

Luke 4 7-22-18

The Greatest Battle, Part One: The Greatest Enemy

Luke 4:**1-13** *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry.³ And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”⁴ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”⁵ And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.⁶ And the devil said to Him, “I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.⁷ Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.”⁸ Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’”⁹ And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here;¹⁰ for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,’¹¹ and, ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”¹² And Jesus answered and said to him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”¹³ When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.*

Ladies and gentlemen - this is it! The battle of the ages, the clash of the titans. The drama is immense. This is Skywalker vs Vader, Superman vs Luthor, Rocky Balboa vs Apollo Creed, Spiderman vs the Green Goblin - all rolled into one. This is the big showdown. It is high noon at the OK Corral. The battle we observe determines the course of human history, nothing less. In this corner is Satanis Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness, the devil. And in this corner is Jesus the Christ, Son of God, Prince of Peace, hope of the world. This greatest of battles is not really fought on earth. It is not earth wars, it is not star wars. It is fought on the plane of moral conflict. It is a battle of the will and it is fought with weapons of the spirit. Ephesians 6:**12** *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.* But it is the battle of the ages. Without doubt the greatest battle. A battle toward which we cannot be neutral. Our whole being, all our hope is wrapped up in the outcome. We are on the Lord's side, and we support, we trust in the Son of God. We observe with the most intense interest, the gravest concern and with

racing hearts we see and we learn of three things in this greatest battle: We look at the greatest enemy, we behold the greatest warrior, and we learn of the greatest weapon.

First, friends and neighbors, focus your attention on this corner of the ring, at the one called in Luke 4 - *diabolos*, the devil. He is the greatest enemy. It is he who attacks Jesus. Now we may speak of doing battle with Satan. That's okay, but I dare say that probably none of us has ever duked it out with Satan himself. Satan is not omnipresent. He can only be in one spot at a time. He may be very fast but he is restricted. You and I probably only struggle with second or third string demons. Jesus goes head to head with hell's top gun, the big cheese himself.

But wait a second! This is 2018, we don't believe in the devil anymore, do we? Here is a cartoon picturing Satan on a psychologist's couch and the doctor says, "*It doesn't matter if no one believes in you anymore. What matters is that you believe in yourself.*" Sunday school kids were talking and one says, "*What do you think of this devil business?*" The other says, "*Oh, it's just like with Santa Claus. It turns out that it's your mom or dad.*" Well, I don't know about your mom or dad, but of this I am sure - the devil is real. He is all over the pages of Scripture. If people don't believe in him that is just one more example of his work. He blinds human eyes and then he takes them unawares. He is often the forgotten enemy. But Paul said, "We are not ignorant of his schemes." Some Christians, in fact, can become unhealthily preoccupied with Satan and demons. God doesn't want that. He doesn't want you hunting for a demon behind every bush but he warns us I Peter 5:8 *Be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* Peter then says, *resist him, firm in your faith.* We need not be his victims, his vanquished. We can be the victors if we learn what we can of this greatest enemy.

We can isolate four truths about the devil in this text. #1 he is devious. He is devious, cunning, and crafty. He does not come out forthrightly and say, "*Hey, baby, how about a little sin, huh? What do you say we offend God's holy character and trample upon His law?*" He doesn't come with horns and pitchfork inviting you to hell. He comes as attractively as he can seeking to entice you. He is the world's greatest salesman and he knows just how to get you.

In Luke 4 Satan attempts two of his favorite plays. First, he speaks to a bodily appetite. You know what that is. Your desire for food, for drink, for rest, for sex. Does Satan ever get you through these appetites? Uh, yea. You know he does. What does he do here? Jesus has gone into the wilderness and has fasted for forty days; and in one of the great understatement in the Bible verse 2 says *when those days ended he was hungry.* And Satan takes advantage. He goes straight for what

looks like a weakness and says *If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread*. Now that had to be an appealing idea. That's how Satan operates. He likes to talk to your senses and tell them how good this or that would feel. *Wouldn't another half-hour in bed feel great! Wouldn't a nice slice of blueberry cheesecake hit the spot!* The devil entices, not through reason but through desire, through feelings, so that persons devoted to their appetites, persons without transcendent principles; persons with nothing to live for besides their temporary pleasures are his easy prey.

Satan's second play, which we find in our text, is that he appeals to pride. He wants you to get very concerned about your own dignity, your own glory. He says to Jesus **3b** *If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread*. And again in verse **9b** *If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here*. "If you are so tough, prove it. Show us what you got." Satan taunts him and tempts him to defend Himself, to glorify Himself, to stand up for Himself. He did that to Eve in the garden. When he tempted the first woman he said, "Look at the fruit. It is luscious." That is the best he could do since there were not any chocolates in the Garden of Eden. But he appealed to what? Her bodily appetites. Then he said of the forbidden fruit, "It is desirable to make one wise. You will be like God." He appealed to her pride as well. And so he does with you. *Hey, you gonna let her get away with saying that about you? Are you going to let that neighbor have a cooler car than you? Satan says, If you are worth anything let me see you beat Jason and Ashley up the corporate ladder, or the social ladder, or the religious ladder*. When you start thinking like that, know that the devil is tickling your pride, and friend, we have all got our share of the ugly stuff even if we express it in diverse ways. A devious devil knows this and exploits it. Beware!

Devilish attribute #2. He is deceitful. In fact, more than anything else Satan is characterized by lies. He is called the father of lies. He is called the deceiver. His arch-weapon is the lie and we see that again in the greatest battle. The very first thing Satan does, notice this, the first thing he does in his encounter with Jesus is to question the word of God. Just before the temptation Jesus was baptized and God had said, "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased*." Now Satan questions God's word. *If you are the Son of God*. Typical devil. Look now to the Garden of Eden and Genesis 3 where you find so many parallels with the greatest battle. Genesis 3:**1** *Now, the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"* What did he just do? He questioned God's word. God said, "You eat of this one tree and you will die." Genesis 3:**4** *The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die!"* Now he goes beyond questioning it

to contradicting it. However subtly it may be presented, Satan always tries to tell you, *God is a liar and His word cannot be trusted*. Luke 4:**5-6** *He led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶ And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.* Satan implies he has the power to do that. Some commentators believe that he does, but I don't want to get my doctrine of Satan from Satan. His statement in verse 6 directly contradicts the rest of Scripture, especially the book of Daniel where in chapter 4 an angel speaks to Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian king and says **17** *The decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes.* Daniel echoes the angel's line 8 verses later when he says again that God is the ruler of the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever he wishes. If God is true, then Satan is lying in our story. He always makes these promises he can't keep. He says, *If You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.* He makes that same kind of offer to you. *Spend more money and I will make you happy.* He masquerades as pleasure or leisure and says, *Pursue me and true life is yours.* He promises what he cannot give and in doing so he contradicts what? The pure word of God.

So, the deceitful devil questions God's word and contradicts God's word. His third strategy is to distort God's word. If you are loyal to Scripture you won't deny it. If you know Scripture you won't negate it. So, for you, he distorts it. He says, "Ole Phil there believes the Bible, so I'll use the Scriptures themselves to trick him." Look at how he tries that in the third temptation. **9-10a** *He led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; ¹⁰ for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You to guard You.'* For it is written. And then he quotes Psalm 91. **10-11** *'He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,' ¹¹ and, 'On their hands they will bear You up, So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'* You didn't know Satan was into Scripture memory did you? Sure he is. He walks around with his little packet of verses, his diabolic memory system, with his favorite passages for tripping people up. In this case, he quotes Psalm 91, word perfect from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of that day. So, how then is he distorting God's word? He does it by ripping it out of context and using it for something God never meant it for. Just because someone quotes a Bible verse to make a point does not make it right. There is a right interpretation and a wrong interpretation. There are many right applications and many wrong applications. When someone quotes a verse to prove a point check it out to see if it really teaches

what they say. Think it through to see if it really applies like they say. If someone notes that the Bible states that there is no male nor female in Christ, does that really mean that gender distinctions are all wrong? Maybe there is more Scripture to consider, huh? You see, the devil himself is in the business of using but distorting and twisting the Scriptures for his own evil purposes. Don't be ignorant of his schemes. Instead – beware! The devil is devious and deceitful.

The third thing we learn about the enemy of our souls is that he is defensive. Yes, defensive. Satan has worked hard to gain what ground he has in the world. And he is not about to forfeit anything or anybody without a ferocious fight. This is why Jesus says that before you can steal from the strong man, you must first tie him up. Who is that strong man He is talking about? This evil one who has real power on this planet and he's not going to let you just come in and walk off with his goods. Satan grows protective, defensive, and like a bear with her cubs, it is when threatened that he becomes most vicious.

Was Jesus a threat to Satan? Like no other. I John 3:8 says Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. In Christ, the kingdom of God is coming, the kingdom of light is invading. Does light threaten the darkness? That is why Satan launches a vicious attack on Jesus just as He begins His Spirit-empowered ministry.

Does Satan have a reason to be upset with you? Threatened by you? Most folks don't do anything that offends the devil. But you start really praying, or you start witnessing for Christ or training your children as disciples of Jesus and you might get the devil riled. That is a great thing to do. I hope you are motivated to frustrate and antagonize the devil, ever as you are motivated to please and glorify the Lord. But warning -- when you get Satan's troops feeling threatened you are likely to encounter some new temptations, some new tests. Be ready, be prayerful, and be armed by the word and Spirit of God.

Our fourth and final attribute of the devil is that he is determined. Determined. You might also say he is persistent. Not a quitter. We have described in our text not one but three of Satan's temptations. These may have been his best efforts, maybe his final attempts in the wilderness, but the Scripture says in verse 2 that Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days being tempted – apparently all the while, by the devil. The greatest enemy keeps at it. Then, at the end of the temptation story, what does it say? That Satan was cast into despair and never wanted to see Jesus again? It is true that Satan departed, but it says **13b** *He left Him until an opportune time*. The enemy would not be beaten so easily. He would attack again and again. He fought Jesus every step

of the way and he is still fighting against God's kingdom. As I began today, I described the great encounter in Luke 4 as the Big Showdown. In a sense that is not true because the battle continues on – it keeps going. Jesus faced Satan throughout his life and the same will be true of you and me. You will never have an experience, short of death, that will release you from combat with the evil one. He won't be gone entirely until Revelation 20 is fulfilled and the deceiver is thrown into the lake of fire forever and ever. Until then, you be steadfast and alert, your adversary prowls about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

There is a hymn that says, *Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide, in the strife of truth with falsehood for the good or evil side.* That sounds nice but it's just not so. It would be nice if all we had to do was decide once for the truth and have done with it – but the battle rages on. The challenges to our will continue. We are not facing a weak enemy, an easily beaten foe. We face the greatest enemy. We face the prince of darkness who is devious, deceitful, defensive and determined.

I will bring this to a close today, but next time we get to behold together and wonder at the greatest warrior. The best is yet ahead. So be here next Sunday for the Greatest Battle Part Two.

Today though, we conclude our service by going to the Lord in communion. This is where we take our eyes off of self, off of Satan and place them on Christ, whose living and dying for us mean far more than our living and dying for Him. I've asked Brooke to lead us in two hymns. One is about our battle for Jesus, the other is about His battle for us. (My Soul Be On Your Guard, vss. 1, 2, 3 and A Mighty Fortress, verse 2)