

Luke 4:1-13: How can we defeat the tempting power of the devil? Lent 1 March 10, 2019

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

God's grace and truth have come to us in Jesus Christ to defend us against temptations. Amen
Our Gospel lesson for the day tells us of Christ's victory for us against the devil in Luke 4:1-13
These are Your Words, heaven Father. Give us strength to fight against the devil through your Word...

Dear Christian Friends,

No one likes to lose. I have never met anyone who wanted to lose a competition. People often have all kinds of strategies in order to win. Even the devil hates to lose. He already lost to Christ when Jesus died for the sins of the world. But the devil is after all other people to keep them from Christ or to get them away from Christ. None of us are safe on our own. We need the help that only God can give through His Holy Word. Today we'll see how He helps us win with the question:

How can we defeat the tempting power of the devil?

First be aware of the temptations. They come in a variety of forms. Jesus later told His disciples to watch and pray. Each temptation focuses on getting us to disobey God. Jesus had been led to the wilderness immediately after His baptism. Our verses tell us, *"Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and ... [was] tempted for forty days by the devil"* (v. 1-2). Those temptations were serious attacks against Jesus. The devil constantly looked for weak moments in His life, not in His nature because He was sinless but in His conditions. *"In those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry."* (v.2)

"The devil said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread' (v.3). Here was a temptation at many levels. The devil questioned whether Jesus was really the Son of God because He looked so helpless. But, Jesus knew the truth. God, His Father, had just called Him His beloved Son at His baptism. Jesus took God's Word over the devil's questions. Jesus trusted in God to provide according to His timing. He did not allow selfish thoughts drive His actions. He knew that God was working everything for His good so He was content. Jesus summed it all up in quoting: *"It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone'"* (v.4).

What can we learn from this temptation? We all have sinful natures that are selfish. When we feel that we are missing out on having food, friends, or other good things, our old nature cries out: That's not fair! The devil tempts us to think that God doesn't care about us, especially if He lets us suffer. But we need to remember that God tests us to strengthen our trust in Him that He works for our good.

Along with the test, God gives His Word to give us a true view of life. It says, *"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"* (Mark 8:36). And Paul reminded us that we are united with Christ. So, *"set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God* (Colossians 3:2-3). Having less in life while having Jesus is so much greater than having more without Him. In the end, what God offers so much more for us than the devil!

The second temptation in Luke shows this. The devil took Jesus to a high place and showed him *"all the kingdoms of the world."* He said, *"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"* (v. 5-7). The devil lied. He didn't own anything on earth. God did. The devil had some influence on earth, but there was no way he could keep this promise to Jesus. The devil offered Jesus a compromise to avoid suffering and death and supposedly would make all nations follow Jesus. All Jesus would need to do is put His trust in the devil's lies. We know how far that got Adam and Eve – pain, fighting, and death.

Jesus refused the devil's offer! He knew the truth. He was living a humble life at the time, but He had every right to claim all creation as His own. God had to be first Jesus' life or everything would be lost! Jesus answered him, *"It is written, 'Worship the LORD your God, and serve Him only'"* (v.8)

God has called us to live at a higher standard than the unbelieving world. Jesus warned, *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it"* (Matthew 7:13-14). Daily we need to ask ourselves, "Whose ways are we going to follow: God or the devil? There is no neutral way. Jesus said, *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money"* (Matthew 6:24). God's Word can guide us. Paul wrote, *"It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of ... Jesus Christ"* (Titus 2:12-13).

The third temptation, the devil brought *"Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you.'"* Jesus answered and said to him, *"It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God'"* (v.11-12). Yes, God had given His promise to protect His people so they could trust in Him to provide. But it was not so people would foolishly try to take advantage of God.

The devil will try to get us to think that when things go wrong that God doesn't care or that we aren't good enough to receive His blessings. We aren't! But Christ has won the victory and has won the full forgiveness of all our sins. He offers His blessings that He won at the cross as a free gift to us.

Second, God's Word empowers us in Christ. Through faith in Jesus we are a part of His family! The Holy Spirit worked through water and God's Word to give us the washing of rebirth so we are made new in Christ. The more we have God's Word, the more we will see how privileged we are as Christians. Heaven is our home. We have a loving God who cares. We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength!

Yet, even Jesus didn't use His own strength to fight off the devil. He fought him with the same truths that we have from God's Word. Luther wrote, "One little word can fell him [the devil]. God's Word assures us that whenever we sin and confess those sins to God and trust in Christ, we are fully forgiven all our sins. The devil cannot accuse us or move us from our secure position in Christ! We need God's Word to give us God's perspective. In Christ, we have God's love that lasts forever. What can the devil offer better than that? Now, we will not see or feel or touch everything God promises yet, but God always keeps His promises. By faith His promises will be ours!

Here are Bible promises to help us when we are tempted. In warns, *"In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold"* (Ephesians 4:27). The Bible promises, *"Submit yourselves, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you"* (James 4:7) With God nearby, the devil cannot stay with us.

So, no one likes to lose. The devil will do everything he can to deceive us or get us to fall from the amazing grace of God in Christ. But, Christ through His Word will do everything He can to hold us in His nail-scarred protecting hands so that nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ. Stay with Christ. He will give you the victory! Amen.