

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.

In the name of our Savior Jesus, dear friends,

“Once you start something, finish it.” “Be the first one at practice and the last one to leave—that’s what coaches want to see.” “If you say you’re going to do something, keep your promise”

Dedication. Giving your all. Perseverance. Faithfulness. Those are great qualities and generally accepted as things we ought to strive for. No doubt, you could tell a story or two about how you stuck with your piano lessons even though it was tough for you. Or you didn’t drop that class in school, but hung in there. Or you really were always the first one at practice and the last to leave. But you may also have to admit that you haven’t been perfect at it. You half-heartedly plunked the piano keys and didn’t really practice that much—it certainly wasn’t the best you could do. You’ve quit a thing or two also because you lost interest or you didn’t want to work that hard.

Can you imagine if Jesus were to have decided after 30 perfect years of life in this world that he wasn’t really interested in serving as the world’s Savior anymore? Can you imagine if he would have decided that he just wasn’t going to finish those last three years?

How thankful we can be that Jesus—true man and true God—was perfectly strong and dedicated and faithful to what he promised to do! When Jesus was in this world, he served sinners FROM BEGINNING TO END. He came to be the world’s Savior and from infancy until his death he lived for us!

Today on this First Sunday in Lent, we go to the beginning—not the beginning of his life, we just considered that at Christmas and Epiphany—but the beginning of his public ministry, the beginning of the last three years of his life. And the particular things we witness in Jesus will move us to thank him for doing what we cannot do in order to save us from our sins and give us heaven. Today we see how

FROM BEGINNING TO END

1. SATAN TEMPTED JESUS 2. JESUS DEFEATED SATAN

The timing of Jesus’ confrontation with the devil is important to note. Remember, Jesus was 30 years old. He had already lived a sinless life for three, mostly unnoticed, decades. But now some things were going to change. God sent John the Baptist to prepare people for Jesus’ arrival on the public scene. John baptized Jesus and these events before us from Luke chapter 4 follow: **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.**

The Holy Spirit filled and strengthened Jesus. It was time for a face-to-face confrontation with Satan, the enemy of God. It may seem curious that Jesus **was led by the Spirit in the desert** to be tempted by the devil. Why would this be important? Because God the Father wanted his son to defeat Satan! This was the beginning of a very public three-year battle with Satan! How fitting it is for us to consider these events today as the season of Lent has just begun, the season where we remember the temptations, the suffering and the death of Jesus. You might also note that Jesus was tempted by the Devil for the entire 40 days. Scripture relates just three specific temptations—the ones recorded here by Luke.

Some of us get hungry if we don't have something to eat for a few hours and we're "starving" if we miss a meal entirely. Of course some of you teenagers can't seem to go more than a half hour without foraging through the fridge and cabinets leaving wrappers and empty containers in your wake! So we may not have much of a concept of fasting. It's pretty uncommon for most of us to go without food for too long. But try to imagine...try to imagine how hungry Jesus must have been after not eating for 40 days.

Like a mountain lion eyeing up an injured deer, the Devil marks his prey. Seeing a hungry and physically weak Jesus, the Devil has just the right temptation for God's Son. **"If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."**

What was the temptation? What was there to fight? Satan was trying to get Jesus to avoid human suffering and stop trusting in his heavenly Father. Could Jesus rightly take a stone and turn it to bread and not be wrong for doing it? Yes, but not under these circumstances! Satan was tempting him and if he let the Devil dictate his actions, he would have sinned even before he began his public ministry and his path to the cross of salvation! 40 days worth of hungry—what would Jesus do? Would he trust in his Father to provide for him at the proper time or would he give in and avoid suffering and pain—the very reason he came into this world?

Jesus had you in mind as he fought this temptation of the Devil. You who are weak and give in when it is wrong to do so. You who are not strong and lack willpower when Satan tempts you. Jesus fought this battle for you right from the beginning.

"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" Jesus responded to the temptation with God's Word from Deuteronomy 8:3. It's interesting that God said those words to the Israelites who had complained about the food the Lord had provided for them as they wandered in the wilderness. Jesus would be content and patient and not complain but instead wait for God to provide for his needs.

Satan tempted Jesus and Jesus defeated Satan. How? You might think that it was the Word of God which won this battle for Jesus. Although that is a weapon that Jesus used, it was really Jesus' perfect trust in his Father. This temptation was really about reliance on God and Jesus had perfect trust in him.

You and I are to trust in God to provide for us just as Jesus did. We follow our Savior's example here, but ultimately because we sin by not always trusting God to give what we need, we need Jesus' perfection in this.

Nobody likes a liar, right? Being lied to is insulting. It causes trouble and heartache. It means that a person is unreliable and untrustworthy. We've all told lies and we've been the victims of lies. We may have even known some habitual liars. Unfortunately, I have known a few of those and it is infuriating. And it is amazing when the liar seems to be totally unaware that you and others know for certain that what they are saying is not true! You want to say, *"Do you really think I'm that stupid?!"*

The devil is a liar. The name “Devil” means “slanderer” but elsewhere in Scripture Jesus calls him a liar because that’s what he is. And he really proved it in the second temptation Luke records for us. **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.”**

Liar! Liar! Liar! Where do you even start with him?! How many lies did he roll into this offer to Jesus?! Let’s see—all the kingdoms of the world were NOT given to him. He could NOT give them to anyone he wanted to. He had NO intention of giving them to Jesus under any circumstances even if he could. And if Jesus would have bowed down and worshiped him, he would NOT have given them to him! Unbelievable! How stupid did he think Jesus was?!

Yeah, it all sounds ridiculous, but hold up for a minute. What was the temptation? What was the thing to fight? It might seem like this is about worldly power, but there’s more to it. The slippery, slimy Satan was sneaky in his attack on the Savior. He was making it seem like there was a way to get around all the suffering and the cross. Jesus came for all the people of the world, didn’t he? Instead of a three-year path to the cross, which was at that very moment lying immediately before him, Jesus could take a shortcut! He could become the Messiah-King he came to be without all the work and pain!

You probably recognize the danger here, don’t you? Salvation would NOT have been won had Jesus listened to the lies and given in. Satan couldn’t give the nations to Jesus and salvation would not have been accomplished. Once Jesus bowed down, he would have been subservient to Satan.

Just as when Satan offers *you* something that you want or are drawn to, he promised much to Jesus but the result would have been sin and failure. Death and the devil would have reigned.

“It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” The simple direction of Deuteronomy 6:13 was Jesus’ response. Jesus was not about to bow down to Satan and derail his Father’s plan to save sinful people.

Satan tempted Jesus and Jesus defeated Satan. How? Relying on God’s Word, Jesus would not try to bypass the path of serving and suffering that lay before him. He would only worship his Father. He would continue to follow the plan laid out to save you—you who are tempted by Satan and often given in as he promises you a short-cut to satisfaction, fun, joy, money, power, popularity if only you’ll cut a corner that God has established and told you about in the Bible. We are to follow Christ’s example in drawing on God’s Word for strength and answers to temptation, but ultimately we rely on our Savior’s perfection here to forgive our sins of this kind.

450 feet, about the size of a 40-story building, is a long way to fall. Some suggest that the spot on the Temple that the devil took Jesus to for this third temptation was a drop of that height down into the Kidron Valley below. That was not a fall he would have survived...unless...unless God’s promise was true. Since Jesus was quoting Scripture, Satan tried his hand at it: **“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.”**

IF he was the Son of God, how could Jesus argue with God’s Word and the promise of angelic protective care?!

So what exactly was the temptation? What was the thing to fight? Well, first of all, the Devil left something out of his biblical quote. He left out the words **“in all your ways.”** **“To guard you in all your ways...”** is the way Psalm 91:11 goes. That makes this promise a little different, doesn't it? The Psalm reassures the believer that God is watching over a person all the time and caring for them all the time. Satan is forcing a different meaning here. He is implying that if Jesus were to do this reckless thing—at this point in time—God would have to reach out and save him...because he promised.

But that doesn't mean that this temptation would have had no “pull” on Jesus. This is a serious challenge. Jesus was just beginning to show the world in very real and public ways that he was the Son of God. If he were to do this, he would show Satan that he was the Son of God! AND it would show his absolute trust in his Father and his promises. That's the way it seemed anyway.

But, because Satan is slimy and sneaky (did I mention that already?), there was a real danger here! As Jesus points out, he would have been foolishly tempting God and his love and promises by recklessly throwing himself down. And he would have allowed Satan to misuse the Scriptures. These things would have been sinful.

Jesus was thinking of you—you who don't always catch the Devil's Scripture-twisting or understand exactly what he's up to when he comes to convince you to sin. Jesus fought the battle for you—right from the beginning.

Satan tempted Jesus and Jesus defeated Satan. How? By not letting Satan misuse a truth from God's Word, by not letting him isolate one part of Scripture while disregarding what else God says, by quoting the other part of God's will on the subject, and by thinking of what his Father really promises and wants.

We are to do the same, following Christ's example of taking all of God's Word into account and understanding it correctly, but ultimately we rely on Christ winning this battle at the beginning because we often fail to do what Jesus did.

FROM BEGINNING TO END. At the beginning of his earthly ministry, Jesus battled Satan. He perfectly kept God's law because we don't. Even those few examples of the Devil's temptations, from among the many that went on constantly during those 40 days, remind us of how miserably we do against the attacks of the devil on us. Where we don't think through the consequences, where we don't have the strength to withstand temptations, where our eyes glaze over at the fool's gold type promises Satan makes to us, Jesus would not falter and he did not fail.

And this was just the beginning, the beginning of three difficult years battling Satan for the world's salvation. Not all of the battles would be face-to face, but the Devil worked behind the scenes on the disciples, through the Pharisees, in the crowds of people. Jesus would keep battling and keep winning until finally—at the end of his earthly life—he would willingly suffer and die on the cross to give his perfect life for sinful people. But the end really came on Easter Sunday when he won the victory! Satan and the grave were soundly defeated with an empty tomb and a living Savior who promises life after death with him for you and all who believe!

FROM BEGINNING TO END Jesus fought and battled for your soul's salvation. Look with love and admiration and thanks upon your Savior's battle. Trust in his forgiveness when you fall to temptation and learn from him to combat Satan when he threatens your faith and salvation. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.