

GENESIS 3:1-7 AND MATTHEW 4:1-11

THERE IS A POEM BY LONGFELLOW THAT BEAUTIFULLY DESCRIBES THE CALL TO ARMS IN ONE OF THE OPENING ACTS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

IT BEGINS BY SAYING: "LISTEN MY CHILDREN AND YOU SHALL HEAR OF THE MIDNIGHT RIDE OF PAUL REVERE, ON THE 18TH OF APRIL IN 75-HARDLY A MAN IS NOW ALIVE WHO REMEMBERS THAT FAMOUS DAY AND YEAR.

HE SAID TO HIS FRIEND, IF THE BRITISH MARCH BY LAND OR BY SEA FROM THE TOWN TONIGHT, HANG A LANTERN ALOFT IN THE BELFRY ARCH OF THE OLD NORTH CHURCH AS SIGNAL LIGHT-

ONE IF BY LAND AND TWO IF BY SEA, AND ON THE OPPOSITE SHORE I SHALL BE,

READY TO RIDE AND SPREAD THE ALARM THROUGH EVERY MIDDLESEX VILLAGE AND FARM, FOR THE COUNTRY FOLK TO BE UP AND TO ARM."

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE READINGS MAY BE SEEN AS ANOTHER TYPE OF CALL TO ARMS.

THEY CALL CHRISTIANS NOT TO ARM WITH MUSKETS OR OTHER PHYSICAL WEAPONS BUT RATHER TO PREPARE FOR SPIRITUAL BATTLE.

OUR PREPARATION BEGINS WITH A REMINDER OF THE REALITY OF SIN AND THE NEED TO RESIST TEMPTATION, LIKE JESUS DID-- AND EVE AND ADAM FAILED TO DO.

THE FIRST THING WE NEED TO REALIZE IS THAT TEMPTATION IS NOT SIN, NOR IS IT NECESSARILY A BAD THING.

THE GREEK WORD TRANSLATED AS TO "TEMPT" ALSO MEANS TO "TEST". AND ABOUT THIS WILLIAM BARCLAY WROTE:

"WHAT WE CALL TEMPTATION IS NOT MEANT TO MAKE US SIN- IT IS MEANT TO ENABLE US TO CONQUER SIN."

JESUS EXPERIENCED THIS, IN EACH TEMPTATION HE MET AND OVERCAME IN THE WILDERNESS.

MATTHEW HENRY PUT IT THIS WAY: "CHRIST WAS TEMPTED THAT HE MIGHT OVERCOME THE TEMPTER."

THIS, INDEED, WAS TRUE NOT ONLY FOR HIS TIME IN THE WILDERNESS, BUT SO THAT HE COULD BE EQUIPPED TO WIN FUTURE BATTLES AS WELL.

FOR EXAMPLE-TURNING STONES INTO BREAD MIGHT LATER TEMPT JESUS TO USE FOOD TO PERSUADE PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM.

BARCLAY ALSO POINTS OUT- "THE REAL WAY TO CURE HUNGER IS TO REMOVE THE CAUSE OF HUNGER.-AND THESE CAUSES ARE IN THE SOUL."

IN OTHER WORDS THERE IS ENOUGH FOOD TO FEED EVERYONE, BUT NOT ENOUGH WILLINGNESS TO DO SO.

THIS IS TRUE, IN SPITE OF GOD'S COMMAND-IN DEUT. 24:19-23, TO, WHEN YOU HARVEST, LEAVE SOME GRAIN OR FRUIT BEHIND FOR THE POOR.

AND JESUS, AS WE KNOW, CAME TO CHANGE OUR SOULS, TO TEACH US HIS FATHER'S WILL SO WE MAY DO IT.

JESUS COUNTERED THIS TEMPTATION USING SCRIPTURE. AND THEN THE DEVIL USED SCRIPTURE TO TEMPT JESUS AGAIN.

HE SOUGHT TO PERSUADE JESUS TO MAKE GOD THE FATHER PROVE HIS TRUSTWORTHINESS.

THIS TEMPTATION TOOK THE FORM OF SUGGESTING JESUS JUMP OFF A HIGH PILLAR.

THIS WAS SUGGESTED BECAUSE THE BIBLE SEEMS TO SAY HIS FATHER WILL NOT LET HIM SCRAPE HIS FOOT AGAINST A STONE.

AGAIN JESUS CONFRONTS THE TEMPTATION BY COUNTERING WITH ANOTHER VERSE FROM THE BIBLE.

SO AFTER JESUS REFUSED TO FALL FOR THE SECOND TEMPTATION-SATAN TRIED TO LURE JESUS INTO OPEN REBELLION AGAINST HIS FATHER.

HE DID THIS BY TEMPTING JESUS TO TAKE CONTROL OF HIS OWN DESTINY, BY GAINING CONTROL OF THE WORLD'S KINGDOMS WITH THE HELP OF SATAN.

DOING SO WOULD HAVE MEANT JESUS ABANDONED HIS FATHER IN FAVOR OF THE SEEMINGLY EASIER WAY SATAN OFFERED.

BUT AGAIN JESUS CONFRONTED THE TEMPTER BY CLINGING TO HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FATHER-"...IT IS WRITTEN WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE ONLY HIM."

HOPEFULLY WE CAN SEE THE POINT OF THESE TESTS WAS INDEED TO STRENGTH JESUS, AS WELL AS TO SHOW US THAT TEMPTATION CAN BE RESISTED BY TURNING IT OVER TO GOD.

THE LATTER PART OF THE STATEMENT IS IMPORTANT, IN THAT WE CAN ONLY OVERCOME TEMPTATION BY GIVING UP CONTROL OF OURSELVES INTO GOD'S HANDS.

SO THE WAY TO GET RID OF A TEMPTATION IS TO YIELD TO GOD, LIKE IT SAYS IN EPHESIANS 6:10-11

"...BE STRONG IN THE LORD AND IN THE STRENGTH OF HIS POWER. PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD, SO THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST THE WILES OF THE DEVIL."

INDEED AT THE HEART OF TEMPTATION IS THE CHALLENGE TO RESIST THE DEVIL, WHO- AS IT IS WRITTEN IN JAMES 4:7, WILL FLEE FROM US.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE NEED TO CONFRONT OUR TEMPTATIONS, THE TESTING OF OUR FAITH THROUGH THE CHOICES WE MUST MAKE, IS FOUND IN THE ANIMAL WORLD.

THERE WAS ONCE A STORY IN THE "DENVER POST" NEWSPAPER ABOUT A SHEEP FARMER WHO HAD TRIED-

JUST ABOUT EVERY GADGET AND TACTIC SHE KNEW OF TO PREVENT COYOTES FROM STEALING HER SHEEP, ESPECIALLY THE LAMBS.

AFTER LITTLE SUCCESS SHE BOUGHT A COUPLE OF LLAMAS, WHICH DID THE TRICK BECAUSE THEY DO NOT RUN FROM THE COYOTES.

ONE IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC OF THE LLAMA IS THAT THE ANIMAL ALMOST NEVER APPEARS TO BE AFRAID OF ANYTHING.

CONSEQUENTLY WHEN THEY SCENT OR SEE A COYOTE, INSTEAD OF RUNNING FROM IT THE LLAMA BOLDLY WALKS TOWARDS IT.

THAT ACTION IS INTERPRETED BY THE PREDATORS AS AGGRESSIVE AND SO COYOTES USUALLY ARE INTIMIDATED ENOUGH TO TURN AWAY.

LIKEWISE FOR US, TEMPTATION NEEDS TO BE FACED HEAD ON, LIKE A LLAMA DOES SOMETHING THAT SEEMS TO THREATEN IT.

BUT FOR HUMAN BEINGS THE TACTIC THAT WORKS BEST IS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THIS AS A SPIRITUAL THREAT.

ONLY THEN CAN WE ARM OURSELVES ACCORDINGLY, BY SEEKING GOD'S HELP, INSTEAD OF TYING TO CONTROL OURSELVES ON OUR OWN.

JESUS OFFERS US THE BEST EXAMPLE OF THIS, AS WE LEARN FROM THE READING FROM MATTHEW.

SO LET'S LOOK AGAIN AT THE FIRST TEMPTATION THAT OF TURNING STONES INTO BREAD.

THIS IS THE MOST SUBTLE OF ALL THE TEMPTATIONS JESUS ENCOUNTERED, AND ALSO THE MOST SIMILAR TO THE GENESIS ACCOUNT OF SIN, AS WELL AS THE SIN OF ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS.

IN FACT ONE ANALYSIS OF THE GOSPEL PASSAGE POINTS OUT HOW JESUS WAS TEMPTED IN A SIMILAR WAY TO ADAM AND EVE, SAYING:

"THE DEVIL'S STRATEGY HAS NOT CHANGED SINCE THE GARDEN OF EDEN.

HE USED THE SAME THINGS THERE AS HE USED AGAINST JESUS, AND HE WILL USE THESE SAME TACTICS AGAINST US AS WELL."

BUT ANOTHER REFLECTION SAYS THAT THEOLOGICALLY MATTHEW TELLS HOW JESUS FOLLOWS THE JOURNEY OF ISRAEL THROUGH THE WILDERNESS.

NOW, OUR SAVIOR'S RESPONSE TO HIS FIRST TEMPTATION WAS TO QUOTE A PORTION OF DEUTERONOMY 8:3.THE WHOLE VERSE SAYS:

"GOD HUMBLD YOU BY LETTING YOU HUNGER, THEN BY FEEDING YOU WITH MANNA, WITH WHICH NEITHER YOU NOT YOUR ANCESTORS WERE ACQUAINTED,

IN ORDER TO MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND THAT ONE DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF THE LORD."

TRULY IT WAS A FAILURE TO ABIDE BY EVERY WORD FROM GOD'S MOUTH THAT WAS THE REAL CAUSE OF ORIGINAL SIN, AS WELL AS ISRAEL'S REBELLION.

YOU SEE, WHEN THE SERPENT TEMPTED EVE, AND ADAM WHO WAS WITH HER, THEY EACH COULD HAVE MADE A DIFFERENT CHOICE.

EVE COULD HAVE SAID NO, ADAM COULD HAVE TRIED TO PREVENT EVE FROM EATING THE FRUIT, AND EITHER OF THEM COULD HAVE SAID-

"LET'S WAIT UNTIL THE LORD WALKS IN THE GARDEN WITH US AND ASK HIM IF WHAT THE SERPENT SAID IS TRUE", BUT THEY DID NOT.

SIMILARLY- THE HEBREW PEOPLE HAD BEEN DELIVERED FROM SLAVERY BY GOD'S POWERFUL INTERVENTION.

SO THEY COULD HAVE TRUSTED GOD WOULD NOT LET THEM DIE OF HUNGER OR THIRST IN THE WILDERNESS -BUT THEY DID NOT.

BUT JESUS, WHO HAD BEEN PRAYING- AS WELL AS FASTING- PASSED THE TEST BY TRUSTING IN HIS FATHER.

IN THIS WAY JESUS CHOSE TO GIVE UP TRYING TO CONTROL HIS SITUATION BY HIMSELF AND RELY ON GOD INSTEAD.

INDEED, UNLIKE ADAM AND EVE AND ISRAEL, WHO DID NOT TRUST IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, JESUS DID NOT LET SATAN PERSUADE HIM TO FORSAKE HIS FATHER

HIS DESIRE TO REMAIN IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FATHER IS THE KEY TO JESUS' SUCCESS IN PASSING THE TEST, BY REMAINING OBEDIENT TO GOD'S WILL.

THIS IS TRUE FOR ALL THREE TEMPTATIONS. AND CONCERNING THE SECOND ONE, IT WAS MEANT TO PERSUADE JESUS TO TEST THE FATHER PROMISES TO HIM.

BEHIND THIS TESTING IS ANOTHER FORM OF DOUBTING IN HIS FATHER'S WORD AND PROMISES.

BUT THE FINAL TEMPTATION WAS A LITTLE DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER TWO.

JESUS' AUTHORITY OVER ALL THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD, AND INDEED EVERY ONE ON EARTH, WAS EXACTLY WHAT WILL HAPPEN, ACCORDING TO GOD'S PLAN.

THE BIBLE TELLS US ONE DAY EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW AND EVERY TONGUE CONFESS JESUS CHRIST IS LORD, TO THE GLORY OF THE FATHER.

BUT IF JESUS WERE TO NOT DIE, AND YET TAKE SOVEREIGNTY OVER ALL NATIONS AND PEOPLES BY FORCE, IT WOULD HAVE DONE NOTHING TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM SIN.

THIS TEMPTATION TO COMPROMISE WITH EVIL, EVEN FOR A GOOD CAUSE IS ONE PEOPLE FACE OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

THE DANGER WITH SUCH TEMPTATION IS THAT GIVING INTO IT WOULD DEMONSTRATE A LACK OF TRUST IN GOD'S PLANS AND PROMISES.

REMEMBER, IT WAS THE LACK OF TRUST IN THE WORD OF GOD THAT OPENED THE DOOR TO THE FIRST SIN.

THIS THOUGHT BRINGS UP AN IMPORTANT POINT OFTEN OVERLOOKED IN THE GENESIS STORY, WHICH IS THAT BEFORE THE FALL.

THE MAN AND WOMAN HAD A CALLING TO FULFILL, WHICH WAS TO TEND THE GARDEN AND ENJOY COMMUNION WITH WHAT WAS IN IT, ALONG WITH GOD AND WITH ONE ANOTHER.

HOWEVER AFTER THEY SINNED NEITHER ADAM NOR EVE THOUGHT ABOUT TENDING THE GARDEN.

THEY DID NOT EVEN THINK ABOUT EACH OTHER, BUT ONLY THEMSELVES AND WHAT GOD MIGHT DO.

TRULY, AT THE HEART OF TEMPTATION IS NOT SO MUCH OUR WILLINGNESS OR NOT TO OBEY, BUT OUR DESIRE OR LACK OF IT TO LOVE GOD, AND TO LOVE OTHERS AS OURSELVES.

THIS IS TRUE BECAUSE GOD'S COMMANDMENTS WERE GIVEN IN ORDER TO GUIDE US CONCERNING HOW TO REMAIN IN COMMUNION WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER.

LOOK TO JESUS, HE PUT HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FATHER FIRST. THIS IN TURN ENABLED HIM TO WIN THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE.

HE REMAINED FAITHFUL TO HIS CALLING AS OUR SAVOIR, BY DYING ON THE CROSS.

JESUS CHOSE THE CROSS BECAUSE HE TRUSTED IN HIS FATHER'S PLAN IN SPITE OF HIS FEAR.

WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT ALTHOUGH HE AGREED TO THE PLAN FOR HIS DEATH BEFORE HIS INCARNATION AND BIRTH-BECOMING HUMAN MEANT HE WAS VULNERABLE TO SIN.

AND WHAT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA TO CHRIST'S DIVINE SELF, MIGHT HAVE LOOKED DIFFERENTLY TO JESUS THE MAN.

BUT HIS HUMILITY BEFORE GOD HIS FATHER WAS AT THE HEART OF JESUS' SUCCESS IN PASSING HIS TESTS.

CONVERSELY IT WAS THE REJECTION OF HUMILITY BEFORE GOD THAT THAT LED TO ORIGINAL SIN.

LIKEWISE, WHEN IT COMES TO OUR OWN REBELLION AGAINST GOD, IT IS OUR OWN LACK OF HUMILITY DRIVES US TO SIN.

THIS BRINGS US BACK TO THE CALL TO ARMS IN OUR SPIRITUAL BATTLE, WHICH IS MORE ABOUT A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THAN OBEDIENCE.

YOU SEE OBEDIENCE FLOWS OUT OF REMAINING IN HUMBLE COMMUNION WITH GOD.

THERE IS A PRAYER WRITTEN BY MARTIN LUTHER THAT APTLY FITS THE THEME OF GIVING UP CONTROL TO GOD.

I INVITE YOU TO LISTEN TO THE PRAYER WITH THE LENTEN JOURNEY IN MIND.

LET US **HUMBLY** PRAY:

“BEHOLD LORD, AN EMPTY VESSEL THAT NEEDS TO BE FILLED, MY LORD FILL IT.

I AM WEAK IN FAITH, STRENGTHEN THOU ME. I AM COLD IN LOVE, WARM ME, AND MAKE ME FERVENT THAT MY LOVE MAY GO OUT TO MY NEIGHBORS.

I DO NOT HAVE A STRONG AND FIRM FAITH, AT TIMES I DOUBT,

AND AM UNABLE TO TRUST THEE ALTOGETHER-- O LORD, HELP ME...

I AM POOR, THOU ART RICH, AND DIDST COME TO BE MERCIFUL TO THE POOR.

I AM A SINNER, THOU ART UPRIGHT. WITH ME THERE IS AN ABUNDANCE OF SIN.

WITH THEE THERE IS FULLNESS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. THEREFORE I WILL REMAIN WITH THEE. AMEN”

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