

Matthew 4:1-11

Lent 1; February 22 & 23, 2026

He was called a *Champion*. In modern English that term could mean the winner of the local softball league, but *Champion* was a term that used to refer to a very specific type of warrior – a single combat warrior. In our age of modern warfare, it can be hard to remember what single combat was like. For years, across time and culture the practice of single combat was common, and that meant the need for *champions* was great.

When armies gathered to fight, sometimes as a prelude to the battle – and sometimes in place of the battle – they would have two men fight each other. One from each side, would fight on behalf of their people. They were called the *king's champion*, the man who fought the king's battles.

They would meet in the middle of a field between the two armies, and with everyone watching, they would fight to the death. Like David and Goliath fighting as *champions for Israel and Philistia*. Champions fought for a king, for a people, for glory.

In our first reading today, we see how God had placed Adam into a perfect world, a world of peace and prosperity, a world in perfect harmony with its Creator. God made this perfect man and called on him to worship the Lord his God and serve him only, but Adam did not. He worshiped himself and ate the forbidden fruit, and by doing so, he condemned the world to darkness, death, and sin. The enemy of God could cry out in triumph that now all the children of men belonged to him, or so it seemed.

But God loved them too much. So, he made a promise: *I will send forth my Champion, my Son*. What you could not do, he will do in your place. Because man could not live perfectly and serve God faithfully, the Son of God would one day become a man to do it in our place. So, the battle that began in the Garden of Eden would continue until today. Satan would go to war. For thousands of years, Satan has deceived us, he has lied to us, he has pulled us from the God who loves us. He has tried to lead us straight to the depths of hell itself. For thousands of years, it looked like humanity was losing the battle. People have believed his lies. If we had been left to attempt to defeat Satan on our own, we would never have defeated him.

But then one day, the battle changed when Satan picked a fight with Jesus, the Son of God. God now made good on the promise that he had made thousands of years before he took on human flesh in the womb of Mary. He became man with one mission – to be our *Champion*. He came to right what was wrong – to do what we had left undone. He came to do what Adam could not do. Our *Champion* goes forth to war!

The outcome of this battle would be different. Instead of winning, like he so often he 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 tempted repeatedly 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. Yet, Jesus is exactly the *Champion* that we all need.

Why? Satan is fighting a daily battle against each of us. Many of those battles we lose, don't we. How do we feel when we lose? Maybe, we feel a bit like Adam and Eve. I wonder how Adam and Eve felt on the first evening after they had fallen to the Devil's temptation. They could no longer walk beside God in the cool of the evening as they had done before. Instead, they found themselves feeling so alone. The relationship that they had with God had changed because of them falling to Satan's temptations. God felt so far away from them. God feels the furthest away when we're in the middle of temptations, doesn't he?

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 as a whole 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. Yet, he declares: **“Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”**

God the Father had not abandoned his Son. Jesus was not alone in that desert. The Holy Spirit went with him into the wilderness. The Father was giving his Son the perfect words to use against Satan. He told the Devil, **“Away from me.”** Then what happens? **“Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.”**

We've begun the journey of Lent. We travel with Jesus on the hard, but victorious road of the cross. This road may not give us all we think we want, but it gives us everything God knows we need: A loving Savior, a devoted friend, and a victorious *Champion!* That's what we need. That's what we have. Amen.