

<sup>1</sup>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, <sup>2</sup>where for forty days he was tempted<sup>[a]</sup> by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

<sup>3</sup>The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’<sup>[b]</sup>”

<sup>5</sup>The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

<sup>6</sup>And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. <sup>7</sup>If you worship me, it will all be yours.”

<sup>8</sup>Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’<sup>[c]</sup>”

<sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you carefully;

<sup>11</sup>they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”<sup>[d]</sup>”

<sup>12</sup>Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’<sup>[e]</sup>”

<sup>13</sup>When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Seven years ago, I was standing on a beach in northern France with some pastor friends of mine. We hadn’t come to swim – it was too cold for that, anyways. We had come to that beach nicknamed Omaha because of the epic battle that took place there on June 6, 1944. You know which one I’m talking about? Operation Overlord. D-Day – the Allied invasion of Nazi held Western Europe that would turn the tide of the war.

Standing there, trying to picture in my mind how the Allied troops struggled and sacrificed to win every foot of beachhead on the way to freedom for Europe...I kinda wished that I could go back and be there when it happened. Not in the fight, of course – that’d be a bit much. But seeing the historic day from a safe and comfortable distance.

What about you? Any epic battles you’d like to go back and be a safe spectator of? Maybe it’s one of the bible’s battles – when the walls of Jericho come tumbling down, or when a shepherd boy named David felled the giant Goliath. Maybe one of the other big battles that shaped the course of world history.

Well, there is no more epic battle...none that did more to change the course of mankind’s history...than the one that Luke gives us a glimpse of in the gospel lesson this morning. This part of the battle took place in the desert of Judea. Not a military struggle, but a very real spiritual one between Jesus and the devil – and the stakes couldn’t be higher. Not Nazi domination of Europe, but the devil’s domination of your soul.

And yes, through scripture, you get to be a safe spectator this morning – see a snapshot of all Jesus did to save you from sin and hell. But seeing Jesus’ struggle reminds us of our own. That the

Christian life is not “safe spectator” – it is life in the trenches, a daily struggle with temptation, and the stakes are just as high as they were then. But you have a Savior who helps you in it - one who was tempted, but triumphant.

Luke wants you to realize how epic what you just heard was. Do you know what comes just before this in Luke 3? Jesus’ genealogy. Do you know who he traces it back to? Matthew goes back to Abraham. But Luke takes it back to Adam.

Because that’s where the war started. Adam, created perfect, like God. A rebellion in heaven that Satan couldn’t win. So he brought the fight to earth. Slithered in as a serpent to meet Adam and Eve at the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden. One question, one lie, one empty promise...and he had them. Not just them. Luke’s list of Adam’s descendants...the one thing they all have in common? Sinners. The devil had them, too. Born sinful, and successfully tempted to sin over course of their lives. Adam’s family tree, from Adam on, was a litany of losers.

Except for the most recent son of Adam on the list. He was also God the Son – miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit without sin. And for 30 years, he’s kept it up. The Father just said of him at his baptism: “Well-pleased.” No sin. He was the second Adam, the one God promised to the first Adam – the one who would come and make things right, succeed where we’ve failed, in our place.

Unless the devil has any say in the matter. One sin, and he’s no Savior. One sin, and he just joins the long litany of losers. So the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness, and the devil is waiting. **For forty days [Jesus] was tempted<sup>[a]</sup> by the devil.** Can you imagine that – 40 days of constant onslaught by the devil? God lets us see just the final three as a summary. And I think that each one teaches us something about the devil, ourselves, and Jesus.

Take that first one: **He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.** <sup>3</sup>**The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”** Here’s a truth we can learn about the devil: He knows your weaknesses. There’s a reason why he waited until Jesus had been fasting for many days before *this* temptation. He waited until he was hungry and weak...then tempted him with the most reasonable thing there is: Bread for a hungry man. “Father left you without food again, huh? Forget him. Make your own!”

It’s important for us to know this, too: The devil knows your weaknesses. You think he hasn’t been plumbing every nook and cranny of your life? Observing the weaknesses in your armor? He knows your weaknesses, and he’ll exploit them. If your weakness is worry, he’ll find all sorts of things for you to fret over. If it’s lust, he’ll stoke it. If your weakness is anger, he’ll find all sorts of things for you to get bent out of shape over. If your weakness is gossip, he’ll put eager ears in front of you.

What about that second temptation? In an instant the devil shows him all the kingdoms of the world. Says to **him**, **“I will give you all their authority and splendor...if you worship me, it will all be yours.”** The devil makes promises he can’t keep. Jesus is God, but he’s set aside his throne in heaven to suffer and die and save us. Then, he’ll take back his rule. The devil says, “Why go through all that? Just bend the knee, and I’ll cede the world to you – all its authority and splendor!” But the world isn’t the devil’s to give.

The devil makes empty promises. If you’re unhappy in your marriage, he promises you’ll find happiness by breaking your marriage vows. If you’re not content with what you have, he promises you’ll find it by getting and buying more. If you’re stressed, he promises escape in a bottle. But they’re all empty promises! Bottle promised escape...but leaves you with guilt, and soon instead of escape, a new

slavery. Breaking marriage vows doesn't lead to happiness, but broken hearts and homes...and no matter how much you buy and get, it's never quite enough.

He did it with Adam, too, right? "Eat the fruit, and your eyes will be open, you'll be like God!" No, that wasn't true. He makes promises he can't deliver on. Adam found out his lies were empty – but I think we can all sympathize.

What about that last temptation? The devil takes him to **the highest point of the temple. Says, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. <sup>10</sup>For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully..."** The devil knows God's Word. He knows it, and he'll get us to focus on one truth at the expense of others. Did God promise angelic protection? Absolutely. But he also calls us to care for our bodies. Devil left that one out.

We're familiar with this one too, aren't we? God will forgive you. True? Absolutely. But the devil uses that truth as an encouragement to sin. "What will it hurt? God will forgive you." God is love? Yes, the devil says, so he'd never send anyone to hell. God provides for you? Of course! So why take seriously the rest of what he says about being a good steward of his gifts?

It doesn't take too much time studying these verses, does it? To see that the devil has had a field day in our lives, too. That our story is so often, "Tempted, and failed." That we join the litany of losers that is Adam's family tree.

And that is why what happened in the desert matters so much! Jesus did not live a holy life to make you feel guilty by comparison...he did it to cover over your guilt. He did not undergo tempting by the devil to give us a "how-to" manual for beating the devil like he did. He beat him for you, in your place!

He was your champion. Are you familiar with the term? Epic battles were sometimes fought that way. One soldier from each side would step forward and fight to the finish as his army's champion. Whichever soldier won, his side won. He fought, but the victory he won went to everyone on his team.

That's Jesus in the wilderness! When he took on flesh and blood, he joined mankind's team, our champion. The devil tempted and Adam ate, but Jesus did not! **It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'** The devil gave his empty promises, and Jesus did not budge: **It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'** The devil twisted God's Word, and Jesus straightened him out: **It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'**

Tempted, but triumphant. And it changed everything. He came and did what we couldn't do. Was what we couldn't be. God says it was in your place, in your stead...as your champion. That victory he won that day, he credits to you. By faith, it's yours.

But this was just one battle. The war kept raging. Did you hear that last ominous verse in our lesson? <sup>13</sup>**When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.** It wasn't over – not yet. He'd return...with demon cohorts to frustrate Jesus' ministry. Even use Jesus' disciples to try to get Jesus to fall. But it was always tempted, yet triumphant. The battle would continue until that one day when Jesus suffered far more than temptation for you. Until that one day when he became sin for you. Made all our failures his own, and suffered the punishment we deserved for them, taking them away forever. Until that day when he cried, "It is finished." And it was. Sins paid for. Serpent's head crushed. Eternal triumph is yours.

Until you get there, though, it'd be good to keep that last verse in mind: **When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.** Like Jesus' struggle for your salvation,

your struggle against temptation isn't over until you die and go to heaven. Every day until then, you're in the wilderness. And if the temptations seem light now, he's just waiting for more opportune time.

Sometimes I don't think we take the struggle all that seriously. Live ignorant of it. Or think, "If Jesus sinned once, I'm lost. But if I sin once, not as big a deal, right?" But when we don't take the struggle seriously, we're playing right into the devil's hands. This is what he wants! Struggle less and less against his temptations until we're no longer struggling at all. Because then we're lost - his again!

No, when you take the threat seriously and realize what's at stake...is there any greater comfort than the words you heard this morning? **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.** <sup>16</sup> **Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.** He was triumphant, but he was really tempted. He knows the struggle you're in. But not just as a safe spectator, with you in it. He knows the help you need, and he promises to give it.

He's left the one, powerful thing he used to resist temptation – the Word of God. "It is written..." It's just as powerful today – as you use it, strengthens your faith to resist and your desire to do what is good. He's promised forgiveness and strength in his Supper. He's promised he won't let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but provide a way out for you. He's promised 24/7 access to his throne in prayer, and that he'll answer with just the gracious help for your time of need.

Make use of it all! So that it becomes more and more true of your struggle, too – tempted, but triumphant. Until the struggle ends...and, forgiven for Jesus' sake, eternal triumph is yours. Amen.