



The Last Temptations of Christ

Brownsburg Church of Christ

by Edwin Crozier

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

Let's start with a question. How many times was Jesus tempted?

Back in 1988, "The Last Temptation of Christ" hit the theaters amid storms of protest. The movie was horrendous. The acting was bad, the theology awful, the soteriology (doctrine of salvation) ridiculous, the Christology atrocious, and the morality terrible. Since it contained nudity, I am ashamed to admit I watched it. However I also read the book. For all that is truly negative about the movie, the seminal concept behind Nikos Kazantzakis's story is tremendous. It was the first time I had considered that Jesus was tempted more than three times. Kazantzakis proposed a story of Jesus's final temptation offered on the cross. Satan presents Jesus the life He could have lived if He wasn't God's chosen one. It includes marriage, family, peace, and comfort, if He'll just get off the cross.

Have you thought about all the temptation Jesus faced, considering the repeated nature of Satan's onslaught against Jesus? Or have you thought Jesus got off lucky with just three? I don't buy Kazantzakis's vision of what Christ's last temptation was, but I think we can find the last temptations of Christ in Scripture. I'd like to share that with you, but not so we can uncover these final temptations. Rather, as we uncover these temptations, I want you to ask why Jesus didn't break. The spiritual forces of evil and the world forces of darkness were all on Him, tormenting Him, torturing Him, tempting Him. But He didn't cave. He held out. Let's start with the three temptations in **Matthew 4:1-11**, then examine the last temptations, and then get to our main point. Why didn't Jesus break?

Discussion:

I. Temptation #1

- A. In **Matthew 4:3-4**, Satan tempted Jesus, who had been fasting for 40 days, through hunger. Satan says, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread" (ESV). Jesus's response shows what the temptation really was. Jesus quoted **Deuteronomy 8:3** saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (ESV). This comes from Moses's explanation that the Israelites had been led through the wilderness and made to hunger in order to learn to trust God. Jesus had been led into the wilderness and made hungry for the very same reason. He was learning to trust His Father. Satan comes along and tempts Him to pull that trust away from the Father and place it in Himself. Turn the stones to bread. "Come on! You know you're hungry. Surely your loving Father doesn't want you hungry. I mean, a loving Father wouldn't give a hungry Son stones instead of bread." But Jesus trusted the Father. He wouldn't even allow the jab about needing to prove who His Father was to get Him to turn.
- B. This may have been one temptation, but it certainly wasn't the last. In fact, look in **Matthew 27: 37-43**. What did the people say? "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (ESV). Do you hear the echo of the earlier temptation? "Prove Your sonship Jesus. Tap into Your own power and come down from that cross. Surely the loving Father wouldn't want His Son hung on a cross. If you manifest enough power to come down, we'll even believe You." Imagine the torment, torture, and agony Jesus was enduring. It could all stop if He would just come down from the cross. Plus, they'd believe in Him. Three years earlier the gnawing and consumptive pangs of hunger would stop if He would just exercise His power, turning stones to bread. And now, the torment of nails, lashes, a crown of thorns, the agony of asphyxiation, the mockery of His tormentors would all end if He just exercised His power, coming down from the cross. But He didn't cave. He didn't fail. He hung on that cross until the Father's plan was finished.

II. Temptation #2

- A. In **Matthew 4:5-7**, Satan took Jesus to the temple pinnacle and suggested He prove His sonship by jumping. After all, the Scriptures say the Father won't allow His loved ones to dash their foot against a stone. Surely the loving Father wouldn't want His Son to get hurt. "So prove that He's with You; prove that He loves You. Jump and let's see what happens." This is borne out by Jesus's response, quoting from **Deuteronomy 6:16**. Moses was reminding Israel of their sin at Massah after the miraculous deliverance from the Red Sea. In **Exodus 17:1-7**, the Israelites complained that they had no water. They asked if they were brought out of Egypt just to die of thirst. The real key is the summation statement in **Exodus 17:7**, Moses called the place Massah, which means testing, "because they tested the LORD by saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'" (ESV). So, Satan's temptation of Jesus was asking Him to prove God was with Him rather than trust.

- B. This may have been one temptation, but it definitely wasn't Jesus's last. Wasn't this temptation all over the crucifixion up to the moment Jesus breathed His last. Consider the prophecy of **Isaiah 53:4**. What do the witnesses of Jesus's crucifixion think of Him? "Stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." After all, surely a loving Father wouldn't allow His Son to go through such agony. Maybe He isn't with Jesus. Jesus Himself even cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (**Matthew 27:46**, ESV). Why not prove God's presence? Why not leave no doubt? After all, didn't Jesus claim the Father would provide Him 12 legions of angels if He asked (**Matthew 26:53**, ESV)? Why not ask? All the agony and mockery can stop. Just call the Father's angels. But He didn't cave. He didn't fail. He hung on that cross until the Father's plan was finished.

III. Temptation #3

- A. The temptation I misunderstood for the longest is the third one. In **Matthew 4:8-10**, Satan takes Jesus to a high mountain, shows Him all the kingdoms of the world, and offers them to Him if He'll worship Satan. He didn't have to make a life of worship, just once would be enough. What's the big deal? Here's what I misunderstood about this. I thought Satan was promising kingship, authority, the world. Not so. In **Psalm 2:7-9**, the Father promised the Son He would be king of the world. What then is in this temptation? After all, this is like telling Prince William, "I'll let you be king of England if you give me the crown jewels." What's he going to say? "I get to be king of England anyway." The temptation was that God's plan for Jesus included leaving heaven, living as a measly human, being mocked, scourged, spit on, hung on a cross. God's plan was dark and painful. Satan wasn't offering kingship; he was offering kingship without pain and suffering.
- B. This may have been one temptation, but it definitely wasn't His last. In fact, this temptation was repeated throughout the entire trial, beating, scourging, and crucifixion. Don't you know Jesus remembered this offer with every blow the soldiers inflicted? As they shoved the crown of thorns on His head, Satan was presenting to Him a picture of being crowned without pain. With each lash of the scourge, Jesus would remember that this could stop if He would just worship Satan. With every hammer of the nail, He was being told, "This can all stop. It doesn't have to go on like this." I can almost envision it as a torture session I've seen in movies. I hear a Nazi-esque voice whispering in Jesus's ear: "I hate to do this to you. But you are forcing me. All you have to do is worship me." Another lash. "Hey, I'm the good guy. I'm on Your side. I don't want to do this anymore than You do. Just worship me once and I'll let it stop. It's really Your supposedly loving Father who is putting You through this." Another pound of the hammer. "How long can You really hold on, Jesus? Let me end the pain. Let me help You. Just worship me." Jesus grits His teeth, pushes down on His nailed feet so He can let enough air in His lungs to say something. I can almost picture the tormenter hushing the crowd so they can hear Jesus cave beneath the pressure of the torture. Satan waits with baited breath, sardonic glee plays on his face, he is certain his battle is almost won. Jesus gasps for breath and cries, "Father! Into your hands I commit my spirit!" (**Luke 23:46**, ESV). Realizing he is beaten, Satan stops, and Jesus dies. Jesus could have stopped the pain, the torment, the agony. Just worship Satan once, just a small head bow. But He didn't cave. He didn't fail. He hung on that cross until the Father's plan was finished.

IV. Why?

- A. How many times did Jack Bauer get tortured? Didn't we think he was amazing for enduring what seemed like unbearable pain? Shock torture, waterboarding, beating, he took it all. What a man! He didn't break. He didn't cave. He didn't reveal the nation's secrets, the government's plans, the President's location. We've seen Jack Bauer beaten and bruised, barely able to speak and yet we see him as the strongest of men. Why then when we see Jesus beaten and bruised far worse do we often picture Him as some Casper Milquetoast weakling who just submitted to these tormenters because He had no option? I want you to stop and be amazed at the strength of Jesus. Why didn't Bauer break? Because he loved his country.
- B. Why didn't Jesus cave? Why didn't He crack? Why didn't He come down from the cross, call the angels, or worship Satan even once? Why? Because He loves you! (cf. **Ephesians 5:2**). What would the great travesty have been if He came off the cross or called the angels? The sacrifice for your sins would never have been offered. The death for your transgressions would never have been paid. He refused to sell us out. He refused to let us down. Satan tempted Him again and again and again. He tormented and tortured Him, but Jesus didn't cave because you were worth more to Him than that.

Conclusion:

I don't know about you. But I can't help but want to follow a Savior who thought that much of me. With every blow of a fist, He could have sold you out. With every lash of the scourge, He could have turned His back on you. With every strike of the hammer on the nails, He could have abandoned your salvation. But He didn't. He didn't break. He didn't cave. He hung on the cross for you. Hallelujah! What a Savior. Will you follow Him?