

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The wilderness temptation of Jesus is familiar to us. We hear it each year as we begin the season. We hear it from Matthew, from Mark, and this year from Luke. Matthew and Luke have similar accounts with the last two temptations reversed. Mark's account is the briefest and doesn't identify the kinds of temptations Jesus endured, but it's more violent — Jesus is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness; and Mark's mention of wild beasts makes it seem more dangerous, though surely battling against the devil himself is dangerous enough.

Reviewing briefly the temptations in Luke, the devil began with a temptation aimed at Jesus' flesh. Jesus had been without food for forty days and "*was hungry*" Luke reports. Therefore, the devil tempted Jesus to use divine power to turn the stones into bread, if He's really the Son of God. Jesus rebuffed the devil with the Scriptures. "*It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'*"

In the devil's next attack against Jesus, he tried to tempt Jesus to find an easier way to accomplish His divine purpose, one that avoided suffering and death. The authority and glory of this world "*have been delivered to me,*" the devil asserted. "I can give it to you, Jesus, if only you bow down and worship me." But the devil was lying. Jesus as the Son of God had the real authority, and He would soon demonstrate it over the devil's minions. The people would marvel as He cast out demons, saying, "*with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out*" (Luke 4:36). Here, Jesus rebuffed the devil, again with Scripture: "*It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'*"

The devil's final attack tested Jesus' trust in His Father. Was Jesus really the Father's beloved Son as the Father had announced at Jesus' baptism? Was He God's own Son, His "*chosen one,*" as we heard last week the Father proclaim from the Mount of Transfiguration. Then let Him prove it, the devil tempted. Let God prove it by protecting Jesus, bearing Him up as He jumped from the temple's pinnacle and hurtled toward the ground. But Jesus did not question His Father's love or His faithfulness. He rebuffed the devil's scheme a third time with Scripture: "*It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'*" Jesus did not.

Jesus did not succumb to any of the devil's temptations, though He shares with us the same weak flesh. He "*likewise partook of the same*" "*flesh and blood*" as we have (Heb. 2:14), was "*tempted*" in weakness, just "*as we are*" (Heb. 4:15). When He was tempted, it was no facade. He was not play-acting. As the writer to the Hebrews testifies: He even "*suffered when tempted*" (Heb. 2:18). Yet, He remained "*without sin*" (Heb. 4:15).

And Jesus' obedience redounds to us. What would it have meant if Jesus had misused His Sonship to turn those stones to bread? What would it have meant if Jesus had forsaken His purpose as the Father's beloved Son to pass through suffering and death to be our Savior? What would it have meant if Jesus had distrusted the love and faithfulness of His Father that He should have to put Him to the test?

What would it have meant if Jesus had succumbed to the devil's wiles like the first Adam did. For the first Adam fell prey; he sinned, and so do all his offspring. Likewise, Adam died, and now "*death [has] spread to all men because all [have] sinned*" (Rom. 5:12). If Jesus, the "*last Adam*" (1 Cor. 15:45) had succumbed and sinned, then His death would have been merely tragic; then He would have atoned for no one, for the sufficient sacrifice to "*take[] away the sin of the world,*" was "*the Lamb of God*" (John 1:29), "*a lamb without blemish or spot*" (1 Pet. 1:19); then God would not have raised Him from the dead; then Jesus would have been a mere "*man of dust*" just as we are, lying still in the grave, and we would still be in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17). Our faith would be worthless, and "*we [would be] of all people most to be pitied*" (1 Cor. 15:19).

Now I know that most of you recognize some of the language I just used as coming from 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's great resurrection chapter. It's not Easter yet. But this is the point: there is no resurrection of Jesus, unless He dies. And His death is not our all-sufficient sacrifice for sin, if Jesus is not the sinless Lamb of God. And Jesus is not that sinless Lamb unless He is able to extinguish every flaming dart that the devil throws His way, unless He fulfills the demands of the law — which He does. In catechism parlance, we call this His active obedience (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, 2017, Q. 159). It's all part of the order of salvation as we look to Jesus as our Savior.

Let us rejoice and be glad in this grace, for our salvation comes not from our resisting temptation or our law keeping. To be sure, as faithful Christians, we seek both of those, but we especially seek to remain faithful to the end, for our salvation comes from the Lord alone through faith in Christ Jesus.

As Christians, we are called to faithfulness. We are called to live godly lives. We're called "*to stand against the schemes of the devil*" (Eph. 6:11). But we look not to ourselves for the strength to thwart his schemes. St. Paul says, "*be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*" (Eph. 6:10). Look to Jesus. Trust in Him. Rely on Him, and He will give you "*the whole armor of God,*" things like truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God — all gifts from God. Arrayed with these we can stand strong against the devil and his "*spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 6:12).

Finally, remember to pray. St. Paul says: *“In all circumstances [pray] at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication”* (Eph. 6:16, 18). Keep the Lord’s Prayer at the ready for your prayers. When we pray “Hallowed be Thy name,” we’re praying that we be taught and believe God’s pure word and that we might lead holy lives according to it. When we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we’re praying that God would give us His Holy Spirit so that we would believe God’s Word and lead godly lives. And when we pray “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we’re praying that God Himself would “break[] and hinder[] every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come”; we are praying that He would “strengthen[] and keep[] us firm in His Word and faith until we die” (*Small Catechism*, Lord’s Prayer, Petitions 1-3).

Friends, our foe, the devil, is mighty, but our Savior Jesus is mightier. He has defeated the devil. He has won our salvation, and He delivers it to us. As Hans Adolf Brorson writes in his hymn ... I think you know it:

1. I walk in danger all the way. The thought shall never leave me
That Satan, who has marked his prey, Is plotting to deceive me.
This foe with hidden snares May seize me unawares
If I should fail to watch and pray. I walk in danger all the way.
5. I walk with Jesus all the way, His guidance never fails me;
Within His wounds I find a stay When Satan’s pow’r assails me;
And by His footsteps led, My path I safely tread.
No evil leads my soul astray; I walk with Jesus all the way. (LSB716)

Assailed by enemies that seek our destruction, may we walk with Jesus all the way to everlasting life.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.