

February 25, 2007 (Lent 1)

Luke 4:1-13

For Us Fights the Valiant One

Introduction: Are you one of the 37 million people who like to watch Jeopardy every week? Of all the quiz shows that have ever been broadcast, Jeopardy seems to be the cream of the crop. Since it started in 1984, more than 300 other game shows have come and gone. I think part of the draw is that it is entertaining, and educational.

Do you find yourself looking forward to the Bible category on Jeopardy? It may be sandwiched between “nuclear physics” and ‘writers who published their second book in 1843’ but you know you’re going to know some of the answers to those quiz questions. There will at least be something you’ve heard of, and maybe even some you can answer before the contestants.

But the Bible is more than just trivia for a game show. It is God’s Word, which is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. It is our comfort, the Sword of the Spirit, which is to be used for the spiritual battles that we face.

Today, we see how Jesus made use of God’s Word to defeat the devil. For us Fights The Valiant One to defeat our enemy, and to train us to fight.

I. To Defeat our Enemy

Last week, we heard about the Transfiguration, which happened just a few months before Jesus would be crucified on Calvary. This week, our Scripture reading takes us back to the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Vs. 1 tells us that Jesus returned from the Jordan, where he had just visited with John the Baptizer. As he was coming up out of the Jordan River, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove, and a Voice from Heaven said to him, “**You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.**”

Directly after this, Jesus is guided by the Spirit to go into the desert to face the temptation of the devil. This is the last step that Jesus takes in preparing for his earthly ministry, when he would preach the good news to the people of Israel.

Luke tells us that he ate nothing for 40 days, and that he was hungry. According to his humanity, Jesus did have bodily needs like eating and sleeping. His physical need would make the tests that much more difficult. Jesus was tempted to misuse his power as God, to ease his own situation and be selfish.

These were real temptations, not just a walk-through, or an act. In Hebrews (4:15) we read - **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.** As true man and our substitute, Jesus had to face temptations just like everyone else, but as true God, he never succumbed to temptation.

You may be thinking, “Why did Jesus have to do this? Why did the Spirit guide him to the desert, and allow him to be tempted so harshly? Nothing to eat for 40 days?” Jesus did this, because mankind could not. The first account we have of Satan’s temptation worked wonderfully for him. When Adam and Eve, our first parents, fell into sin, the whole world fell with them. Since the fall, all people inherit a sinful nature from their parents. All people have to admit with King David “**Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**” A substitute was needed for mankind, because there is no way that mankind could save itself.

On top of the fact that we start out as condemned sinners, we add our own sins to the mix. We are looking specifically today at how Jesus used God’s Word to fight against temptation. How good of a handle do you have on the Bible? Could you identify where the Scripture quotations came from so far in the sermon? What about in our reading?

How often don't we fail to have the Sword of the Spirit at our fingertips? Those of you who are in grade school: is memory work a joy and a privilege, or is it an assignment that is forgotten as soon as it's done? Those of you in high school or college: did you view your confirmation as a graduation from learning about God's Word? When was the last time you just read your Bible? Those of you who are a little further removed from your formal schooling: how is your devotional life? Did you identify where the quotations came from in our lesson? More than just being able to quote chapter and verse, how well do we use the tools that God has given us in His Word?

When we look at ourselves in the light of God's Word, we realize how poorly we have prepared ourselves against temptation. And since we have not prepared well, we easily fall into temptation. We worry about money and food, doubting God's ability or desire to provide for us. We are greedy and power-hungry, doing whatever it takes to carry out our goals, our personal agendas. We fail to treat God's Word with the respect it deserves, and fail to use it against temptation.

Though we fail, we have one who overcame for us. For us fights the Valiant One. He overcame temptation, and succeeded in fulfilling the Law. He knew what God's Word was for, and used it perfectly for us. Jesus never doubted God's ability to provide, or used his divine power selfishly. He did not sacrifice God's Will to follow his own. He never foolishly tested God's promises. He had perfect trust, perfect humility before the Father's Will, perfect faith which used Scripture correctly.

He won our salvation. Jesus' victory over Satan began here in our lesson. He did not fall for the temptation, but conquered fully in their first confrontation. And his victory was finished at Calvary, his greatest test. This was the crushing blow to Satan's head, when the power of the devil was defeated through Jesus' death. Our salvation is a sure thing because of Jesus' resurrection, the stamp of approval that the Father put on his innocent sacrifice. He fought to defeat our enemy.

Transition: The victory is won for eternity, but as Christians living our Time of Grace on earth, the daily battle goes on until the Last Day. Now that Jesus has defeated Satan, he gives us the means to fight in our spiritual struggles every day. For us Fights The Valiant One, to train us to fight.

II. To Train us to Fight

We see Jesus overcome temptation in our lesson today. But he did not use his power as the almighty God to dismiss Satan; he used something that each of us here today can use. He used the Word to fend off the attacks of the Tempter, and trusted fully in God. Each time, Jesus answered Satan's lie with Scriptural Truth.

The apostle Paul called God's Word the Sword of the Spirit in Ephesians 6:17. A sword is both a weapon for offense, used to attack the enemy, and a weapon for defense, to block the enemy's attacks. And like using a sword, it takes practice to learn how to use it.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul says that **“all scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”** We, as a church, use God's Word in these capacities today. We instruct the young, and those young in the faith. We have Bible classes, devotions and sermons that identify sin, and offer the sweet comfort of the Gospel. We use God's Word to inform our lives of sanctification as we seek to live our faith.

So, how can we specifically follow Jesus' example, and defeat temptation with Scripture? When tempted to be selfish, 1 John 4:19 – **We love because he first loved us.**

When tempted to sin against the 6th commandment – 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – **Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.**

When tempted to be greedy – Psalm 24:1 – **the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.**

In all of these things, we must remember that God will bless our efforts. We want to do these things out of thanks for all the things God has done for us. So, we memorize Bible passages, not because we have to, but because it is a privilege to dig into God's Word, and carry those memory treasures with us. We have home devotions to spend some quiet time with God. We let Him speak to us through his Word, and give us strength, wisdom and love. We come to worship so that we may be edified and strengthened from contact with the Sacraments, and to enjoy the unity of faith that we share with our fellow Christians. We do these things out of love for God, so that we may be built up in our faith and equipped for every good work. We pray that God will continue to strengthen us in our struggles, and trust that he hears us and blesses according to his rich mercy.

Brothers and sisters, the victory has already been won. Jesus Christ, our Champion, fought for us to defeat our Enemy. Through Jesus' victory, we have the promise of everlasting life with him in Heaven. Until the Last Day comes, we continue in our daily struggle to live as faithful children. Jesus fought for us to defeat our enemy, and to train us to fight. Amen.