriads, that the devil may have more to do, and therefore no be able to give so much of furious attention, as he does in one direction and another, to the children of God.

He also leaves God's people very quickly when he sees that they are sustained by superior grace. He hopes to catch them when grace is at a low ebb. If he can come upon them when faith is very weak, when hope's eyes are dim, when love has grown cold, then he thinks that he will make an easy capture; but where we are filled with the Spirit as the Master was, (God grant that we may be!) he looks us up and down, and he presently sheers off. Like an old pirate, who hangs about on the look out for merchant vessels, but if he meets with ships that have plenty of guns on board, and hardy hands to give him a warm reception, he goes after some other craft not quite so well able to resist his assaults. Oh, brothers and sisters, be not merely Christians, only barely Christians, with just enough grace to let you see your imperfections; but pray to God to give you mighty grace, that you may "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might"; so that, after the devil has tested you, and found that the Lord is with you, that God dwelleth in you, then you may expect that, as it was with your Master, so it will be with you, Satan will leave you.

Sometimes I think, however, that Satan personally leaves us because he knows that not to be tempted is, to some men, a greater danger than to be tempted. "Oh!" say you, "how can that be?" Brothers, sisters, do you know nothing of carnal security, of being left, as you think, to grow in grace, and to be very calm, very happy, and, as you hope, very useful, and to find beneath you a sea of glass with no a ripple on the waves? "Yes," say you, "I do know that experience, and I have been thankful for it." Have you never found creeping over you, at the same time, the idea that you are somebody, that you are getting wonderfully experienced, that you are an eminent child of God, rich and increased in goods; and have you not said, like David, 'I shall never be moved'? Possibly you have looked askance on some of your friends, who have been trembling and timid, and crying to God from day to day to keep them. You have been Sir Mighty, you have been Lord Great-One; and everybody must bow down before you. Ah, yes, you have now fallen into a worse condition than even those are in who are tempted of Satan! A calm in the tropics is more to be dreaded than a tempest; in such a calm everything gets to be still and stagnant, the ship scarcely moves, it is like a painted ship on a painted sea, and it gets to be in something like the state described by Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*,—

"The very deep did rot;  
Alas, that ever this should be!  
And slimy things with legs did crawl  
Over the slimy sea."

"Oh!" say you, "that is horrible." Yes, and that is the tendency of a soul that is at peace with itself, and not emptied from vessel to vessel. I fear that is often the case with those who believe themselves to be supernaturally holy. A curious fact can be proved by abundant evidence, namely, that the boast of human perfection is closely followed by obscenity and licentiousness. The most unclean sects that have ever defaced the page of history have been founded by those who had the notion that they were beyond temptation, that they had ceased to sin, and never could transgress again. "Ah!" says Satan, "this notion does my word a great deal better than tempting a man. When I tempt him, then he stands up to resist me. He has his eyes open, he grasps his sword, and puts on his helmet, he cries to God, 'Lord, help me!' and he watches night and day; and the more tempted he is, the more he looks to God for strength. But if I leave him quite alone, and he goes to sleep, well then he is not in the battle; and if he begins to feel quite secure, then I can steal in upon him unawares, and make a speedy end of him." This is one reason why Satan leaves some men untempted. A roaring devil is better than a sleeping devil; and there is no temptation much worse than that of never being tempted at all.

Again, I doubt not that Satan leaves us, nay, I know that he does, when the Lord says to him what he said in the wilderness, "get thee hence, Satan;" and he does say that when he sees one of his poor children dragged about, tortured, wounded, bleeding. He says, "Get thee hence, Satan. I permit thee to fetch in my stray sheep; but not to worry them to death. Get thee hence, Satan." The old hell-dog knows his Master, and he flies at once.

This voice of God will come when the Lord sees that we cast ourselves wholly upon him. In my brother's prayer he suggested to us, if you remember, a that in casting our burden upon the Lord we might not be able to get rid of it; the way was to cast ourselves and our burden both upon the Lord. The best way of all is to get rid of the burden entirely, to cast yourself, but without your burden, upon the Lord. Let me remind you of a story that I once told you, of a gentleman who, riding along in his gig, saw a packman carrying a heavy pack, and asked him if he would like a ride. "Yes, and thank you, sir." But he kept his pack on his back while riding. "Oh!" said the friend, "why do you not take your pack off, and put it down in front?" "Why, sir," he said, "it is so kind of you to give me a ride that I do not like to impose upon your good nature, and I thought that I would carry the pack myself!" "Well," said the other, "but, you see it makes no difference to me whether you carry it or do not carry it, I have to carry you and your pack; so you had better unstrap it, and put it down in front." So, friend, when you cast your burden upon God, unstrap it. Why should you bear it yourself when God is prepared to bear it? Beloved, there are times when we forget that; but when we can come and absolutely yield ourselves right up, saying "Lord, here I am, tempted, and poor, and weak; but I come and rest in thee; I know not what to ask at thy hands, but thy servant has said, 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.' I lie at thy feet, my Lord; here I am, here would I be. Do with me as seemeth good in thy sight, only deal in tender mercy with thy servant," then will the Lord rebuke the enemy; the waves of the sea shall be still, and there shall be a great calm.

So much for the devil leaving the tempted One. He does so, he must do so, when God commands it.

II. But now, secondly, let us think of THE ANGELS MINISTERING TO THE TEMPTED ONE.

The angels came and ministered to our Lord after Satan was gone. Notice that they did not come while our Lord was in the battle. Why not? Why, because it was needful that he should tread the winepress alone, and because it was more glorious for him that of the people there should be none with him! Had there been any angels there to help him in the duels with the adversary, they might have shared the honour of the victory; but they must stay away till the fight is over, and when the foe is gone, then the angels come. It has been noted that it does not say that the angels came very often and ministered to Jesus, as much as to make us think that they were always near, that they hovered within earshot, watching, and ready to interpose if they might. They were a body-guard round about our Lord, even as they are to-day about his people, for "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who over, then the angels came, and ministered to Christ. Why was that?

I suppose, first, because, as man, *he was especially exhausted*. He hungered, we are told, and that proves exhaustion. But, besides that the strain of forty days' temptation must have been immense. Men can bear up under a strain; but when it is eased, then they fall. Elias can do marvels, he can smite the priests of Baal, and behave like a hero; but, after it is all over, Elijah fails. As man, our Lord was subject to the sinless infirmities of our flesh; and it was needful that angels should come and minister to him, even as the angel did in the garden, after the agony and bloody sweat.

But it was also because, being man, *he was to partake of the ministry which God had allotted to man*. He has appointed angels to watch over his own people; and, inasmuch as Jesus is our Brother, as the children were partakers of the ministry of angels, he himself also took part with the same, that he might show how he took our weakness upon him, and therefore needed and received that succour which the Father has promised to all his children.

Was it not, again, *because he was so beloved of the angels and they were so loyal to him*? They must have wondered when they saw him born on earth, and living here in poverty; and when they saw him tempted of the enemy, they must have loathed the adversary. How could Satan be permitted to come so near their pure and holy Master? I think that Milton could have pictured this scene, and that he would have drawn every seraph there as longing to let his falchion of flame find a scabbard in the heart of the foul fiend that dared to come so soon as ever they might, then they joyfully came and ministered unto him.

And does it not also go to show that this was a nature very sensitive to the angelic touch? You and I are course, hard-hearted.

"Myriads of spirits throng the air:  
They are about us now."

Women are to cover their heads in worship “because of the angels.” There are many acts of decorum in holy worship that are to be kept up “because of the angels.” They are innumerable, they are sent to minister to us; but we are not sentient to them, often we do not perceive them. But Jesus was all tenderness and sensitiveness, and he knew that the angels were there, so it was easy for them to come and minister to him. What they did in ministering to him, we cannot tell. I should certainly think that they sustained his bodily nature, for he hungered, and they readily brought to him food; but they also sustained his mental and his spiritual nature with words of comfort. The sight of them reminded him of his Father’s house, reminded him of the glory which he had laid aside. The sight of them proved that the Father did not forget him. He had sent the household troops of heaven to succour and support him. The sight of them must have made him anticipate the day of which the poet sings,—

“They brought his chariot from above,  
To bear him to his throne;  
Clapp’d their triumphant wings, and cried,  
‘The glorious work is done.’”

Well now, brethren, if we are tempted, shall we have any angels to succour us? Well, we shall have the equivalent of angels, certainly. Oftentimes, after a temptation, God sends his human messengers. Many of you can tell how, when you have been hearing the Word after a bad time of temptation, the gospel message has been wonderfully sweet to you. You have sat in your pew, and said, “God sent that sermon on purpose for me;” or, if you have not had a sermon, you have read the Bible, and the words have seemed to burn and glow on the page, and you have warmed your soul by their heat. Has it not been so with you often? Are not all the holy things more sweet after trial than they were before? Have you not found them so? I bear my willing witness that never does Christ seem so precious, never do the promises seem so rich and rare, never does Evangelical doctrine cling so closely to my heart, and my heart to it, as after a time of painful trial, when I have been laid aside from holy service, and racked with anguish. Oh, then the angels come and minister to us, in the form of men who preach the Word, or in the form of the living page of God’s written Word!

I have noticed, too, that God sometimes cheers his tempted people with clear sunshine after rain, by some very gracious providences. Something happens that they could not have looked for, so pleasant, so altogether helpful, that they have had to burst into singing, though just before they had been sighing. The cage-door was set wide open, and God’s bird has had such a flight, and sung so sweetly, as it mounted up to heaven-gate, that the soul seemed transformed into a holy lark in its ascending music. Have not you found the Lord very gracious to you after some severe trial, or some strong temptation? I believe that this will be the testimony of many experienced Christians.

And, as there come these choice providences, so, I do not doubt, there do some actual angels ministering to us, though we are unaware of their presence. They can suggest holy thoughts, I doubt not, to bring us comfort; but, above the angels, far superior to angelic help, is the Holy Ghost the Comforter. How sweetly can he close up every wound, and make it even sing as it heals! He makes the bones that God had broken to rejoice, and fills us with a deeper experience of delight than we have ever known before.

Well now, I suppose that some of you here to-night are in this condition, that Satan has left you, and angels are ministering to you. If so, you are very happy. Bless your God for it. There is a great calm. Thank God for the calm after the storm. I hope, my brother, that you are the stronger for what you have endured, and that the conflict has matured you, and prepared you for something better. Now, what did our Lord do after the devil had left him, and the angels had come to minister to him? Did he go home, and stop there, and begin to sing of his delightful experiences? No, we find him preaching directly afterwards, full of the Spirit of God. He went everywhere, proclaiming the kingdom. He was found in the synagogue, or on the hillside. Just in proportion as the Spirit of God had enabled him to overcome the enemy, we find him going forth to spend that strength in the service of his Lord. O Tempted one, hast thou a respite? Spend that respite for him who gave it to thee. Is it calm now, after a storm? Go now, and sow thy fields with the good seed. Hast thou wiped thine eye, and is the salt tear gone? Go, thou, sing a Psalm, then; sing unto thy Well-beloved; and go thou down into his vineyard, and take the foxes, and prune the vines, and dig about them, and do necessary work for him who has done so much for thee. List. Thou hast been set free. There are many under bondage to Satan, not as thou art, fighting against him, but his willing slaves. Oh, come, my brother, thy God has set thee free, go after them! Go after the fallen woman, and the drunken man. Go, seek and find the most debauched, the most depraved. Specially look after any of thine own house who have played the prodigal.

“Oh, come, let us go and find them!  
In the paths of death they roam:  
At the close of the day ‘twill be sweet to say,  
‘I have brought some lost one home;’”

and it will be right to say it, if the Lord has dealt so well with thee.

III. Now, I have to close by reminding you of the third point, which is a searching truth, namely, THE LIMITATION OF OUR REST. Satan left Christ “for a season,” or until a fit occasion.

Did the devil assail our Lord again? I am not sure that he personally did; but he did so in divers ways by others. I notice that, before long, he tried to entangle him in his speech. That is a very easy thing to do with us. Somebody to-night can take up something that I have said, twist it from its connection, and make it sound and seem totally different from what was meant by it. You know how the Herodians, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees did this with our Lord; they tried to entangle him in his speech. In all that Satan led them on. Satan also actively opposed Christ’s ministry, and Christ opposed Satan; but Jesus won the day, for he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

A more artful plan still was that by which the Devil’s servants, the demons that were cast out of possessed persons, called Jesus the Son of God. He rebuked them because he did not want any testimony from them. No doubt the devil thought it a very cunning thing to praise the Saviour, because then the Saviour’s friends would begin to be suspicious of him, if he was praised by the devil. This was a deep trick; but the Master made him hold his peace. You remember how he said on one occasion, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him.” It was something like this, “Down dog! Come out!” Christ is never very polite with Satan; a few words and very strong ones are all that are necessary for this arch-prince of wickedness.

Satan tempted our Lord through Peter. That is a plan that he has often tried with us, setting a friend of ours to do his dirty work. Peter took his Lord, and rebuked him, when he spoke about being spit upon, and put to death; and then the Lord said, “Get thee behind me, Satan!” He could see the devil using Peter’s tenderness to try to take him off from his self-sacrifice. Oh, how often has Satan tempted us that way, entangling us in our speech, opposing us in our work, praising us out of wicked motives to try to deceive us, and then setting some friend to try to take us off from holy self-denial!

There were also occasional heart-sinkings in our Lord. Thus we read in John 12:27, “now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour.” He seems to have been very heavy in heart at that time. But the deepest soul-sinking was when, in the garden, his soul was “exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” Satan had a hand in that sore trial, for the Lord had said, “The prince of this world cometh,” and he said to those who came to arrest him, “This is your hour, and the power of darkness.” It was a dreadful season. Our Lord’s ministry began and ended with a fierce onslaught from Satan. He left him after the temptation; but only for a season.

Well now, dear friends, if we have peace and quietness to-night, and are not tempted, do not let us become self-secure. The devil will come to us again at a fit opportunity. And when will that be? There are a great many fit opportunities with you and with me. One is, *when we have nothing to do*. You know Dr. Watt’s lines,—

“Satan finds some mischief still,  
For idle hands to do.”

he will come and attack us *when we are alone*; I mean, when we are sad and lonely, and are sitting still, and moping by ourselves.

But Satan also finds a very fit occasion *when we are in company*, especially when it is very mixed company, a company of persons, perhaps, who are superior to ourselves in education and in station, but who do not fear God. We may easily be overawed and let astray by them. Satan will come then.

I have known him frequently come and find an occasion against the children of God *when we are sick and ill*, the old coward! He knows that we would not mind him when we are in good health; but sometimes when we are down in the dumps through sickness and pain, then it is that he begins to tempt us to despair.

So will he do with us *when we are very poor*. When a man has had a great loss in business, down comes Satan, and insinuates, “Is *this* how God treats his children? God’s people are no better off than other people.”

Then, *if we are getting on in the world*, he turns it the other way, and he says, “Doth Job fear God for nought? He gets on by his religion.” You cannot please the devil anyhow, and you need not want to please him; he can make a temptation for you out of anything.

I am going to say something that will surprise you. One time of great temptation is *when we are very spiritual*. As to myself, I have never been in such supreme danger as when I have led some holy meeting with sacred fervour, and have felt carried away with delight in God. You know that it is easy to be on the Mount of Transfiguration, and then to meet Satan at the foot, as our Lord did when he came down from that hill.

Another time of temptation is *when we have already done wrong*. “Now he begins to slip,” says Satan; “I saw him trip; now I will have him down.” Oh, for speedy repentance, and an earnest flight to Christ, whenever there has been a grave fault, ay, and before the grave fault comes, that we may be preserved from falling!

And Satan finds a good occasion for tempting us *when we have not sinned*. After we have been tempted, and we have won the day and stood fast, then he comes, and says, “Now, that was well done on your part; you are a splendid saint;” and he who thinks himself a splendid saint is next door to a shameful sinner, depend upon it; and Satan soon gets the advantage over him.

If you are successful in business or successful in holy work, then Satan will tempt you. If you are not successful, and have had a bad time, then Satan will tempt you. When you have a heavy load to carry, he will tempt you. When that load is taken off, then he will tempt you worse than ever. He will tempt you when you have obtained some blessing that you have been thinking was such a great boon; just as, in the wilderness, when they would cry for flesh, and said that they must have flesh, God gave them their heart’s desire, but sent leanness into their soul. Just as you have secured the thing that you are seeking, then comes a temptation; to which all I have to say is this: “Watch.” “What I say unto you, I say unto all,” said Christ, “Watch. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.” And by the conflict and the victory of your Master, go into the conflict bravely, and expect to conquer by faith in him, even as he overcame.

But what shall I say to those who are the slaves and the friends of Satan? The Lord have mercy upon you! If you desire to escape, there is only one way. There is the cross, and Christ doth hang upon it. Look to Jesus; he can set you free. He came on purpose to proclaim liberty to the captives. Look and live. Look now, and live now. I implore you, do it, for his dear sake. Amen.

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