

### Christ Crushes the Old Evil Foe for You!

It was a grand and glorious day when Jesus was baptized. The sky split as the Holy Spirit descended as a dove over Jesus and the Father's proud voice exploded, **"This is my Son whom I love. With him I am well pleased."** Jesus' baptism was like his inauguration day – the time when he began his public ministry as our Savior. Usually, when someone important – like a president or governor – is inaugurated, there is a big banquet followed by some extravagant celebration. Not so with Jesus. His head was still wet with the water of his baptism when the Holy Spirit led him into the desert. As Jesus began his formal ministry, the devil threw everything he had at him. He did not trust this job to any of his demons. For 40 days, the devil himself did all he could to get Jesus to sin. Jesus was truly human and after 40 days, he was hungry, exhausted, lonely, weak and weary. Luke highlights three particularly intense temptations.

The devil said to Jesus (:3), **"If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."** "Jesus, you're hungry. You could die. Why not make some of these stones into bread? That is, IF you really are true God." It's more than cruel to entice a hungry man with an instant meal. To turn stones into bread would be showing lack of trust in God, who sent Jesus into the desert. Jesus knew that he was going to die on a cross, not in the desert and so he could trust that God would provide for him in some way. We see that the devil tempted Jesus to stop trusting in the Lord to provide.

When that did not work, the devil took Jesus to a **"high place and showed him ... all the kingdoms of the world."** The Bible does not tell us how this happened, but when Jesus saw all the power and wealth of the nations, the devil said (:6), **"I will give you all their authority and splendor. ... if you worship me, it will all be yours."** "Jesus, you want the whole world to look up to you. There's an easier way of doing that than being lifted up on a cross. Just bow down and follow me." If Jesus did not follow God's plan for his crucifixion, then he could not be our Savior. We see that the devil tempted Jesus to take a sinful path to happiness.

In still another temptation, Satan said (:9), **"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from [the top of the temple]."** (One historian estimates that it was a 450 ft. drop from the top of the temple to the bottom of the Kidron Valley.) "Jesus, you say that you trust God's Word. OK, then jump off the top of the temple. Psalm 91 says that he will send his angels to protect you. So, prove that you trust God's Word." To purposefully do something harmful would be misusing God's Word. It would be like saying to God, "If you say that you love me, I

demand that you do whatever I want." We see that the devil tempted Jesus to misuse God's Word.

The temptations that the devil threw at Jesus are similar to the temptations we face. Usually, we use the word "temptation" for simple things like, "I am tempted to have another candy bar." The Bible speaks about temptation as something deadly serious that separates us from God, something that destroys our relationship with him. When Adam and Eve gave in to the devil's temptation, they broke their relationship with God and sentenced themselves and the whole world to death. Temptation is deadly, like powerful poison to our soul. How sincerely do you pray the Sixth Petition, "Lead us not into temptation?" Do you just mumble through it, or do you consciously ask the Lord to help you overcome the sinful desires that lurk in your heart? Temptations begin with a desire in our hearts as we are pulled or tugged in a direction that is not good.

The devil tempted Jesus to stop trusting in the Lord to provide. Maybe you find yourself doubting God's promises to take care of you as you worry and stress about things. "If I only had more money, then I'd feel safe and secure. So, I'll cheat a little on my taxes. Big deal. Others do it too."

The devil tempted Jesus to take a sinful path to happiness. Maybe your weakness is alcohol or drugs which promise to make you feel happy and numb the pain in your life, even though you know that it only makes things worse. Or maybe your drug of choice is sports or television shows or something else. Maybe a few mouse clicks on your computer shows you some sort of smut that give you an adrenaline rush.

The devil tempted Jesus to misuse God's Word. Maybe you find yourself thinking that you know enough about God's Word so you do not need to come to church so often or read any devotions during the week. Or maybe you find yourself thinking that since God's Word says that you are forgiven, then it does not matter if you sin. That, also, is misusing God's Word. What are some things that are tempting to you, things that would pull you away from your Lord and his Word and his will? Maybe there are times when you feel hungry, exhausted, lonely, weak and weary, and vulnerable like Jesus did in the desert and the devil especially bounced on you. I can not pretend to know where the weakness is in your spiritual armor. But the devil knows.

In a way, temptation is like a mosquito bite. It demands your attention. You know that scratching your mosquito bite is the wrong thing to do, but your mind argues that if you just scratch one more time, then the itch will be gone. So, you scratch. You damage your skin and the itch is back as soon as you stop scratching. Giving in to temptation never makes the temptation go away. It only makes it harder to resist the next time. Every sin damages your soul.

There was a tragedy a few years ago in Florida. A couple bought a python as a pet. It was small and fascinating to look at it inside the aquarium tank. The python grew to be 12 feet long. They got a larger aquarium tank. Then, one night, it broke out of the tank, slithered through the house into the baby's room and choked their 2-year-old daughter to death. The devil is a slippery snake who has thousands of years of experience getting people to sin. He is the "old evil foe" as we just sang. The devil is your worst enemy and he has you in his crosshairs. He already has plans for how he is going to attack your faith this next week. He will use the mixed-up world around you and your sinful desires to pull you away from your Lord. What are some times that you gave into temptation and sinned? What sort of impure thoughts rush through your mind that would embarrass you if your husband or wife knew? Or if your friends or coworkers or classmates knew? Or if your pastor knew? Or if God knew. Oh, wait. He already does know. The Lord knows very well how the many ways we continue to follow the devil instead of walking with Jesus.

At the time of King David, about 3000 years ago, it was something of a custom for two opposing armies to send their best warriors to fight each other. It was called a "battle by champion." That's what you see in our Old Testament lesson (1 Samuel 17) as the Philistine champion, Goliath, challenged the Israelites to send out their champion. As you know, David won that battle and so the whole nation of Israel won. David looked weak and vulnerable compared to Goliath. And Jesus looked weak and vulnerable as he was hungry and weak and weary and the devil attacked him. Just as David beat Goliath, Christ crushed the old evil foe. And since Jesus won, you win.

Jesus is not like some army general sitting in a safe place miles from the danger of combat. Jesus entered our battle. He became fully human in order to go toe-to-toe with the devil. Jesus understands your weaknesses and how overwhelming your temptations can feel. He knows what it feels like to struggle against temptation. Our second lesson this morning (Hebrews 4:15) tells us that in Jesus we have someone "**who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.**" In truth, even more. We have never been stuck without bread in the wilderness for 40 days face-to-face with Satan. We have never been so thirsty that a sponge of vinegar sounds appealing. We have endured a crucifixion. We have never been weighed down with so much stress and so many satanic attacks that blood came out from our pores when we were sweating. The one person who, every time, showed that he really did love God and his will more than anything, was crowned not with life, but with thorns and a very lonely death. Jesus became fully human so that he could be your substitute in your battle against the "old evil foe." In every temptation he faced, Jesus did not sin. Since he's your substitute, his perfect record becomes your perfect record. You are declared perfect in God's sight. Jesus died to erase every time that you and I gave into temptation.

Jesus rose from the dead to prove that you will rise from the dead, never to be tempted again. Because Christ fought the battle against Satan as one of us, he won that battle for all of us.

In Jesus, you have a friend who knows what temptations you face and knows exactly how to beat them. In his battle with the devil, every "if" was replaced with "it." Every time the devil said, "**IF you are the Son of God,**" Jesus replied, "**IT is written.**" The Apostle Paul calls God's Word (Ephesians 6:17), "**the sword of the Spirit.**" Jesus used God's Word to slay Satan and render him powerless to drag you into hell with him. The Holy Spirit, who guided prophets and apostles to write down God's Word, has preserved that Word through centuries of attacks by the devil so that you have God's Word, the Sword of the Spirit, in your hands today.

You do not need to go 40 days in the desert without food to know that the Lord will take care of you. You have God's Word which promises that the Lord will provide you with daily bread. You do not need to sin in order to find happiness. You have God's Word. As God's Word fills your heart you will experience a true and lasting happiness that can not be found in the things of the world. You do not need to throw yourself over a cliff to find out if God really loves you. You have God's Word. God's Word shines the spotlight on the empty cross and empty tomb as proof that God loves you. Your days may be dark and difficult, but God's Word reveals to you a grand and glorious day when you will see Jesus face to face and feel happy and satisfied forevermore. The devil knows that God's Word is the one that thing he can not overcome in this world. That's why he tempts you so hard to neglect God's Word. And that's why we pray so hard that the Spirit lead us to hear, read, learn and take God's Word to heart.

During the season of Lent, we focus on the struggle that Jesus went through in order to save us and the struggle that we face as Satan tries to pull us away from Jesus. Lent is a time to roll up our sleeves and fight against the devil's temptations with even greater determination. Even as the devil still rages against you, you can face him and his temptations unafraid, confident that your champion has already won the victory. Jesus said (John 16:33), "**In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.**" Through your God-given faith which connects you to Jesus, you already have overcome the world. That is something the devil can not do. He knows he can not win. As we just sang, "this world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will, he can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done." You are saved. Amen.