

In our morning session today, Abi and I discussed Matthew 4:1-4 (we're working through Matthew). It called back to our minds the three major doctrines of Satan's system of lies that Professor Robert wrote about:

1. I don't need God
2. I am like God
3. God needs me.

This discussion was more visceral for us because of the journey that the Lord has been taking us on. The question that we were discussing was:

If you possess the power/ability and the need, is that enough reason to act?

It seems to me that the exact point of that first temptation is that it isn't. As it is, Jesus had no weaknesses at all in His flesh except for its mortality. Additionally, He was given the right by the Father to exercise the power of God as He pleased (as a prophet, He could speak and act on God's behalf whenever the Spirit came upon Him, but then the Spirit was always upon Him so He could speak and act at will), so it was not the ability that was lacking nor was it the need since He was also hungry. So then, why was it wrong for Him to turn stones into bread?

That is easy enough for us to see from an outside position: The Bible says that that was Satan's suggestion, and it is obviously unwise to listen to Satan. But in our personal experiences, how can we know that it is Satan who is suggesting things to us so that we know when we shouldn't listen?

One of our considerations was that, unlike Jesus, we do have weaknesses that are "imposed" on us by the Lord. For example, we certainly don't have the power to turn stones into bread. So if we were in the desert as the Lord was, however sorely tempted we might be, not a few of us would consider it arrogant to think that we could turn stones into bread, but Satan knows that, so he often suggests to us something that we know or at least think we can do to alleviate our troubles. This is where the trouble is for us: a perception of ability as well as a perception of need. Hunger is undeniable, but if the Lord withholds food and we are hungry, is our perception of need at that time supposed to guide our actions? So, then, when it pleases the Lord to constrain us in some way or another, that might be a good indication that acting is saying that we don't need Him.

But how do we know that our constraints/weaknesses are imposed on us by the Lord Himself? What if our choices bring them upon us? Are we being responsible when we don't try to break out of our difficulties?

It seems to me that whether our choices bring our constraints upon us or they come upon us another way, we are where we are because God has put us there. Consider, for example, that if we make a bad choice, its natural and divine consequences are decreed by God so that what trouble it puts us in is God's own doing. On the other hand, if we come under the fire of testing, as it was with Job, it is God Who put us there too. So, how we got there is of little consequence, the constraint is still God's doing. With Jesus, His constraint was only that it was the Holy Spirit that took Him into the desert for that period of testing, and until it pleased Him to close that season and move Him on, it would be wrong for the Lord Jesus to take matters into His own hands with respect to His hunger. We are sinful, so our own constraints tend to be external to us rather than internal as it was with the Lord Jesus who because of His perfection had to be the one to constrain Himself by choice. What this means is that we often cannot break out of our constraints without hurting ourselves (and certainly our relationship with God) in some way where all it would have cost the Lord Jesus was His intimate communion with the Father.

This put me in mind of other passages of the Bible: Eccl. 3:1-8; John 3:8; and 1 Cor 2:14-15. They suggest to me that the times and seasons of the Spirit are not always or necessarily the same as those of the world. In general, we believers live normal lives in this world on the surface. We do what everybody else does -- work, eat, sleep, marry, raise kids, etc. But under the hood, things are very different indeed. The Spirit is (or ought to be) the driver of our choices. Therefore, quite a few times, we will seem to fall out of line with what seems normal to the world. This matter of Jesus going into the desert is one example. Another is when He deliberately went late to a feast in Jerusalem (Jn. 7:1-14). The choice to live by the leading of the Spirit will then sometimes have us act unusually, in a manner of speaking. This should go without saying since what people would naturally want is opposed to what God wants for us so that the points of intersection are necessarily superficial at best.

So, then, when we are constrained by the Spirit, it seems to me that it would be wrong to "fight our way through." Or, at least, it wouldn't be terribly productive to do so because it will really amount to "kicking against the goads/pricks." What success we have then will certainly be destroyed by the costs we incur especially spiritually.

This then is why the Bible counsels patience in suffering or testing.

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful?
Let him sing psalms.
James 5:13 (NKJV)

7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!
James 5:7-9 (NKJV)

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.
James 1:2-4 (NKJV)

12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.
James 1:12 (NKJV)

3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.
Romans 5:3-5 (NKJV)

If we need God, then it is not a question of what we can do even when we seem to have the power to do it, and we should not forget that we really have no power at all since without Christ we can do nothing at all (Jn. 15:5; 2 Cor. 3:5). But does this mean that we should be irresponsible? Only ever waiting for God to do everything? Not at all. The Bible says that the world cannot contain all the books that would be written if everything Jesus did was written down (Jn. 21:25), yet He said,

19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.
John 5:19 (NKJV)

When we take it upon ourselves to do what we think we should do, that leads to all manner of pain and suffering (Pro. 14:12; cf. 3:5-6). But if we subject all of our issues to the Scriptures and make our choices according to them, we will not be irresponsible nor will we get ahead of ourselves and find ourselves in opposition to God.

15 For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel:
"In returning and rest you shall be saved;
In quietness and confidence shall be your strength."
But you would not,
16 And you said, "No, for we will flee on horses"—
Therefore you shall flee!
And, "We will ride on swift horses"—
Therefore those who pursue you shall be swift!
17 One thousand shall flee at the threat of one,
At the threat of five you shall flee,
Till you are left as a pole on top of a mountain
And as a banner on a hill.
18 Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you;
And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you.
For the LORD is a God of justice;
Blessed are all those who wait for Him.
19 For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem;
You shall weep no more.
He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry;
When He hears it, He will answer you.
20 And though the Lord gives you
The bread of adversity and the water of affliction,
Yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore,
But your eyes shall see your teachers.
21 Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying,
"This is the way, walk in it,"
Whenever you turn to the right hand
Or whenever you turn to the left.
22 You will also defile the covering of your images of silver,
And the ornament of your molded images of gold.
You will throw them away as an unclean thing;
You will say to them, "Get away!"
23 Then He will give the rain for your seed
With which you sow the ground,
And bread of the increase of the earth;
It will be fat and plentiful.
In that day your cattle will feed
In large pastures.
24 Likewise the oxen and the young donkeys that work the ground
Will eat cured fodder,
Which has been winnowed with the shovel and fan.
25 There will be on every high mountain

And on every high hill
Rivers and streams of waters,
In the day of the great slaughter,
When the towers fall.
26 Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun,
And the light of the sun will be sevenfold,
As the light of seven days,
In the day that the LORD binds up the bruise of His people
And heals the stroke of their wound.
Isaiah 30:15-26 (NKJV)

In conclusion, the Bible teaches us that we need God. That means that we are wise to restrain ourselves in our thoughts and plans and actions. If we need God, we depend on Him not just for guidance (Rom. 8:14), but also for the power to act (Eph. 2:13) and for the fruit that we produce (Jn. 15:5). It is then the wrong way around to think that God or any part of His plan depends on us. We are the pensioners upon His grace. He does not need anything we do to accomplish any part of His will. We need Him, His guidance, strength, and encouragement in our hearts, to do what He expects or commands of us. If we are constrained by Him sometimes, then rather than worrying, straining, and ripping ourselves and others apart with complaining and grumbling, we should pray just as the Bible tells us to.