

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Lent 1 -- February 17th, 2013

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 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.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 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. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

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. 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.'" Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Dear Children of God.

It's ironic that the first promise of a Savior was actually addressed to the devil. Now certainly, Adam and Eve were there to hear it, and God offered this promise for their benefit, but that first promise of Savior was actually spoken to the devil. You see, Satan had just succeeded in leading Adam and Eve astray. He had tempted them to eat fruit from the tree which God had declared off limits to them. As a result, Adam and Eve fell into sin. That first sin resulted in horrible consequences for Adam and Eve and for all of their descendants, including you and me today. Indeed, it corrupted our entire world.

And so the Lord confronted Satan with a declaration of war. The Lord God said, "Satan, you won a battle here today. But I am going to win the war. You achieved a victory, but I am going to overturn that decision. You succeeded in enslaving my people, but I am going to set them free. You led them astray, but I am going to redeem them from sin, and from death, and from your dreadful control over their lives I am going to restore what you have broken. Yes, Satan," **I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.**" Genesis 3:15

Already back then the battle lines were drawn. God promised to send a deliverer, a champion, one of Eve's physical descendants, to come and conquer the devil, crush his head, and destroy his oppressive hold over us. This promise came true 4000 years later, when Jesus Christ, a direct descendant of Adam and Eve was born into this world to redeem us from the curse and the consequences of our sins.

This week we have entered the season of Lent. During this season of the church year we walk with Jesus to the cross to see all that he endured to purchase our redemption. Usually we focus on the opposition Jesus faced from Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders, or from Pontius Pilate and the Roman soldiers, or from the angry mob. But today we are going to focus on the key battle which was taking place behind the scenes, that crucial contest between Jesus and Satan himself.

In our Gospel reading today Jesus engaged the devil in battle. He endured 40 days of intense temptation from the devil, but he never sinned, not even once. No, Jesus stood strong, firm and steadfast against Satan's attacks. In so doing, Jesus won a great victory over the devil, a victory which would reach its final climax upon on the cross. Today, we are going to relive this intense battle and rejoice in the

outcome. For you see, Jesus won this great victory over Satan, not just for himself, but for each and every one of us. Yes, today through our study of God's Word the Holy Spirit leads us to rejoice that

Theme: Jesus Gives Us The Victory!

- 1. Over the devil**
- 2. Over temptations**

In our midweek Lenten services we are focusing on the last week of Jesus' life, leading up to his crucifixion. But our Gospel lesson today actually takes us all the way back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, right after his baptism in the River Jordan. Now you might expect Jesus to kick off his public ministry with a bang, by going to Jerusalem and meeting with some important officials, or with a grand display of his divine power.

But instead Jesus traveled very humbly and all alone, out into the desert to face 40 days of intense tempting from the devil. Why begin his public ministry with this time of testing? Well it really takes us back to the Garden of Eden where the devil succeeded in leading Adam and Eve astray. At that time, Adam and Eve fell for Satan's temptation, and so now Jesus, our perfect substitute, needed to face Satan's temptation, and not fall. God had drawn the battle lines between Jesus and Satan with his first promise of a Savior. And so the very first thing Jesus did as he began his public ministry, was to engage the devil in battle, and overcome him.

When asked what Jesus did to redeem us from our sins, many people will answer – Jesus died on the cross to pay for my sins. And that is a good answer. But that was just one day, Good Friday. What was Jesus doing for us the previous 33 years before that crucial day? Of course the answer is – Jesus was keeping the law perfectly for us. This too was vitally important. We refer to this as the active obedience of Christ. You see, our holy God demands perfect obedience to his law. However, all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Therefore we are deserving of God's anger and eternal punishment. So, Jesus, our substitute, needed to keep God's law perfectly in our place, and now God credits Jesus' perfect life and obedience to our account. Jesus did all the work, but we receive the credit. That's one of the incredible benefits of our baptism, for the Apostle Paul declares, **"All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."** Gal. 3:27 Yes, at our baptism we are actually clothed in the perfect robe of Christ's righteousness, a glorious garment we are privileged to wear our entire lives.

Now please, understand that if Jesus had sinned even one, if he had succumbed to even one of Satan's temptations, he would have failed to serve as our perfect substitute, and we would be eternally lost. So you can be certain that the devil was working extremely hard trying to get Jesus to trip up, even one time. But the good news I am proclaiming to you today is that although Jesus was tempted in every way, throughout his entire life, just as we are, yet he remained without sin. Yes, Jesus won the victory over Satan and his temptations, and that great victory now belongs to us today as well!

Let's review then the three temptations which Jesus overcame for us in the wilderness. In his first temptation the devil said to Jesus, **"If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."** Now at first glance this may appear to be a harmless request. What would be so wrong with Jesus making some bread for himself to eat, especially after fasting for 40 days out in the wilderness? I am sure he was extremely hungry!

The problem was that Jesus would have been misusing his divine powers to serve himself. Remember that his heavenly Father had sent Jesus into the wilderness to endure this time of testing. Jesus needed to trust his Father in heaven to provide for his needs, and not take matters into his own hands. Remember how often the Children of Israel grumbled and complained about the Lord's care for them in the wilderness. Well, in a similar time of trial, Jesus needed to remain strong, firm and steadfast. And that is exactly what Jesus did. Faced with this tempting proposition Jesus said "no". Instead, he replied, **"It is written: Man does not live on bread alone."** Yes, Jesus resisted Satan's temptation by entrusting

himself completely to the care of his heavenly Father. He refused to doubt or complain, or stray in any way from God's will for his life, but feared, loved and trusted in God above all things.

Notice also that Jesus refuted Satan's temptation each time by referring to a Bible passage. Yes, each time Jesus replied, "**It is written,**" and then he used the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God to drive Satan away.

Next, the devil led Jesus up to a high place and showed him in instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "**I will give you all their authority and all their 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.**" Now some people wonder how Satan can claim to offer Jesus the riches of this world in the first place. After all, the Bible teaches, "**The earth is the Lord's, and all who dwell in it.**" Psalm 24:1 But Jesus does also refer to the devil as the "prince of this world." All those who live only for earthly wealth and pleasure place themselves under his control. Basically Satan was offering Jesus earthly glory. Now Jesus was set to receive glory from his Father in heaven as well as his redeemed people, but this would come only after Jesus had first endured the shame of the cross to make satisfaction for our sins. According to God's plan, first would come the cross, then would come the glory. In essence, Satan offered Jesus a shortcut, an easy way out. He promised Jesus glory now, without the cross, without any suffering, without any sacrifice. Knowing the difficulties which lay ahead, Satan's alternative plan must have been very tempting.

But once again, Jesus defeated Satan's alluring temptation, using God's Word to drive him away. Jesus replied, "**It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only!'**" Someone once said that in every temptation Satan seeks to turn us inward, upon ourselves, seeking only our own personal benefit, regardless of the cost or the consequences. Certainly this was the case here. But Jesus refused to fall for Satan's trap. You see, Jesus didn't have a selfish bone in his body. He loved his heavenly Father and wanted to carry out his saving plan. And he loves you and me and was willing to do whatever was required to redeem us from our sin. The Bible tells us, "**No greater love has anyone than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.**" John 15:13 That is the amazing love which Jesus empowered to defeat Satan's temptation for our benefit.

With his third temptation the devil led Jesus 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. For it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in your hands so that your will not strike your foot against a stone.'**" Again Satan's temptation must have been very appealing. Jesus was just starting out on his earthly ministry. What better way to make a big splash and attract all kinds of followers than to jump off the roof of the temple and land safely in the courtyard below, with a large crowd of adoring fans eager to greet his arrival.

But once again, Jesus saw right through Satan's crafty proposition. For Jesus to pull such a stunt would be gathering a crowd for the wrong reasons. Jesus wanted followers to repent of their sins and to trust in him as the Messiah. He didn't want them to view him as an earthly bread king or as an entertainer performing stunts.

What's more Satan was taking Scripture out of context. Yes, God does promise to send his angels to watch over us and guard us in all our ways. But that does not give us the right to put the Lord to the test. God the Father had just publicly put his stamp of approval upon his beloved Son at his baptism. There was no need then for Jesus to put the Lord to the test, daring God to prove his love for him in this foolish situation. Once again, Jesus rejected Satan's temptation with a word of Scripture. Jesus replied, "It says, '**Do not put the Lord your God to the test.**'"

Then the devil left Jesus until a more opportune time. This too is important to remember. Jesus' temptations did not begin or end with the three recorded for us in the Gospel of Luke. No, Jesus faced continual times of testing from the devil throughout his earthly life. But in absolutely every situation, Jesus rejected what was evil and chose to do what is good. Yes, Jesus won the victory over Satan and his temptations. And as our substitute, Jesus' victory is our victory today as well. Try as hard as we may, even

as Christians, you and I are not able to overcome all of Satan's attacks. Sadly, we fall for Satan's temptations all the time. To be honest, we all daily sin much and deserve to be punished by God now and for all eternity in hell. Now, Satan, who at first entices us to break God's Commandments, then turns on us after we sin to drive us to hopelessness and despair. He wants us to believe that our situation is beyond repair. He wants us to believe we are without hope and will die in our sins. He wants us to despair of God's love and to wallow in our guilt forever.

But this is where Jesus gives us the victory over Satan and his accusing temptations. Yes, we have sinned and we do deserve to be cursed by God forever because of them. But we are not without hope and we don't have to despair. You see, Jesus went to the cross to make atonement for all our sins. He redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. So when our sins condemn us we will bring them Jesus, telling him we are sorry, and taking hold of his forgiveness. In him we find the peace and the hope and the forgiveness we so desperately need. Yes, by his wounds, we are healed.

And we also need to remember that the devil doesn't own us any longer. Yes, we were all born dead in sin and under his control. But Jesus Christ has set us free so that we might be free to serve our Savior with joy and gratitude. So the devil will continue to tempt us and try to take control of our lives. But we don't belong to him. We belong to Jesus. The devil doesn't call the shots in our lives. No, Jesus rules in our hearts by his Word. Always remember the devil is a beaten enemy. Jesus defeated him and when we rely on his strength, we can defeat him as well. In fact, the Apostle Paul assures us, "**Resist the devil and he will flee from you.**" James 4:7

And Jesus has also provided us with a powerful weapon to resist Satan's attacks. What is our secret weapon? Well it is the same weapon Jesus relied on to defeat the devil – the powerful Word of God. God's Word encourages, "**Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.** Eph. 6:11" That's why it is so important that we be firmly grounded in the truths of God's Word. That's why we encourage our young people to learn their memory treasures well. That's why a Christian education is definitely worth the investment. You see, God's Word can't help us defeat temptations if we aren't familiar with it, or if we don't rely on it when making choices in life.

The devil is a real spiritual enemy, intent on destroying our faith and leading us into false belief, despair and other great and shameful sins. On our own, we don't stand a chance against his attacks. But Jesus, our champion, took on the devil in battle and defeated him. When your sins condemn you and Satan accuses you, find hope and healing in Jesus, in the perfect life he offered as your substitute and the sacrificial death he offered to make atonement for your sins. When Satan tries to control you, ask Jesus for help. Rely on his strength to drive Satan away. And when Satan tries to confuse you and lead you in the wrong direction, follow God's Word as a lamp for your feet and as a light for your path. Yes, let us rejoice and move forward with confidence because Jesus Christ our Savior gives us the victory over Satan and his temptations. Amen.