Who will stand against the Old Evil Foe?

1. With his deep guile and great might
2. He shall not overpower us

A lifetime of slavery was the wager. Your freedom was staked to a contest of single combat. Your hero would face off against their hero. It was winner takes all, but it was a devil’s bargain. Their champion was a giant of a man. He stood over 9' tall. The armor he wore weighed well over 100 lbs. Who of us could even carry that on to the field? The point of his spear weighed as much as an Olympic shot put. The weight of the blow alone would crush anyone it met.

If victory did not seem impossible enough already, consider your own champion. He is only a young man, really just a boy. The king tried to give him armor and he refused it. Where is his sword? Where is his spear? He does not have either one. All he has is his shepherd’s staff and sling. But what will that do against the bronze-plated giant?

Yet this boy, David, triumphed over the heathen hero of the Philistines because his confidence did not stem from strategy and his strength was not found in his arm. His victory was certain because of the one who would fight this battle for him. David says: The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.

Today we encounter a great battle and a greater enemy. He is none other than the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, as John tells us in Revelation. We may wonder: Who will stand against the old evil foe? The Foe with his deep guile and great might is seeking an eternal lifetime of slavery from us. He is far more fearsome than Goliath, and we certainly see that here. At first glance, we might not be too impressed with our champion either. But, he fights for us with divine strength. It is because of him that the Old Evil Foe shall not overpower us.

We consider the temptation of Jesus at the beginning of Lent, but we need to remember that this event took place at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry. It followed right on the heels of Jesus’ Baptism, as Luke tells us: Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness. He went there to do battle with the Old Evil Foe.

But, shouldn’t Satan have known better? He was facing God’s great champion! We know that these temptations were extremely difficult for Jesus, and yet it was impossible for Satan to succeed. How these two truths can stand side by side is a mystery, but we must allow them to stand. Jesus was true God. He could not have fallen into temptation, but he needed to fight this battle for us.

Let’s now follow Jesus’ heroic journey. We see Satan’s deep guile and great might as he begins the battle against our Savior. The devil said to him, If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread. The devil begins where he sees a weakness. Jesus was hungry. He had eaten nothing for 40 days, and Satan seeks to exploit this chink in his armor. Satan challenges the declaration made at Jesus’ Baptism. The Father said: You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased. Now Satan begins: If you are the Son of God!

Satan is saying: If you are such a favored Son of God, why are you so hungry? You seem so alone, so abandoned, so hungry! It does not have to be that way. Prove that you are the Son of God! Use the power I know you have! You do not want to make God out to be a liar, do you?

Satan continues his attack. We hear: The devil led him up to a high mountain and
showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. The devil told him, I will
give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, because it has been entrusted
to me, and I can give it to anyone I want. So, if you worship me, it will all be yours. This
assault strikes at the very heart of Jesus’ mission as the Savior. Listen to what was promised
to him in Psalm 2: Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of
the earth your possession. Satan is offering all this to Jesus without pain, without suffering,
without the cross!

But this was another of Satan’s lies. The world was not his to give. It could not be
 gained by such an easy path. Paul tells us so in Philippians 2: Jesus humbled himself and
became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross. Therefore God also
highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name. Such exaltation
could only come from the humiliation of the cross.

Finally, we see Satan seeking to turn Jesus’ own weapon against him. The devil takes
Jesus to the highest point of the temple. If Jesus was really the Son of God, he could jump
down without getting hurt. God would protect him. After all, It is written! In other words:
Prove your trust and reliance on God and his Word!

The devil also attacks us in strikingly similar ways. Consider how Satan turns his
attacks toward us. Just as he questioned God’s declaration of Jesus’ identity, Satan does the
same to us. Did God really say that you were his child? I thought you were a Christian!
How could a child of God sin like you do! That is not what you are! You are a sinner, a
liar, a hypocrite. God could never love a child like you. You are lost.

Just as Satan tempted Jesus to take the easy path, so Satan entices us. Why carry
the cross as he did? That is hard. God would not want you to have such a hard life. He
would want you to be happy, right? Don’t listen to what he says; just do what you
want. It is much easier to walk that path, and more fun!

Just as Satan tried to get Jesus to question God and his Word, so he pries at our
confidence. Go ahead and make God who you want him to be! You can also make his
Word say what you want it to! pick and choose what you want. Be your own Bible; be
your own god!

Clearly, the Old Evil Foe with his deep guile and great might is seeking to devour us.
Who can stand against him? If we had to fight this battle by ourselves, we would be lost. But
he shall not overpower us, because we have one who fights for us.

As our champion, Jesus responded to each of Satan’s attacks with an invincible
weapon. This weapon was the Word of God: It is written. Jesus could have called on legions
of angels. He had miraculous powers. He was the ruler of heaven and earth. But with all
Jesus had at his disposal, he used the Word of God. This is the same Word that we have
today. It is not just our power for salvation, but it is also our power for daily life.

God’s Word is truth. God’s Word is power. Even Jesus relied upon it and Satan has no
answer to this weapon. His lies cannot stand in the light of its truth. His power cannot
withstanding its power. So Jesus disarmed Satan, defeated him at each battle, and never
wavered in his commitment to his mission.

We also have this weapon, and Jesus shows us how to use it. When Satan comes with
his lies, we respond with the truth of God’s Word. When Satan questions, Are you really a
child of God? Your Father says in his Word: You most certainly are! You were made so at
baptism. Your adoption papers were signed in the blood of Christ. Your home is now in
heaven with me!

When Satan says, Take the easy way out, God’s Word reminds us that our life, like
that of our Savior, is lived under the cross. Life will not always be easy! Deny yourself, take
up your cross and follow me!, Jesus says. But God promises that he will bring good to us even from the difficult times.

When Satan says, Form your God into what you want him to be and make his Word say what you want it to! We can go to God’s Word and find out who God is. In the Word, the true God reveals himself to us. In the Word, he reveals his will for us. When we oppose the devil with the weapon of the Word, he cannot stand! We have God’s promise: Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Satan must leave in defeat.

But what happens when we still fail? What happens when we do not follow the perfect example of our Savior? - and we know that this happens all too often! Has Satan won? Are we lost? That is when we need to remember the closing words of our lesson. When the devil had finished every temptation, he left him until an opportune time.

This battle did not end in the desert. Jesus would face the Old Evil Foe again. It is this final battle we remember during the season of Lent. Just as Jesus defeated every temptation in the wilderness and won victory, so also his victory continued as the battle was waged in Gethsemane and then on Golgotha. Because Jesus battled Satan for us even to the cross, we also have victory. There our forgiveness was won, even for the times when we fail to fight as we should, when we fail to wield the Word as he did.

Who can stand against the Old Evil Foe with his deep guile and great might? Jesus! He fought our battle and so our victory is absolutely certain. What a comforting message this Lenten season! This Foe shall not overpower us because he has been overthrown by Jesus. Because of all this, we too can come to the same conclusion as Luther did in the hymn: Our victory is won; the kingdom’s our forever! Amen.

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