

Hebrews 4:15 Skirmishes Lenten Worship 3 March 11, 2020

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God's grace and peace are yours for the battle from our Lord and Savior who overcame Satan for us. Amen.

God's Word to understand the devil's temptation and how to fight it is written in Hebrews 4:15

Heavenly Father, thank you for the victory we have in Christ in spite of temptations. Amen.

Dear Christian Friends under attack,

Have you heard the term *captology*? It uses technology designed to change people's thinking. Social media has used it to get us to put our pictures on Facebook, reveal personal facts about our vacations, what diet we are on, about our pets, or how frustrated we are with life. That technology is used to get us to buy things or to watch their commercials. The designers have learned how to use media to change us.

Changing people's thinking isn't something new. The devil has been doing it since Adam and Eve. He knows our sinful nature. He knows how to mislead us and turn us against our God's plans. If he keeps a score sheet of his victories over us, it would probably read: devil 500 and us 0. We must prepare for **Skirmishes!**

Without a doubt, the devil attacked Jesus just as many times. **1. Our warrior never gave in.** The writer to the Hebrews says it clearly: "*We do have a high priest ... who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin*" (4:15). When Jesus began his public ministry at age 30, the devil stepped up his attacks. The word *diabolical* comes from the name Matthew uses to describe the devil. Matthew 4:1-11 tells us Satan's psychological warfare against Jesus. First he tried to overpower Jesus. Jesus had been fasting for 40 days and was humbled and hungry, while the devil was confident and powerful.

In his first attack he basically said, "You are starving. You need to eat or you won't get to be the Savior. So, doubt God's care and turn these stones into bread." Despite His weakness, Jesus was firm and said: "*It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'*" (Matthew 4:4). Satan's second attack distorted the Word of God to tempt Jesus to go beyond what His heavenly Father said. He said: "Show that you trust God. Jump off the temple. He'll send his angels to preserve you. It will be an amazing demonstration of God's power." Jesus turned away the temptation by using his heavenly Father's words: "*It is written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'*" (Matthew 4:7).

Satan chose another way to get into Jesus' head to make Him sin. So many people love the world's wealth more than God. He told Jesus, "God isn't going to give you wealth in your life. You're better than this. Think of all the good you could do with wealth. Worship me and it's yours!" Jesus responded, "*Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only*" (Matthew 4:10). Though weak, Jesus drove Satan away. Jesus stayed strong through it all! The skirmish ended with the score: Satan: 0, Jesus: Won! And there is another comfort.

2. Jesus understands our temptations. "*We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses...*" (4:15). Satan enlisted help against Jesus: the former high priest, Annas, and current high priest, Caiaphas. They were disloyal to God and they failed in their role as high priests. Jesus was our perfect high priest. He followed God's plan precisely, even allowing Himself to be sacrificed for our sin. Our Great High Priest prays on our behalf every day because His heart goes out to us in our weaknesses. He experienced temptations just like us. He knows what it feels like to be vulnerable to temptations that pry us from God.

What temptations are we struggling with? Where has Satan found our vulnerable spots? In a national survey on temptation, people said they struggled most with 1. worry 2. lack of self-control (eating too much, overspending) 3. lust (for a person or for things they should not have) and 4. lying/ cheating. Amazingly, when asked why they gave in to temptation, a few said that it got them away from a dull life. But most said they didn't know to stop (<https://www.barna.com> - temptation).

We are tempted by a many things. We know what it means to fall into sin. If our sinful words and actions didn't condemn us enough, our thoughts are often worse! If there were a brain scanning tool that revealed our thoughts, how shocked people would be! What would it reveal today as we sit here in worship? Do we lose concentration by worrying about bills or our problems or wondering why people are missing the service? Satan wants to distract us. He uses temptation as a sort of virus in our minds to weaken our faith. Don't give up! Remember Jesus! *"We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way..." (4:15).*

3. He won every skirmish for us. Every minute during his life on earth Jesus kept God's will perfectly in thought, word, and action. He was a real person (100 % God and 100 % man). He did not have a sinful nature like us. He was pure like Adam was originally. Jesus succeeded where Adam failed. He remained pure his whole life! *"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work"* (John 4:34). He loved to do his heavenly Father's will! He was God's Son and loved to talk with his Father constantly.

The good news is that Jesus didn't come to this earth just to keep commandments. It wasn't only an exercise for Him. He faced those daily battles and the final battle with the devil because none of us could do it. Have you seen the commercial where a doctor talks to a patient and says, "I hope I can get this surgery right now that I have my practice back!" The patient wonders what will happen to him. There would be no wondering for people if Jesus was only pretty good. We wouldn't be able to stand before God without being condemned.

Jesus is our perfect hero, qualified to take our place on Judgment Day. We are covered, clothed, and protected under the garment of our great warrior's perfect life. His victory is ours so that we stand forgiven and holy before God. Yet we struggle in our efforts to remain faithful to Him. We're in a war not against economics or the coronavirus, but a spiritual battle. We've lost so many conflicts to the devil and would die in our sins were it not for Jesus. When we think of the judgment that we should receive, we see how massive Jesus' battle with temptation and sin really was! What a great warrior we have!

Our great hero has not left us alone to face the temptations and trials of our enemy. He promises to protect us and rule over all things for our good. When we face temptation, he has our back. *"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will provide a way out so that you can endure it"* (1 Corinthians 10:13). He also tells us to pray for his help when we are struggling.

How good to know that when we hurt, Jesus feels our pain. When we have problems, he experienced many of the same problems, too. He was despised by his enemies and rejected by people. When we pray to him, we are not talking to some far-off God. He hears our concerns and can relate. He is one of us. Over and over again, his words and his life reinforce how great his love is for us.

And most importantly, we take comfort in the fact that Jesus has taken away the guilt of every sin by offering the sacrifice of his perfect life on our behalf. God has forgiven all our sins, including every time we have fallen to temptation. But in Christ, we can still sing these words: *"Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged, take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness, take it to the Lord in prayer"* Amen. (ELH 385 vs 2)