

Jesus is Your Champion

The Super Bowl was just two weeks ago. As usual, there was a lot of hype and a lot of betting on the game. Retired boxer, Floyd Mayweather, bet \$10,000 that the Philadelphia Phillies would win the Super Bowl. They lost and so he lost. \$10,000 seems like a lot of money to us, but for a multi-millionaire, that's just chump change. The stakes were not too high for him. But what if he bet his life on that game? What if you bet your life on the outcome of the Super Bowl. You would certainly watch that game with interest. This morning, we watch with eagerness as we see the devil and Jesus go head to head in a battle.

Matthew 3 ends with the account of Jesus' baptism. The heavens opened, the Spirit of God descended as a dove, and God the Father spoke, "**This is my son whom I love. With him I am well pleased.**" Immediately after his baptism, Matthew tells us that (4:1) "**Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.**" At his baptism, the heavens opened up. Now at his temptation, it was like hell opened up. The devil was not going to leave this job to any simple demon, some second-stringer. This was the Super Bowl of the spiritual world. The devil would fight this battle with Jesus himself.

The first human being, Adam, was created perfect, in the image of God. Every thought and word and action was perfectly in line with God's holiness. But then Adam and Eve blew it when they ate of the forbidden fruit. Since they were the first humans, every human being ever born came into the world already infected with sin. By nature, we are doomed to spending eternity in hell with the devil. The nation of Israel, Abraham's descendants, are also called God's children, the people who were to represent him to the world. He set them aside as his holy nation, but they did not do any better than Adam. The Israelites when through the water of the Red Sea as they left Egypt. Then they spent 40 years in the desert. As soon as they left Egypt, their first complain is that they did not have any bread. Certainly, the Lord who led them into the desert would provide for them. They could have at least prayed, "Lord, we're hungry. Can you please provide us daily bread?" Instead, they whined and complained. Just like them, there have been all sorts of times in our lives when we worried and wondered how God was going to take care of us. He tells us that he is working all things for our good. But when we do not get what we want, we whine and complain and stress. Whenever mere mortals go up against the devil, the devil wins and we lose. Humans – losers. The devil – winner. As we just sang (CW 863, st. 2),

"With might of ours can naught (nothing) be done. Soon were our loss effected." Quickly we would lose to the devil.

Jesus, however, came to be our substitute. That's why he had to be fully human, so he could live and die as our substitute, making things right that we messed up. Did you notice the connection? The Israelites passed through the water and then spent 40 years in the desert. After Jesus passed through the water of his baptism, he then spent 40 days in the desert. I suppose it's not surprising that the devil's first temptation against Jesus dealt with bread. The devil saw Jesus haggard and hungry after 40 days with nothing to eat and suggested (:3), "**If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.**" Certainly, Jesus was the Son of God and had the power to turn stones into bread. He knew, though, that the Holy Spirit led him into the desert. Jesus knew that his work of saving the world was not done yet. Even though he was uncomfortably hungry, he knew that the Holy Spirit would not let him die. Besides, Jesus was not going to perform a miracle at the prompting of the devil. Jesus stiff-armed the devil by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, "**It is written:: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mount of God.'**" He was going to trust in God and not give into the devil's temptation. Jesus – winner. Devil – loser.

The devil regrouped a bit and came at Jesus again with the idea, "So, you want to trust in God's Word, do you? Why don't you prove that?" He took Jesus to the highest point of the temple complex. Some scholars think that with the valley below included, there was a drop of nearly 450 feet. The devil took Jesus to the edge and quoted Psalm 91 (:6), "**If you are the Son of God, 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.'**"

As we look at Old Testament history, we again see that God's people blew it. In the Garden of Eden, God told Adam that if he ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he would die. Instead of taking God at his Word, Adam and Eve trusted what the devil said. And as the Israelites slowly moved to the promised land, they continued to go against God's Word. For example, when God told them to invade Canaan and promised to give them victory. They were scared and did not think they could beat the Canaanites, so they rebelled against God. They even said that they wanted to return to Egypt. God made it clear that their disobedience was bad. They thought that their children would die in the desert. God said that they were going to live in the desert for 40 years. They would die in the desert, but their children would make it into the Promised Land. Then the people said, "We're sorry God. We'll attack Canaan now." God said, "Don't do it." They did anyway and got beat back. There are many other examples of how they

did not follow God's Word faithfully. How many times has the Lord told us to do something – pray daily, don't abuse alcohol, honor marriage, worship regularly, use our mouth for good things, help others, etc. – but we just shrugged it off as if doing what we wanted was more important than what God wanted. For our mixed-up priorities and lack of love for God, we let the devil beat us. Again, when God's people are left to themselves we are easily overwhelmed by the devil and doomed ourselves to eternal destruction. Humans – losers. Devil – winner.

In Psalm 91, the Lord certainly promised to send his angels to guard us, but for us to do foolish things, like jump off of a cliff and expect angels to keep us safe, is actually showing disrespect for God's Word. It's like saying, "God, you say you are going to keep me safe. I don't believe you. I want you to prove it no matter how foolish I am." Instead of trusting in God's Word, that's testing God to prove his Word. Jesus refused to jump. Jesus – winner. Devil – loser.

In a desperate gamble of going for broke, the devil went after Jesus a third time. He took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. [This had to have been some miraculous vision. As the Lord allows, even the devil can perform miracles.] Then he said (:9), "**All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.**" The devil knew that Jesus wanted all the whole world to look to him as their Savior God. Satan offered Jesus a short cut. "Instead of going through the suffering, pain and shame of being crucified, just bow down and admit that I am in control of the world and then I'll let you be in charge of everything as you want. It's a simple and pain free way of accomplishing your goal."

Adam and Eve, the Old Testament Israelites, and we, blew this one too. Adam and Eve said they'd rather trust the devil than trust what God said. In essence, they worship the devil. They were unbelievers at that moment. Reading through the Old Testament is a litany of how many times the Israelites prayed to Baal, Asherah, or some other make-believe God. If aliens from another world came to earth and observed our lives, what would they determine is our God? Apart from what we have to do to keep ourselves clothed and fed and safe, what is most important to us? Our house? Our phone? Sports? Music? Entertainment streaming services that keep demanding more money? Such things are not, by themselves, wrong. But they can easily become a distraction from God. We'd be lying if we said that spending time with God's Word is always our number one priority in our hearts. Once again, humans – losers. Devil – winner.

By now, Jesus had had enough of the devil's tricks. The first temptation – of Adam and Eve – led to a tree. That's where the devil tempted them. This

final battle between good and evil would seek to lead Jesus away from a tree, the tree of the cross, away from his Father and his will. Once more, Jesus conquered and destroyed our enemy, with a simple reliance on the Word of the Father. Jesus simply quoted God's Word (Deuteronomy 6:13), "**Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.**" Just like a fictitious vampire can not stand the presence of garlic, the devil cannot stand God's Word and had to leave Jesus alone. As we just sang in our last hymn (CW 863, st. 3), "**one little word can fell him.**" One again, Jesus – winner. Devil – loser.

When the mighty Philistine named Goliath challenged the Israelites to send out one soldier to fight him [David was the one who finally went and killed Goliath with a slingshot and stone to the forehead], Goliath was following an old custom called the Battle of the Champion. One man from each side would step forward to fight to the death. If the other army's champion won, then your entire army were losers and your country would be destroyed. But if your champion won, then the other country would be destroyed. During the season of Lent, we are vividly reminded that we are all sinners who deserve eternal death in hell. We are losers in our battle against sin and Satan. We realize that our greatest need is Someone who can defeat sin, death and the devil for us. Lent demonstrates that in Christ, all our greatest needs are met. Jesus erased our sin through his sacrifice on the cross. He overpowered death when he came back to life on Easter morning. He defeated the devil by resisting every temptation perfectly. Because Jesus is your substitute, when God looks at your spiritual score, he sees that you are a winner. Jesus wins and so you win. Hang on to that thought as you go through this week. When the devil tempts you in whatever way, tell him to go where he belongs because you are a winner. When you do stumble into a sin and the devil nags your conscience, tell him to go where he belongs because you are a winner. If things don't go well for you, if others ignore you or put you down, if your own feelings tell you that you are a worthless loser, look to Jesus and smile that, because of him, you are a winner. Our greatest need is for a Champion to win salvation for us. This morning, we see for sure that the devil lost and Jesus won. Therefore, you also win forgiveness and eternal life in heaven. You can bet your life on it because Jesus is your Champion. Amen.