



Luke 4:1-13

Lent 1, March 9, 2025
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Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where he was tempted by the Devil for forty days. He did not eat anything during those days. When they came to an end, he was hungry. ³ The Devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” ⁴ Jesus answered him, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.’” ⁵ The Devil led him up to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶ The Devil told him, “I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, because it has been entrusted to me, and I can give it to anyone I want. ⁷ So, if you worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸ Jesus answered him, “It is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” ⁹ The Devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ because it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you. ¹¹ And, they will lift you up with their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” ¹² Jesus answered him, “It says: ‘You shall not test the Lord your God.’” ¹³ When the Devil had finished every temptation, he left him until an opportune time.

Animal attacks on humans are not all that rare; perhaps you’ve been bitten by a dog or cat that didn’t like what you were doing. And that type of attack can be painful, but it’s not exactly life-threatening. Animals *defending* themselves when they feel threatened, that’s not unusual. But animals actually *hunting* humans, now that’s a bit more rare. It does happen sometimes. Around the world, when predatory animals face a food shortage of some kind, *sometimes* they will start to make humans their meal of choice. When that happens, they become known as “man-eaters.”

There was a famous man-eater that lived in India in the early 1900’s. It was a leopard known as the Leopard of Rudraprayag. Over an 8-year span of time, this particular jungle cat is believed to have killed and eaten over 400 people. A British naturalist and author by the name of Jim Corbett finally hunted the cat down and killed it, and then he wrote a book about this particular leopard and its hunting methods. He detailed how the cat would primarily look for unsuspecting humans in the jungle at night, and if that failed, he would actually venture into villages, clawing at doors and windows, trying to find a weak spot as an entry point.

Can you imagine if you were in one of those houses at night? Imagine if you could hear a giant, man-eating jungle cat outside scratching at your door, pawing at the windows, desperately trying to make you its next meal. Not a very pleasant thought! “Thanks for putting these images in my mind this morning, Pastor,” right? Well, you’re welcome! I want you to picture this, and I want you to be troubled by these things. I want you to get a full and clear picture of just how terrifying this type of enemy would be, because this is exactly how God paints the picture of our adversary the devil!

The Apostle Peter warns us, **“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”** (1 Peter 5:8) With his temptations, Satan is constantly circling you, scratching and clawing and trying to find some weakness. He wants to maul you with sin. Ideally, he’d love nothing more than to make you his next meal, devouring your faith completely and dragging you to hell to suffer together with him. And the *scariest* part of all of this is realizing that the devil has been successful with us, many times.

How many times has Satan broken through your defenses? It doesn't take him too much effort to work his way into our hearts, does it? We've given in, succumbing to temptation so many times, that perhaps we find ourselves feeling helpless and defeated due to our sins. But there is some brighter news for you this morning: Victory can still be yours. Jesus Christ came to earth to take on that roaring lion for you, and, in your place, He won. The theme we'll be considering this morning is:

“The Roaring Lion Meets His Match”

As your Champion, Jesus beat the devil's temptation to:

I. Distrust His Father's Will II. Take the Easy Way Out III. Put the Father to the Test

During Jesus' passion, that is the week before His death, there was a titanic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. This was the epic battle between Christ and the devil for the souls of men and women around the world. So today, on this first Sunday in Lent, we are focusing on the opening battle of that war. The roaring lion arrived at Jesus' doorstep and started probing, trying to find a way in. The devil knew that if he could penetrate the defenses of the *Christ*, then he would win the soul of every man, woman, and child ever born. So his first temptation was cunningly simple: ***“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”***

As always, the devil's temptation begins by raising a cloud of doubt: “Are you really the Son of God? If you are, then prove it!” And how easy it would have *been* for Jesus to prove it! Turning a stone into bread? Easy! Just a little while after this, Jesus would turn five loaves of bread and two small fish into enough food to feed over 5,000 people! A stone into bread would be *easy* proof for Jesus to provide. And Jesus was certainly hungry too. He'd gone without food in the wilderness for forty days. Turning a stone into bread, maybe He could finally fill his stomach! But following through on the devil's challenge now wouldn't have anything to do with saving mankind. It would only be to satisfy and prove Himself. And worse, it would mean obeying Satan rather than God.

So, Satan *hoped* this temptation would work on Jesus, but he *knows* how well it works on us. How easily the devil can get us to concentrate on our grumbling stomachs—you know, things like our monthly paychecks, our jobs, getting the things we feel we so desperately need. We focus on these things and tend to forget about the God who promises to provide. Instead, we place undue trust in what we can *see*—in our monthly paycheck, in that bank account balance, in our insurance policies. We'd much rather put our trust in our *own* abilities to provide, since we're in control of that—or at least we *think* we are. Yes, Satan makes hay with this temptation around us. When we should be seeking *first* the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, Satan has us looking down at our hands, fretting and worrying, “What will we eat, what will we drink, what will we wear?” Yes, with this particular temptation the roaring lion has breached our defenses many times.

But in Christ Jesus, the **Roaring Lion Met His Match**. Tempted to distrust His Father, Jesus instead shows supreme trust in God. He quotes God's Word, quickly turning the devil away, ***“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word of God.”*** He points to the Bible and rightly identifies it as the best weapon available to combat the devil's temptations. He would not trust in His own abilities—though His own abilities were great!—instead, He trusted in the Word of His Father in Heaven. This is the answer we have so often failed to give, and so Jesus—our Champion—He gives it instead.

Now, Satan wasn't done with Jesus, not by a long shot. He couldn't give up that easily. Like the meat-eating predator that he is, he continues to prowl, probing for weakness. And so comes the next temptation. In some way or another, he transports Jesus to a mountaintop, and in an instant, Satan makes all the kingdoms of the world and their riches flash before Jesus' eyes. And here comes the temptation: ***"I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, because it has been entrusted to me, and I can give it to anyone I want. So, if you worship me, it will all be yours."***

You know, Jesus calls the devil ***"a liar, and the father [of lies]."*** (John 8:44) As such, we can expect him to always be lying. But one thing that makes his temptations so effective is that there's usually a little truth mixed in with the lie. Of course, he was *lying* when He told Jesus he had the power to give the world to Him—this world does not belong to Satan, as ***"the Earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."*** (Psalm 24:1) But the part about Jesus *receiving* the kingdoms of the world—well, that part actually *was* true! That's exactly what Jesus would receive after He completed His earthly mission. This was promised in the 2nd Psalm: ***"You are my Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession."*** (v. 7-8)

And there-in lies the strength of this temptation; Satan was offering Jesus the easy way out. "Hey, you're going to be the Lord of heaven and earth one day anyway, right? Here's a shortcut! Why go through all that pain? You know what's left to come. The whips, the spitting, the crown of thorns, the nails—do you *really* want to go through all that? Just bow to me and skip right past it all!"

Sadly, that's another temptation of Satan that works *very* well on *us*. When the Lord lays trials across our path, when God gives us crosses to bear—don't we usually want to just dump them off and find an easy way out? When we know the hard road that God lays before us, here Satan comes with a nice little shortcut! Tax Day is approaching, wouldn't it be easy to flub a few numbers here and there, an easy shortcut to more money in your pocket? On Sunday mornings, boy, sometimes it takes so much effort to make it to church. There's always next week! Why not stay in bed today, avoid the hassle?

Yes, for us, when it comes to obeying God or following the shortcuts of the devil, the easy way out often seems very alluring. But Your Savior stood firm in the face of temptation. Jesus answered, ***"It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*** How many times could I have answered the same way, but instead followed *Satan's* word? It's more times than I can count, and I'm sure it's the same for each of you. But for every time *we* failed, Jesus succeeded. He never took the easy way out. He refused to take a shortcut, even when His road would lead Him to the cross. Jesus knew that sacrificing His life on that cross was the *only* way to redeem us from our sins.

So, Jesus swatted away the devil's temptation again, but the devil wouldn't give up. Twice beaten back, the lion roared again and tried a different approach. Next, he brought Jesus to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said, ***"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, because it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you.' And, 'They will lift you up with their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"*** This time, Satan was tempting Jesus to put His *Father* to the test. He couldn't shake Jesus' trust in His Father, so he's coming from a different angle. Basically, "If you trust your Father so much, prove it! Throw yourself down! After all, doesn't the Bible say that God's angels will protect you?"

And of course, the Bible does say that. In fact, the devil is quoting *directly* from the 91st Psalm. God has promised that His angels will protect us in all our ways, and that nothing can happen to us apart from His will for our lives. But there's a difference between *trusting* in God's protection and intentionally *testing* God's protection. I heard an older lady put it this way once, which made me chuckle: "When you drive over the speed limit, don't expect the angels to be riding on your fenders." In other words, don't tempt God. Don't *test* God's protection.

So, Jesus quoted Scripture right back to the devil, only He used it correctly. And ***"Jesus answered him, 'It says: "You shall not test the Lord your God."'"*** Once again, Jesus resisted the temptation. Once again, He took our place and gave Satan the right answer, where we have so often given the wrong one. The lion was repulsed. There in the wilderness, our Champion stood up to the devil and won a great victory over him. And think about what this means, that we have a *Champion* standing up to Satan for us. Think about David and Goliath—when David defeated Goliath in the Valley of Elah, it was the *whole* Israelite army that was victorious. Why? Because David was fighting as their "champion," fighting on their behalf. And the same is true of your relation to Jesus. The good news this Lenten season is that *Jesus was your* Champion. When He battled the devil there in the wilderness, He was fighting on your behalf. When He gave the good answer of God's Word, that was *your* good answer. Because *Jesus* had a perfect track record against temptation, it's now as if *you* do as well.

Jesus' victory is *our* victory. We who have so often given in to temptation and hung our heads in defeat, may today claim that victory as our very own and rejoice in it. It was not the *final* victory; only a foreshadowing of it. But *on* Calvary's cross, His work as our substitute, as our Champion, would be finished, and with it our record of failure and sin would be blotted out forever.

The hungry lion is still prowling, however, and with His temptations, the devil has defeated us many times. But bear this fact in mind: he has not defeated *our* *Champion*. And so, we may look to Jesus for righteousness, for forgiveness, and for help with temptation. The Book of Hebrews says, ***"Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."*** (2:17-18)

One Christian writer described it this way: when tempted, we must learn the lesson of the dog. Anyone who has trained a dog to obey knows this scene. A bit of meat is placed on the floor near the dog and the master says, "No!" which the dog knows means that he can't touch it. The dog will usually take his eyes off the food, because the temptation to disobey would be too great, and instead will fix his eyes on his master's face. God grant that we may all learn the lesson of the dog, and learn to turn our eyes *away* from the temptations of this world, and look into the loving and gracious face of our Master, Jesus Christ. For there we will ever find pardon, and peace, and everlasting life! Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.