

## Matthew 4:1-11

Lent 1; March 1 & 2, 2020

Satan has been waging war on humanity for thousands of years. In his battles with mere mortals, Satan has deceived us, he has lied to us, he has pulled us from the God who loves us and he has tried to lead us straight to the depths of hell itself. For thousands of years, humanity has been losing the battle. People have believed his lies. If we had been left to attempt to defeat Satan on our own, we would have been defeated.

But then one day, the battle changed when Satan picked a fight with Jesus, the Son of God. The outcome of this battle would be different. Instead of winning, like he so often had done, he began to lose. Things begin to change. Satan knew it. It was now time for it to be all out war against Jesus. Yet, this is why Jesus had come. It was now “game on.” **“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”**

Jesus had hardly dried off from his baptism in the Jordan River when he was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. For 40 days, he fasted. For 40 days he was tested and tempted by Satan. For 40 days, he tried every trick up his sleeve. For 40 days, he lost. Yet, perhaps, as Jesus grew weaker as the month dragged on, Satan thought he had a chance.

The pages of the Old Testament are filled with times of tempting and testing for God’s people. For 40 days, the heavens open wide and the flood waters covered the entire world. All people on the face of the world are killed with the exception of Noah and his family. For 40 days, Goliath challenged the army of Israel to send someone out to fight him. For 40 days, he laughed when no one stepped forward until a young shepherd faced him when no one would. For 40 days, the prophet Jonah preached a message of repentance to the people of Nineveh – Repent or die. In the Bible, God will often use 40 day period to indicate a spiritual battle between the powers of heaven and the powers of hell. This period of 40 days in the wilderness was no exception. For 40 days, Jesus and Satan were battling it out.

Scripture records only 3 of the temptations that Jesus faced after those 40 days of battle. We could look at each of the temptations in our text and see a few of the tactics that Satan uses against Jesus and against us. But this morning, I’d like to look at these temptations and see a couple of things that are common to all three. When we think of the devil, we often have a picture of him in mind. We think of him as this hooded being. We think of him as being red with horns coming out of his head. But, perhaps, in the desert, we see a different Satan. We see him as one who is strong and mighty. We see him flexing his muscles. We see him using his power to transport Jesus between one place and another. We see him as the roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8) looking for someone to devour.

Yet, what does Jesus do? He relies on the strength of his heavenly Father. When Jesus had been baptized a month before, God the Father declared: **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** While this story of Jesus could be described as a battle, it could also be described as a love story. Throughout all of these temptations, Jesus turns to his Heavenly Father and His Word. He trusts that his Father will not abandon him throughout these temptations and the ones to come. We see a loving Father loving His Son. We see a Son loving His Father that he will willingly obey His Father in everything. Jesus knew what was on the line. He doesn’t waiver from carrying out his mission. Jesus was at war, and he knew it.

It was the night before D-Day and the Allied invasion of France that took place at Normandy on June 6, 1944. The battle would become a turning point in World War II. In the dark of night, United States paratroopers were dropped behind the enemy lines in northern France to cut off reinforcements. It took guts. It was a moment of unparalleled bravery. In order to move quietly through the dark of night, the men were split up into small groups. Most of the paratroopers carried out their orders faithfully. But not every trooper played the brave man that fateful night... One small group took cowardice to a new level. They found a farm house abandoned. In the basement, they found a stash of alcohol. They decided to help themselves. One private would later write that they heard *“all kinds of noise and singing from a distance.”* They quietly sneaked up on the farmhouse, and there inside they saw a group of the U.S. paratroopers that *“were drunker than a bunch of hillbillies on a Saturday night wingding. Unbelievable.”* (<http://strength-honor-god.blogspot.com/2013/05/>) These men knew that they were at war – but they refused to act like it.

Do we always realize that we are at war with the Devil? Do we always act like it? The Bible describes this war in so many different ways. Yet, do we sometimes fall asleep? We know we are at war, but do we sometimes refuse to act like it? Do we sometimes listen to those temptations of Satan? You see every temptation has another thing one thing in common. Even in this wilderness they have one thing in common. The common denominator in every temptation is selfishness. Every temptation appeals to our selfishness. *It's your life! You can do it! No one else will!* That's what was going on in the wilderness over 2000 years ago. Satan is trying to get Jesus to take care of himself. You hungry? You can fix it yourself. Do something spectacular. Jump! You can stop yourself. You can promote yourself. You can be king over it all.

But on that day in desert, Jesus won. You see Jesus knew that it wasn't about himself and what he wanted. It was about what His Heavenly Father wanted. It was about you and me. On that day in the wilderness, Satan lost. He ran off and left Jesus alone for now, but not for good. Luke tells us in his Gospel: **"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time."** (Luke 4:13) The war was not done. But one day -- 3 years from then -- it would end. It would end on a cross. When Jesus died, he crushed Satan. He would win. The outcome of the war was never doubted. Today, Jesus wants you to know that his victory is our victory. We may not resist every temptation the way that Jesus did. But God tells us that his victory is our victory. By his wounds we are healed. As you face the battles of Satan, remember this – Jesus has battled the Devil in the wilderness for you. His victory is yours. Amen.