Matthew 4:1-11

3/5/17

Did you come here today to see a fight? That is the last thing we were thinking about when we come to church. I also do not want anyone thinking we are going to be installing a boxing ring here in the near future. But even if you did not come looking for a fight, today that is exactly what you find! And really, that will be the case throughout this season of Lent.

In many ways the fight began long ago in a place so beautiful you could only call it Paradise. Things were perfect there. People had every advantage. God literally walked and talked with them each day. There was only one command for them to follow as a way show their love to their God. They lacked no good thing.

How sad and shocking it is that when Satan came looking for a fight, his victory was almost too easy! God’s people barely put up a fight and failed miserably and completely. It was an embarrassment, a mercy-rule game, throw in the towel kind. That is how bad that failure was and their failure is still affecting us today.

Today we take a look at another bout in this fight and what a contrast from what we saw in Eden! We go from Paradise to the barren wilderness. From every need filled to hunger and thirst and need of every kind. From mutual encouragement and constant contact with God to loneliness. From every advantage to complete disadvantage. From Adam to Christ, the second Adam, who now must battle the tempter. His battle with devil continues to affect us today too, and it influences our own battles with the tempter. In many ways, this fight in the wilderness sets the tone for this whole season of Lent as we see Jesus fight for us against so many different enemies to secure our salvation. Today you see how Jesus fights for you against the devil. So how does this battle unfold?

Jesus had just come from his Baptism. There the Spirit had come down; the Father proclaimed: This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Then the Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for 40 days. Jesus did not eat for those 40 days. During this time, he trusted completely in his Father to sustain him and his Father did not fail him. But as those days came to end, Jesus was hungry.

The devil saw a weakness and attacked. He said: If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. This was not just an invitation to dinner. What was Satan saying? If you are the one and only Son of God, why are you so hungry? You seem so alone, so abandoned, so hungry! It does not have to be that way. I thought you were the Son of God! Use your power! Use it to help yourself for a change; where is the harm in that!

But Jesus saw through this devilish lie. He did not fall into this trap of selfishness. He defeated the devil with a word: It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God.

Jesus defeated him once, but the devil was not so easy to discourage. In an instant, he took Jesus to Jerusalem. The devil has great power of his own. There they stood, perched on the top of the temple overlooking a drop of nearly 500 feet. Here Satan again challenged what the Father said: If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down. He continued: For it is written. Satan was saying: Let’s play it your way! I know the Scriptures, maybe not as well as you, Jesus. But I know them and I can use them. If you want to stand on it is written, let me help you. Remember these words from the Psalm. Aren’t you just taking God up on his offer; isn’t that a good thing?

But again, Jesus saw these words for what they were: a deathtrap for his mission. A
half-truth is still a whole lie. Jesus grabbed this powerful weapon away from the devil and
turned it back against him: **It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.**

The tempter tried one more trick. He brought Jesus to a high place to view all the
authority and splendor the world has to offer. **All this I will give you, if you will bow
down and worship me.** How could Satan think this would work? But think for a moment
about what he’s saying: You are the Messiah, right? Doesn’t Psalm 2 say the Messiah will have
the nations [as] your inheritance, the ends of the earth [as] your possession? Here they are! I am not even gonna put up fight. Here they are for a real bargain: no pain,
no suffering, no cross, no valley of the shadow of death. Just bend your knee. How quick!
How easy! How painless! And we are out in the middle of nowhere; who will know?

Again, Jesus defeated the devil: **Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.**

For those 40 days, Jesus fought for you against the devil. In this battle, he did not
just fight at your side. Jesus fought for you. He took your place. He defeated your enemy,
the devil. As we begin the season of Lent, we see Jesus begin his ministry by defeating the
devil for us. Throughout the season of Lent, Jesus goes to battle, defeating our enemies along the way.

But even when we see Jesus fight for us, even when we understand he could not
have fallen to Satan’s traps, even as he has secured this victory, we still have a problem.
The devil is still fighting, and now his puts us in his crosshairs. He turns his deep guile and great might toward you and me.

Just as Satan questioned God’s declaration of Jesus identity, he does the same to
us. Did God really say you were his child? I thought you were a Christ! How could a
baptized child of God act like you do! You are not really a child of God! You are a sinner, a liar, a hypocrite. And even if you are a child of God, God could never love a child like you. You are as good as mine.

As the devil charges at us, we reach for a weapon. **It is written,** isn’t that what Jesus used? But our grip on this weapon seems so feeble and the attack is so fierce. What does that mean again? Where does it say this? Why cannot I remember?

Just as with Jesus, the devil is a willing helper for us. He gets us to wonder what good are just words. Remember, Satan knows Scripture. He wants you to listen to him. He tries to get you to question what Bible really says, that some of the things in Bible are just nice stories, but really did not happen that way. Or that some statements are pretty harsh and severe and leads you to wonder if the Lord would mind if you bent a few of them? God is love after all, right?

And the devilish lies keep coming, especially when you are alone! This faith stuff is hard. Why not have a little fun? Why not do what you want? Do you really have to live it all the time? Put down the weapons for a while. I will even go easy on you for a bit. No one is looking. No one will know! Listen to me. How quick! How easy! How painless! And how wrong! Only the devil can make wickedness look fun and God’s loving protection look evil. Even if no one else is watching, the Lord always is!

The devil continues to fight and we are still in the middle of the fight. But the big difference is: the victory is won! The devil keeps fighting, but his defeat is absolutely certain. Jesus has defeated him. He took your place. He fought for you. Not just in this wilderness, the battle continued throughout his life. It reached to Gethsemane and Golgotha and finally a garden tomb. But Jesus battled on until he defeated the devil and
won the victory!

Yeah, but that was Jesus! Of course he won! He was the Son of God! He was, as the book of Acts tells, anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. As true God, there was no possible way he could fail! But he was also true man. As a man he could fall and then we would have no Redeemer! Even still, the devil keeps coming at me! Even if the ultimate victory is already certain, I still have hard fighting ahead. Does Jesus victory really make a difference for me? How does that help?

You are right; although Jesus defeated the devil, you are still under attack. But his victory makes all the difference! Notice how Jesus defeated the devil here. He did not use God’s power and might; he used God’s Word. He relied on the same weapon you have. That is the only weapon you need. The devil’s defeat is certain because Jesus has already defeated him. We have the Lord’s command and promise: Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Victory does not come from our strength or intelligence or cunning. Our victory comes from Jesus. When Satan sees the same weapon Jesus used, loaded with God’s power and promise, pointed at him again even in our trembling hands, he must flee. Jesus defeated him and he has no strength to stand against his Word. How important it is for us to grow in our use of this weapon!

How important to hear it in worship, to study it with others, to read it at home with our families! How important to have it in our hands often so it sticks and stays in our hearts and minds! Then we too can recognize Satan’s lies. We can be certain of God’s promises. We can be certain of Jesus’ victory over all our enemies.

Jesus fights for you, and this battle in the wilderness was just the beginning of Jesus’ victory and the devil’s defeat. When we keep his Word in our hearts and on our lips, the devil will fail and flee again. Jesus fight for you brings you a victory right now in your struggles and forever in heaven. Amen.

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