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First Sunday in Lent **February 18, 2024**

The Battle for Us

Jesus Overcomes Satan and All His Temptations

The battle between God and the rebellious angel Satan began soon after creation and Satan spared no efforts to ruin the world God had created. To undo what Satan had done God sent his only Son to assault and finally destroy the devil's deeds. The Season of Lent places that horrific battle before our minds and eyes. The Sundays in Lent recall how Jesus overcame Satan's influence on us and the Wednesdays in Lent take us to his ultimate battle on the cross. May Jesus give us grace to ponder this battle with somber but confident faith.

Sermon

Mark 1:12-15

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Introduction – Let's start this morning with some things we know. The Bible tells us that God sent his Son to our planet to undo what the devil had done. So what did the devil do? Well, we know. God formed Adam and Eve and gave them bodies and brains. He also gave the ability to use their bodies and brains in line with God's will. With this ability—the Bible calls it the image of God—Adam and Eve were to populate the globe so that people forever after could enjoy everything God had created. That's what God did.

God planted a tree in the garden where Adam and Eve lived and he told them not to eat the fruit of this tree. Not eating the fruit of the tree confirmed that they were completely in sync with God. It was like they were glued to God.

Satan used that tree to ruin what God had created. He disguised himself as a snake and he connived and convinced Eve and then Adam to eat the fruit of the tree. He coerced the first human creatures to do what God told them not to do. And in a heartbeat—call it a fruit bite—the image broke into pieces, the glue melted, and they were out of sync with God completely and forever. That's what Satan did. What Satan did changed everything for everyone including us.

God sent his Son to our planet to undo what the devil had done. The Son of God entered our world as a human child and his name was Jesus. We know that. He came to supply the obedience human beings lacked and to endure the death human beings deserved. Satan tried to stop Jesus ferociously and viciously. But when Jesus was done, when it was finished, Satan's head was crushed. At that moment the image was restored, the glue was reapplied, and we were in sync with God again.

The Gospel of the temptation of Jesus has been read in Christian churches on the First Sunday in Lent since at least the fifth century. The 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness establishes the 40-day season of Lent that we

still observe today. The temptation account sets down for us what we can expect to see in the weeks ahead. It anticipates how Jesus undid what the devil had done. In a very real way

The Temptation of Jesus Marks the Beginning of the End

Jesus began his work as Savior as soon as he was born. On the eighth day of his life the baby Jesus endured circumcision as he obeyed God's law and shed his blood. When the devil caused Herod to plot his death, Jesus endured the trauma of fleeing to Egypt. At age 12 he identified the importance of being in his Father's house. The Bible tells us almost nothing of Jesus' life between birth and age 30, but Jesus knew all along what his mission was. During all those years he was tempted as we are tempted, but he did not sin.

The time came for his ministry to begin. He appeared at the Jordan River and was baptized by John. The descent of the Spirit and the voice of the Father identified Jesus as the one God had sent to undo what the devil did. Mark tells us what happened next. **At once the Spirit sent him into the wilderness.** Lots of sand, lots of rocks, and lots of wind; boiling hot during the day, freezing cold when the sun went down. Water to drink, but nothing to eat. People didn't live in this desert. Ravens, leopards, and poisonous snakes did. But the Spirit didn't have to push because Jesus was ready. This was part of the plan.

And he was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan. Jesus walked into the wilderness and Satan showed up. Satan means adversary and that's what Satan was and is. He was a created angel but he rebelled against God and God threw him out of heaven. Forever after he has been hell-bent to oppose God and ruin everything God created. His most important target was Jesus. Satan needed to convince Jesus to disobey God. If Jesus gave in to even one temptation, if he broke just one of God's laws, the whole plan collapsed. There would be no perfect obedience in place of our disobedience. There would be no innocent death to die in our place. Satan attacked. Matthew and Luke mention three significant temptations as they tell this story, but Mark makes it clear that the temptations never really stopped; they came like bullets from an assault rifle. For 40 days: nothing to eat, impossible to sleep, encircled by stalking animals. Jesus didn't break; he didn't even bend. The temptation in the wilderness was the first foray and Jesus won convincingly. Even the angels knew it; **they came and attended him.**

After those 40 days, Satan took off but he didn't stop. He had to derail Jesus somehow. He came after Jesus in the blatant rejection of Israel's religious leaders. He attacked Jesus with the bile that spewed out of demon-possessed mouths. He even used Peter to try to stop Jesus: **Get behind me, Satan,** Jesus said to Peter. Even on the night in Gethsemane when Jesus contemplated finding another way to save the world, even in his agony, he obeyed his Father's will: **Not my will, but yours be done.** And then this perfect God/man **became obedient to death, even death on a cross.** He said no to every temptation, he obeyed every law, and he trudged to the cross to endure our punishment. The punishment was terrible. Remember? **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** And finally he cried out in a loud voice: **It is finished.** And he died. Three days later the angels came down from heaven again and they announced: **He is not here; he is risen.** That was the end. Jesus had crushed Satan's head. He undid what the devil had done. So the temptation in the wilderness was the beginning of that end.

When Great Britain went to war with Germany in 1939, nothing went well. The Germans bombed London to smithereens, their submarines sank hundreds of ships bringing supplies to England, and they invaded North Africa to try to take over the oil fields in the Middle East. Finally in the fall of 1942 the British drove the Germans out of Africa. Someone asked Winston Churchill, "Is this the beginning of the end?" Churchill replied, "No, but it is the end of the beginning."

When Jesus walked away from the wilderness, it was time for his ministry to begin. John the Baptist was in prison; it wouldn't take long before Herod cut his head off. Mark tells us what happened: **After John was put into prison. Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news."** So Jesus began to preach that his perfect life and his innocent death would pay the price for sin and cause God to forgive the sins of the whole world. Jesus' kingly activities would restore the image and bring people and God back together.

Jesus preached that message up and down Israel and he shared the message with Samaritans and Canaanites and Romans, too. People believed what he said and followed him. Jesus called apostles and prepared them to preach that message when his work on earth was done. Jesus crushed Satan's head on the cross and at the empty tomb and then he sent his followers out as witnesses in the world to share the good news. The temptation in the wilderness was the beginning of the end; it anticipated the final battle on Calvary and the resurrection in Joseph's garden. With that battle at an end, something new began. If we can say that the temptation of Jesus was the beginning of the end, we can also say it was also the end of the beginning. With Jesus' victory over Satan the spread of the gospel began. And now the good news has come to us.

The devil isn't dead. His head is crushed and he is mortally wounded but is still determined to destroy what God created. He comes after us. He is caged and chained and toothless and can't harm anyone. But if he can get one of us to come inside his cage or get close to his chains, he is vicious and murderous; he'll bite our faith off. Peter calls him **a roaring lion looking for someone to devour**. Trouble is Satan doesn't come to us as an adversary; he comes to us a friend. He doesn't come to kill us but to win us. He doesn't come to convict us but to convince us. We can all be sure that he takes no coffee breaks or vacations. He will pursue us and plague us for the rest of our lives. We've all heard his voice; we've all smelled his breath; we've all felt his slimy hands.

The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness marked the beginning of the end of Jesus' battle with Satan. The temptation of Jesus was also the end that marked the beginning of the spread of the gospel and our battle with Satan. Jesus' victory over Satan in the wilderness takes us to the cross where Jesus ended the struggle with Satan. At the same cross he equips us and empowers us to stand firm against Satan's temptations. And so we sing:

Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no till, they shall not overpower us.
This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done.
The kingdom's our forever. Amen.

This sermon was preached by Pastor James Tiefel.