

Text: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Prayer of the Day:

Lord our strength, the battle of good and evil rages within and around us, and our ancient foe tempts us with his deceits and empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your Word, and when we fall, raise us up again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

It is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." (Matthew 4:10b)

Sermon Text:

Hollywood has made a ton of money on the theme. Good versus evil gets people in the seats and hearts pumping. We want to see the villains defeated! We get nervous when the hero seems to be on the ropes. It sells! It's much less popular however when it comes to real life. Temptation is the ultimate struggle of good versus evil. Perhaps we don't like it because we know sometimes, more often than we like to admit, we lose. The Devil is a serious foe. But then that's why we need Him, our Hero who can defeat the Devil for us and not just once, but every single time. Let's jump right in.

Notice the set up to the lesson. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert. For 40 days He is without food, growing hungrier, weaker with each passing day all the while Satan attacks. "*If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.*" Maybe not as tempting for day one but by day 40 the temptation is exponentially bigger. It sounds familiar though doesn't it? "Eat the fruit Eve. God is simply holding out on you. Just take a bite. What can really happen anyway? Who will ever know?"

Jesus sees right through it. Check out the answer: "*It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.'*" Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3. There will be times when our wants are not met. When our needs seem unfulfilled. The solutions of the world are always temporary, God's Word is eternal. How many times has this temptation overcome us? For Jesus, even in hunger that would kill anyone else, the temptation falls flat.

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “ ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’ ” ⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” Ah yes, now, comes the twisted theologian. They are a dime a dozen in the world today. Let’s grab one passage of Scripture, use it completely out of context but make it sound so spiritual. Of course, it misses the point completely.

Satan quotes Psalm 91 which if one reads in its entirety is actually an encouragement to follow in God’s will. So, God will command His angels to protect those who follow after His will, not those who hurl themselves against it or who try to use God like a genie in a lamp. Again, Jesus answer hits the mark, “It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ ” Oh, how this must have seemed tempting. Jesus knew what the future held: rejection, hatred, pain, torture, death. Satan says, “That’s all unnecessary Jesus. I’ll give you the world. Just worship me.” Seems like such a little thing with such a massive pay off right?

It’s such a common temptation. Just this once, just this little sin, you’ll be happier, it’ll make life so much easier. Just set aside the will of God which always seems to feel so difficult and follow the ways of the world, abandon marriage, embrace impurity, reject authority, embrace your own big brain which always knows better anyway. It’s easier to give in than fight for truth.

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ ” Again, Jesus sees through it. It’s all an assault on the First Commandment. It’s an assault on God. Follow the ways of the world and bow at the altars of Satan and sin and while it may seem like we have the world at our fingertips here, hell is the real reward. God wants what is best for us and directs us to it in His Word. It isn’t easy. In fact, most times there are crosses to bear. In the end, far more than the world is ours as faith follows after God. Christ has procured heaven and perfection for His children. “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”

Our lesson tells us that Satan leaves but this is not done. One can almost hear Him say, “You won this time Jesus, but I’ll get you yet.” Truth is he won’t, Jesus will remain perfect as the author of the book of Hebrews describes him, *we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin* (Hebrews 4:15). He does that for us as Paul tells the Romans, *Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.* ¹⁹ *For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous* (Romans 5:18-19). His perfection is our perfection. God’s requirements of absolute perfection are met.

Of course, that doesn’t stop the devil. He has always been irrational from the moment he thought he could rebel against God. So, he still lurks for the opportune time with us. His desire ever since Jesus defeated him has been to pick off the sheep of the flock so, Jesus sent the Devil packing, but can we do the same?

The answer is a resounding, yes! James tells us, “*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you* (James 4:7).” We are no longer slaves to sin or to Satan. A few minutes ago we sang the words of that great reformation hymn and Luther himself pens that

line, *“This world’s prince (that’s Satan) may still scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He’s judged; the deed is done! One little word can fell him (CW 200:3).”*

Jesus shows us this is true. God’s Word rebuffs Satan at every turn. Each attack of Satan, whether he appeals to our passions and pleasures, our pride or our apathy, even when he would try to twist the very weapon we use against him, his attacks are defended and defeated in the Word of our God, through which the Spirit works mightily in us.

Of course, that means you will want to be in it regularly. Church just became an important regular event in our life. Like the athlete who hires a trainer to keep them in tip-top condition, to point out flaws and how to fix them, so we will gather around God’s Word and partake of His Sacrament. It also means we’ll make daily use of God’s Word in private devotional time, one on one with God and together with our families, we’ll think about the Word in which God speaks to us. What warrior never trains for battle and honestly expects to be ready when attacked? And when our battles grow long and the fighting is fierce, when it feels as if we are at our weakest and Satan won’t let up, again it’s God’s Word through which the Spirit comes to us, strengthens us, encourages us from the lips of a called worker, a family member or a friend.

And when we slip and fall, when Satan gets the best of us, when we sin? Well, then there is repentance. Confession and Absolution are a gem God gives to His people. The perfect life of Jesus Christ has already fulfilled the law for us. His holy precious blood spilt on the cross, the complete and perfect sacrifice for our sin. We confess that we are by nature sinful and that in our daily thoughts, words and deeds, we fall for the traps and snares Satan sets around us. We rely on Jesus life, death, and resurrection, He has won the battle for us. He sends His Spirit for new strength to continue the battle.

Hollywood loves a good fight, but her heroes are often flawed. Ours is not. Because we so often fail in the fight against satan, He defeats him. And while His battle shows us how to send Satan packing it does so very much more. It actually provides us with the very victory we need. We the security and the certainty of Heaven itself. Dear friends, we need a hero ... and we have one, the only one we will ever need. Amen!