

**February 21, 2010**  
**Lent 1**

*"Jesus Defeats the Devil"*

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**LUKE 4:1-13**

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**J**esus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, <sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" <sup>5</sup> The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. <sup>7</sup> So if you worship me, it will all be yours." <sup>8</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" <sup>9</sup> The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. <sup>10</sup> For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; <sup>11</sup> they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" <sup>12</sup> Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" <sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Why is it that the Holy Spirit who comes down on Jesus in the form of a friendly dove then leads him out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil? Can you imagine a Marine who is fighting in Afghanistan leading his buddy into a mud hut filled with vicious Taliban fighters? The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, knows Jesus will defeat the devil and win the victory for us. Jesus does not resist the Holy Spirit's leading. He heads into the war zone to engage the devil in hand to hand combat. As we just sung in the hymn, "But for us fights the Valiant One whom God himself elected."

The economy is bad. Friends and family members lose their jobs and homes. More graffiti is painted on walls and signs. The furnace is broken and blows cold air. There is another trip to the doctor this week. As much as these problems loom up large in our lives, our greatest problem is our personal battle with temptation. You have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The water of your baptism is still as wet on you today as the day you were baptized. Satan has a target on you. His sights are set on you. That infrared light shining on you right now is another temptation read to be unleashed against you.

Oh what a joy and privilege it is this morning to take you out into the desert and watch as Jesus is being tempted by the devil. The Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the desert is the same Holy Spirit who is leading you and me to see the victory we have in Jesus as he defeats the devil here in the desert. The snake is crawling on the ground. Come and see the sandaled foot of Jesus crush his head. See Jesus defeat the devil.

**He defeats the devilish desires**

The devil is so good at inflaming evil desires in our hearts. He comes to Jesus with the enticing words, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus went forty days without eating. Have you ever been so hungry you almost ate a whole pizza by yourself? Jesus was not setting himself up for a fall as we do when we open ourselves to temptation. He was setting himself up for a victory, a defeat of the devil.

Listen to the hissing sound in Satan's voice as he says to Jesus, "You are God. You have the power to take a stone (hold stone) and turn it into a nice tasty loaf of bread." Did Jesus have such power? He sure did. He could have taken a stone like this and turn it into the tastiest little loaf of bread you have ever eaten, made with whole wheat, red Durham wheat harvested from the high plains of Colorado, packed with flavor. Can't you smell it baking? Eat it now. It is still warm. Here is a pat of Irish butter and some clover honey.

What was wrong with a little bread, just a small piece to take the edge off the hunger? What was wrong with sparing a little pain and suffering, and making the temptation a little less demanding? Jesus blasts this temptation into oblivion by firing an important truth from God's Word. "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" This is a quote from Deuteronomy that says "Man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." God's Word gave the Old Testament people everything they needed. They were given manna to eat and water to drink and their clothes did not even wear out. But they always desired more than what God gave them. They grumbled and complained just as we grumble and complain. They did not trust the Word of God that gave them everything they needed. Jesus was tempted in all parts as we are. If Jesus had listened to Satan he would have given up his full trust in what his heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit had planned for him to do.

Does Satan still try to inflame evil desires in your heart and mine? He sure does. He is a master at what he does. Feeling down? How about a nice fresh, warm pity party for yourself, where you can give vent to your feelings and emotions, instead of turning to the Lord for help? How about a trip to the Mall or Costco where you can satisfy your craving and emptiness by indulging yourself with some material pleasure? How about beating up somebody in your family? Kick the dog. Say nasty things to your mom. That will make you feel better. Pour another glass. Pop another pill. Look at another web page. The pain will go away. Hear Satan hissing, "There is so much more to life than what God promises you in his Word."

Jesus defeated the devil with one Word from Holy Scripture. His desire is to serve his heavenly Father perfectly and not give into these evil desires set forth by Satan. In the great Reformation hymn, Martin Luther wrote, "One little word can fell him." Jesus sent the devil packing with one word of Scripture and so can we with one word of Scripture. The devil is not done. He is never done. He comes back again for round two, focusing this time on deception.

### **Jesus defeats the devilish deception**

We hear the hissing sound again. Satan approaches Jesus with a very cunning and devilish

deception. He leads Jesus up in a high place and shows him all the kingdoms of the world. The devil leads and Jesus follows because Jesus knows he will win round two. "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." At first glance this hardly seems like a clever deception. You have heard it said, "It is too good to be true, it is probably not true." Here is Satan showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. He promises to give Jesus' power. He says he has power to give people whatever they want and then he has the audacity to say to Jesus all this is yours if you worship me.

How could Satan even begin to think about getting Jesus to fall for this trap? Ah, but look at the temptation more closely. Take a look at all the great kingdoms of the world, the Chinese Empire, the Aztec Empire, the Roman Empire, the Germans and Swedes and Norwegians at the time of Jesus. All these great civilizations have one thing in common. They were always fighting with each other, suppressing each other and hurting each other. Remember the words of Rodney King after the LA riots. Can't we all just get along? Jesus had the power to help people get along. Imagine a world with no drugs, no guns, no broken families and no nursing homes. Jesus had the power to deliver. It was also our Lord Jesus who said, "What does it profit a man if gains the whole world and loses his own soul." Jesus knew his mission was not to follow the devil's deception and build a kingdom here on this earth. His job was to rescue people from sin and build the kingdom of heaven.

Once again Jesus fires another blast at Satan's temptation with the words, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" Jesus loved worshiping and serving his heavenly Father. He came to serve by rescuing people who are lost forever in their sin, people like you and me. Listen to him pray in the Garden to his heavenly Father with drops of sweating falling like blood to the ground, "Not my will but yours be done."

Satan still challenges us. "Do you really want to take up your cross and follow Jesus? Deny yourself? Is that what you really want in your life?" Ah, Satan offers a better plan. He suggests ever so gently that we will be much happier if we get involved in people and their lives with the goal that they might bestow glory on us and make our lives meaningful. Get the rewards and ribbons, the smiles and hugs, even glowing testimonies in church services, and forget about the cross and crucifying your flesh and being buried with Christ and rising with a new life to follow him. Look for the kingdom of glory here on this earth and forget the kingdom of the cross. And then we hear God's word tell us, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross." We find strength in the wounds and words of Jesus to send Satan packing and get our lives back on track again.

### **Satan defeats the devilish doubt**

Satan comes back again. He always does. He is the roaring lion seeking whom he can devour. He is always hungry. He takes Jesus to the highest part of Herod's temple in the city of Jerusalem. "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Notice the word "If." If you are God's Son dive off the top of the temple head first to the stones below. The angels will protect you. Jesus again blasts this temptation with the proper teaching of Scripture, "It says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Jesus knew the angels

would always be there for him. He did not doubt God's Word and put it to the test. The angels were there ministering to Jesus when he prayed in the Garden. They were there when he was nailed to the cross.

Satan even uses God's Word to raise doubt in our minds as he did with Eve when he said, "Did God really say you should not eat from the tree of the Garden." Do you really need to read your Bible every day? You are strong. You are a soldier of the cross. You don't need your weapons and armor because the Lord will protect you. Satan has his sights on you and me. He tempts us where we are weakest and where we are strongest. If Satan convinces you that you are strong enough to stand without the Lord and his Word, you are on the edge of serious fall.

A man was dying with a serious infection that went into his liver. In the last weeks of his life he was led back to a firm faith and trust in the Jesus he had come to know as a child. A few days before his death, Satan made one last battle for his soul. Satan confused him and told him Jesus didn't love him and he would not be there for him when he died. He tossed and turned into the night. In the morning he was at peace. His wife asked him what had happened. He feebly told her that during the night he kept seeing his little grand daughter standing by the fireplace in their home on Christmas singing to the family, "Jesus loves me this I know.." "One little word can fell him."