

Satan Doesn't Have to Win

- I. **God's Son defeated him in the desert**
- II. **God's Son helps us overcome him in our lives**

During the Sundays in Lent this year we are focusing on several paradoxes surrounding the person and work of our Savior, Jesus Christ. A paradox appears to be a contradiction, an impossibility, or even foolishness as we heard in last week's Wednesday evening Lenten sermon. God forgives all sins and at the same time is perfectly just and must punish all sins. The Bible also tells us that God is holy and created a perfect universe. Yet evil exists. How can both be true? It's beyond our ability to understand, and because of that so many people simply dismiss it. They say, "There is no God" or "God must not all-powerful or he would prevent evil" or "God created evil".

As head-scratching as divine paradoxes may be to us, they show how weak and hopelessly limited our sin-infected minds are in grasping divine truths. Yet what is impossible for us to understand is perfectly sensible to God.

One such paradox is that Jesus Christ is both God and man in one person. We confessed it in the creed this morning, "Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary." We cannot nor will we try to figure out how this is possible. We believe it by faith. By faith we will stand in wonder and awe at such amazing love that would bring the Lord of Glory from heavenly bliss to live on this pathetic planet ruined by sin – *our* sin – where he stood in as our substitute. His sole purpose in coming here was to remove every trace of sin from our record so we could be declared righteous by God.

During his baptism the heavenly Father identified Jesus as his Son, as our chosen substitute – the Savior of the world. Matthew tells us that the Holy Spirit then came upon Jesus with power and immediately led him out into the wilderness to face the archenemy of God and man, the devil. Through this story about Jesus Matthew teaches us this morning that ...

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And I, the LORD, will put enmity (hostility) between you, Satan, and the woman, Eve, and between your offspring and hers (hostility between unbelievers and believers), he (that is, an offspring of the woman) will crush your head (he will destroy you, Satan) and you, Satan, will strike his heel (will make it painful for him). (Genesis 3:15 with my notes) That promise haunted Satan for thousands of years. Now that offspring of the woman was here. Only this time things were different. In the beginning Satan had slithered into God's perfect world, stalked God's people and approached them with his deadly package of lies. This time the Prince of Light kicked in the door of a world ruined by sin, marched up to the Prince of Darkness, and faced off with him.

You would think that because Jesus is God and man in one person, he would use his divine power to pound the devil to smithereens and be done with him. But he doesn't. He faces each and every temptation so that they would be real, and felt, and difficult, just like ours. He struggled through temptation so he could be our perfect substitute. The writer to the Hebrews said, "**He was tempted in every way, just as we are.**" (Hebrews 4:15)

After Jesus endured 40 days of relentless temptations, Matthew sums up three of the most intense as those days came to an end. **“Tell these stones to become bread.”** The devil urged Jesus to doubt God’s care for his bodily needs and to take matters into his own hands. **“Throw yourself down from here.”** The devil tempted Jesus to question the truth of God’s Word and dared him to test it to see if it really worked. And the third was an offer to have it all – every kingdom, every person, all the glory – without the suffering and the shedding of blood that Christ would have to endure – if Jesus would simply worship him.

How many times just this past week did that ancient Serpent slither into your home and tempt you to doubt God’s care for your bodily needs, and you believed him? How many times did you listen to Satan when he tempted you to take matters into your own hands, even though your God tells you to “be still and wait for him”? (Psalm 46) How many times have you dared to question the truth of God’s Word in exchange for your own truth? How many times have you reached out with greedy hands to take what Satan offered you in this world, all that is fleeting and transitory?

How many times did Jesus reach out for what the devil offered him? Not once. How did he do it? We fall everyday! God’s Son met each temptation, not by crushing this fallen angel with his almighty power as God, but by using what is available to every one of us. Jesus defeated the father of lies with the Sword of the Spirit, his Word of Truth. He depended upon it completely as his only weapon against the devil’s deception, **“It is written!”**

He never failed to trust his Father to provide for all his needs. He never abused his power for selfish reasons. He never misplaced his trust or misapplied God’s Word. He never fell for Satan’s false promises. And above all, he never stepped aside from the mission he came to complete.

All this was preparation for Jesus’ final battle at the cross, Satan’s “more opportune time.” He had done his worst in the wilderness, but now, at the cross, he has another shot at Jesus. His efforts reached their ultimate at Gethsemane, before the Sanhedrin and Pilate, and finally atop Golgotha. Here Satan figured he would defeat God’ valiant Champion. Here Jesus would die. Here the devil would secure his victory over God’s people.

But before Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit, he cried out in a loud voice, one word that sent all of the devil’s work crashing down around his head, **“Tetelestai!”** Translating the Greek into our English, **“It is finished!”** Satan is devastated! Not only had Jesus failed to fall into his traps, but by his death Jesus received the punishment that our failures deserved. He endured the torments of hell for us. He suffered the power of death and grave. And by his life and death, Jesus set us free from the devil’s power. He set us free from hell and grave. He secured our home in heaven. Jesus’ victory, and along with ours, is complete. Jesus proved that Satan doesn’t have to win. In fact, Jesus proves that Satan is the loser.

One of the questions that both Soldier and civilian alike ask is, “How will we know when we win the war on terror? Won’t there always be terrorists in the world?” That is a question we never have to ask in regards to our battle with Satan. Christ has won the victory. Through faith in Christ, we have the victory over Satan. Ours is the victory over the grave. Ours is victory over hell and ours is the home in heaven.

But won’t Satan always be in the world? Like terrorists, Satan will ever be creeping among us on this earth. Even though he knew he had lost, the ancient serpent did not slither back into his hole like Saddam Hussein. Satan knows his time is limited. Like a sore loser, he doesn’t want anyone to enjoy the beautiful blessings Jesus earned through his victory.

2. God's Son helps us overcome him in our lives.

Like a seasoned terrorist, who conducts surveillance on the troops' movements, Satan has been watching the human race for a long time. His troops have been watching and listening to you personally to find out what it is that you are most susceptible to. He knows where you are weak. He knows what appeals to you the most. He will use whatever weapon in his arsenal to tear you away from God and battle with all his might to bring us to hell.

But Martin Luther wrote in his hymn "A Mighty Fortress", "**Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us.**" We need not fear, even if we are surrounded by as many devils as there are potholes in the roads. How can we have such confidence as Martin Luther? Where do we get such power, if we are so weak and susceptible? That power, that confidence is found in Jesus' words to the devil, "**It is written...**" God's Word stands forever. God's Word is power. God's Word sent the devil running from the wilderness. God's Word will send the devil running today, tomorrow and the next day. You possess that same weapon which your Savior used to detect Satan's roadside bombs before they detonated. Satan doesn't have to win.

When we are tempted to lose our temper, lie to get out of work, God's Word is there to send Satan running. When the devil nudges us to go spread rumors, let indecent thoughts linger in our minds, or spend sleepless nights in worry, we have God's Word to nudge him back. He can tempt us to neglect worship or distract us from reading God's Word every day, but by staying in that Word everyday, we keep our hands firmly wrapped around the Sword of the Spirit.

Even when we give in to temptation and fall into sin – and we will – even then Satan doesn't have to win! We don't have to cover up our shame, blame someone else, or hide in fear of God's punishment. We can bring our burdens to God's Son, confess our sin, claim the victory he won over Satan in our place, and receive the full forgiveness he earned for us. Guilt doesn't have to end up in depression or despair. Satan doesn't have to win!

And when we finally face our last hour – when we are most vulnerable to defeat – Satan doesn't have to win there, either. By defeating the devil, Jesus destroyed the power of death and turned our cry of fear into a shout of joy, "**Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!**" (1Cor 15:55-56)

Jesus was hounded by Satan all the way to the cross, and until we see Jesus face to face, Satan will continue to hound us, too. We will be plagued by fear, worry, doubt, lust, and greed. We will shed tears of loss, disappointment, and regret. It will seem at times as if Jesus has won nothing and that evil rules. Another paradox! But when we suffer in times of temptation we remember that it is written: "**Because [Jesus] himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted**" (Hebrews 2:18)

Jesus comes close to you in that promise and whispers, "I am human just like you. I know exactly what you feel. I can sympathize completely with your weaknesses. But I defeated Satan for you and I will help you overcome him in your life. Be still and know that I am also God. I have put my sword in your hand and it will work for you just as it did for me. You tell Satan, '**It is written**', and he cannot win!" Amen.