

C. The Temptations of Christ

Matthew 4:1-11

In the first section of Matthew 4, we find the account in Scripture of the temptation of Jesus Christ. Just before this at the end of chapter three, Jesus is introduced to the public for the first time at his baptism. Richards notes, “The baptism of Jesus launched His public ministry. But it did even more than that. It demonstrated how fully Christ as a Man identified Himself with humanity. One of the central doctrines of the Christian faith is that of *Incarnation*.”¹ He goes on to say that “God, in the person of the Child of promise would fully identify Himself as a human being. In every way this promised individual would be God, yet would be God *with us*.”²

Here at His baptism, Jesus’ divine origin is also confirmed—the Holy Spirit anointed Him by descending upon Him in the likeness of a dove and God the Father spoke from heaven confirming that Jesus was and is the Son of God. This is extremely important because it is immediately contrasted with Jesus’ identification with humanity in His temptations. Richards stated, “If the baptism of Jesus impresses us with the complete identification of the Saviour with us in our humanity, His temptation stretches our minds to grasp the depths to which Jesus stooped.”³

The Kenosis (or Emptying) of Christ

What is the kenosis of Christ? Why is it important?

- *Kenosis* refers to the emptying or self-humbling of Jesus.
 - “The act of the incarnation is described by the strong word *ekenōsen* (English, *kenosis*), from *kenoō*, meaning “to empty.”⁴
 - The primary passage that teaches this is Philippians 2:5-11.
⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but **emptied himself**, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹ Richards 533.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid 534.

⁴ Walvoord, John. *Jesus Christ Our Lord*. (Location: Publisher, Year) 139.

- Various renderings of *ekenōsen* in Philippians 2:7:
 - KJV – “made himself of no reputation”
 - NIV – “made himself nothing”
 - NLT – “gave up his divine privileges”
 - NCV – “gave up his place with God”
 - AMP – “emptied Himself [without renouncing or diminishing His deity, but only temporarily giving up the outward expression of divine equality and His rightful dignity]”
 - The vast majority of English translations follow the literal translation found in the ESV—“emptied himself.”
- The exact meaning of *kenosis* is hotly debated among theologians. An excellent source for more information on this subject is John Walvoord’s book, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*.
- A clear understanding of this concept is important because it is important to grasp who Jesus was while He was here on earth; so for our purposes here, we will simply focus on the best understanding of the doctrine of *kenosis* rather than all the different viewpoints.
 - **PRESUPPOSITION** – “Christ did not give up any divine attribute or any essential quality of deity in becoming man.”⁵
 - **CLAIM #1** – “the humiliation of Christ consisted in the veiling of His preincarnate glory. It was necessary to give up the outer appearance of God in order to take upon Himself the form of Man.”⁶
 - **CLAIM #2** – “the union of Christ to an unglorified humanity unquestionably involved divine condescension and was a necessary factor in His ultimate humiliation on the cross.”⁷
 - **CLAIM #3** – even though the incarnate Christ did not surrender “the relative attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience, He did embark upon a program where it was necessary to submit to a voluntary nonuse of these attributes in order to obtain His objectives. Christ does not seem to have ever exercised His divine attributes on His own behalf...”⁸

⁵ Walvoord 143.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

- “He did not use His divine knowledge to make His own path easier.
- “He suffered all the inconveniences of His day even though in His divine omniscience He had full knowledge of every human device ever conceived for human comfort.”⁹
- **CLAIM #4** – “on two specific occasions Christ is revealed to have performed His miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28; Luke 4:14-18). In these instances Christ chose voluntarily to be dependent upon the power of the Father and the Holy Spirit to perform His miracles.”¹⁰
- **CONCLUSION** – “The act of kenosis as stated in Philippians 2 may therefore be properly understood to mean that Christ surrendered no attribute of Deity, but that He did voluntarily restrict their independent use in keeping with His purpose of living among men and their limitations.”¹¹

How is this ‘emptying’ process described in Philippians 2?

- “The ‘emptying’ process Paul described is one of progressive humiliation.”¹²
- Philippians 2:7-8
 - “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant”
 - “born in the likeness of men”
 - “becoming obedient to the point of death”
 - “even death on a cross”

The Temptations of Jesus

Considering all that we have learned about the kenosis of Christ, what are we to assume about Jesus’ temptations?

- Jesus was tempted as a man—His divine attributes were not at play in His temptation.

⁹ Walvoord 144.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Richards 534.

- “When a physically weakened Jesus, after 40 days of fasting in the desert, was tempted by Satan, He did not seek strength from His divine nature to resist. The very first words of Jesus in response to Satan’s initial temptation sets the tone.”¹³
- Matthew 4:3-4
³And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the **Son of God**, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written,
“**Man** shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” *(emphasis added)*
- Jesus’ response was as a man.
 - Satan called Him the Son of God (as He was), but Jesus responded by referring to Himself as a man. He was dealing with everything that any one of us might be dealing with after 40 days in the desert with no food.
 - Arno Gaebelein wrote, “Hunger is a part of His humanity. Was there or is there in the Word of God one word which could have told Him to change stones into bread? ... had God given anywhere one word to Him, who had come to do His will that He was to end His suffering as man, His hunger by a miracle? Nowhere is to be found such a direction. If He had entered upon the suggestion of Satan He would have acted according to His own will and that would have been the will of the enemy.”¹⁴

What were the three temptations of Jesus?

- According to Matthew 4:
 1. Turning stones into bread.
 2. Throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple.
 3. The Kingdoms of the world if he would bow down to Satan.
- According to Luke 4:
 1. Turning stones into bread.
 2. The Kingdoms of the world if he would bow down to Satan.
 3. Throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple.
- In each gospel, the writer places the temptation in the order from the least to the most important based upon their purpose and target audiences.

¹³ Richards 534.

¹⁴ Gaebelein 89.

In this passage (Matthew 4:1-11), how many times was the Old Testament quoted? By whom?

- There are five Old Testament quotes in this passage:
 - “Man shall not live by bread alone.” (Deut 8:3)
 - “He will command his angels concerning you” (Psalm 91:11-12)
 - “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone”
 - “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test” (Deut 6:16)
 - “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.” (Deut 6:13)
- Only three of these Old Testament quotations were spoken by Jesus. The other two were spoken by Satan. What can we learn from this?
 - Satan knows the Bible better than we do.
 - He will try to twist the words of Scripture and distort their meaning (Gen 3:1ff).

Conclusion

In these temptations, Jesus was tempted in every way that we are tempted—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Hebrews 4:15 sums it up:

“For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,
but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are,
yet without sin.”

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