

## The Quiet Hour

For Dominion Presbyterian.

### The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus.\*

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After several years of silent preparation our Lord is now ready to begin His great life-work. We know that those years of modest retirement were not lost; their fruits will now be clearly seen. In fact, our Lord's whole ministry is a protest against the vulgar measurements of length of days or extent of publicity; it teaches us to regard the quality of work, its loftiness of aim, and purity of nature. We are now called to note two events at the beginning of His actual ministry. John was still sternly declaring the strong truths to which attention was called in our last lesson, and inviting men to the Baptism of Repentance, when there came to this Baptism One who was different from all the rest of the crowd. He might seem to the superficial observer to be the same, and as we shall see He was determined to take His place side by side with all those who came sincerely to this great preaching, but John felt that there was a profound difference, and we to-day know that this young man who came up from Galilee was destined to take a new place in the religious life of the world, a place which none other had been able to fill. John, who was in full sympathy with the kingdom of God, felt instinctively the power of the new teacher, and shrank from even the appearance of superiority over Him. This frank recognition of the fact: "He must increase, but I must decrease" is one of the noblest traits in the character of John. He would have hindered Jesus, saying: "I have need to be baptised of Thee and comest Thou to me." Only when our Lord declared that He was fulfilling one of the demands of righteousness did John suffer Him. Then was Jesus baptised with the baptism of repentance, and as He came up from the water He received the sign of His father's approval. St. Luke tells us that "as He was praying the heavens opened"—a reminder, not only that all our Saviour's life was suffused with the spirit of prayers, but that the special crises of His life were all marked by a wonderful manifestation of the same spirit. He sought God in the plain path of duty and there was given to Him glimpses of the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. In some degree we may say of this, that the servant shall be as his Lord. We cannot enter now into a full discussion of our Lord's reason for demanding this baptism. The main point was, no doubt, to show Himself completely one with us, but He would also set His mark of approval on John's ministry and show how a noble preacher of righteousness ought to be received.

When He had received this glimpse of glory and had publicly accepted the principles of righteousness for which John contended, He was led by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Thus we have put before us the changing scenes of the spiritual life. The comfort received in the hour of devotion was a preparation for the coming conflict and that spiritual conflict was itself a preparation for the great life of service to humanity. Often a dark, trying hour comes after a time of spiritual gladness, but we must not on that account think that the spiritual brightness is vain. One of its meanings is that by assurance of heavenly realities, we should be all the stronger to face days of darkness. Here is one plain lesson for us all; there is no sin in being tempted, though it is right that we should pray: "lead us not into temptation." The sin is in neglecting to seek the divine help and weakly yielding to the temptation. The Son of Man was led into temptation that He might share our lot, and fight in secret the battle which would be involved in His public ministry. When we wonder sometimes at the steadfast purpose, the calm determination with which He went through His life-work, let us remember that His public life began with the wilderness of temptation and ended with the garden of sacrifice. Always when a great man displays outward calmness in doing great tasks it is because there has been deep inward struggle. He has fought out the matter in the presence of his God. So we must regard our Lord's temptation, not as something capricious or artificial, but as a facing and accepting of the principles which must govern His life and work.

Note then that He fights the battle by the aid of Scripture. He goes back to the Old Book and says: "It is written." He was opposed to dead tradition and to mechanical worship of the letter, but He will not cut Himself off from the past. He gives a larger application and a deeper meaning to the principles which animated the ancient saints. When He says, "It is written," the old text becomes luminous with a new light.

He will not use His miraculous power for a personal, not to say, selfish purpose. Bread is important, but there is something more important. It is of the highest importance that He should not separate Himself from His kind. He will prove Himself to be the Son of God, not by making Himself an exception, but by becoming truly the Son of Man, bearing nobly the common burdens, and giving dignity to common trials. He will not give special treatment for Himself, but will be like us, in all particulars. Neither will He call upon His Father for such special treatment. Presumption and trust are different, though a devil by the use of Scriptural text may try to confound the distinction. The Son of Man will trust

in God for all the help that is needed to fight life's battle, but He will not make a vulgar exhibition of Providence. Again He will not betray the interests of the true Kingdom for the sake of present success and worldly glory. The motto of His own life, as it should be the principle of ours, is "Seek first the Kingdom of God." The Kingdom of God may be slow and silent, but it is an abiding Kingdom, whereas these kingdoms of the world, with all their glamour, will soon fall into dust. There is connected with the Church of to-day too much worship of mere success, and worldly splendor. We need to be reminded that the Church lives to incarnate the principle for which the Savior lived and died. Our hour of temptation is ever with us, and our only hope of victory is to live in the Spirit of Our Master, avoiding all needless danger and trusting in God for help in the difficulties that must be faced. Then we shall know not only the hour of temptation, but also the ministry of angels.

### Transfigured Music.

Two travellers, one summer evening, were descending a steep mountain path in the Alps. Suddenly music came floating around them from some unseen source, pure, impersonal music, so distilled that no sediment of mere sound remained to blur the divine harmony. It was clearer than any piano note, finer than any strain of violin, more resonant than any peal of bells, richer than any organ swell, sweeter than any human voice. The travellers stood listening to hear whence it came. The rugged mountain of rock rose above them half a mile high and at the top was splintered into crags. The music came from the mighty wall of stone. The whole mountain seemed full of it, pulsing and throbbing with its burden of song. Again and again it pealed forth like a mighty cathedral bell, so grandly sweet, so all-compassing that the atmosphere for miles around seemed pregnant with the glory. It seemed as though angels had come back to earth and sung as they sang at Bethlehem. What did it mean? A mile down the path the travellers came upon a mountaineer with his Alpine horn, a big wooden instrument ten feet long, the flaring end of which fitted into a box like a hopper. He blew them a mighty blast, but it was only aloud rasping noise that was unpleasant and almost painful to the ear. Yet it was that rude horn blown by that rough mountaineer far down in the valley that was making that celestial music up among the summits of the Alps. The majestic mountain with its heart full of music gathered up those rough sounds and transformed and transfigured them into harmony so divine. So may the life on earth be transfigured into the life in heaven. The instrument on which we play may be rude and clumsy, the sounds we make may often seem harsh and discordant, we may be shut far down in the valley, all the conditions of life may seem narrow and its service hard, but when these experiences are caught up into the celestial world they may be transformed into such music as will make our heaven forever. "And I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps."—Presbyterian Banner.

\*S. S. Lesson for Jan. 28th: Math. iii: 13-17. iv. 1-11.

Golden Text—"Mathew iii. 17."