

JESUS WINS

Luke 4:1-13

First Sunday in Lent (Series C)

March 9, 2025

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 4, verses 1 through 13. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 4, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴ And Jesus answered him, "**It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'**" ⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ And Jesus answered him, "**It is written,**

**" 'You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him only shall you serve.' "**

⁹ And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written,

" 'He will command his angels concerning you,
to guard you,'

¹¹ and

" 'On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.' "

¹² And Jesus answered him, "**It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'**"

¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is your champion. He fights the battle in your place and wins. He is your champion.

And I should clarify the way I'm using the word "champion," because there are a few different definitions. Most commonly, we speak of a champion as someone who wins it all, like the state championship. But there's a more technical definition, where a champion fights or competes on behalf of a larger group. We can kind of see this in the way a team wears the name of their school or their town on their jerseys. They're playing on behalf of the larger group. And when the team wins, you have a whole bunch of fans who say, "We won!" even though they only watched the competition. The champions represent all of them.

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Or you might see a champion in movies about war in the middle ages or ancient times. Two armies come against each other, and instead of everyone fighting and lots of men dying, they might agree for each side to choose one man to stand in as their champion. Then only one man dies, and if the losing side honors the agreement, that settles the dispute.

The Old Testament example of this is David, when he fought Goliath (1 Sam. 17). The Israelites and the Philistines lined up across from each other for battle, each standing on a hill, with a valley between them. The Philistines had a great fighter, whom they did not think could be beaten. If they fought the battle the normal way, even if they won, some men would die. But since they had such confidence in Goliath, they sent him out for a one-on-one fight. That way, they could win and have none of their men die. All the men of Israel were afraid of Goliath. But David trusted the LORD to give him victory. So, even though he was just a youth, he volunteered to be the champion for Israel. He slung a stone that sunk into Goliath's forehead. Then David took Goliath's sword and cut off his head. In this one-on-one match, David won victory for all of Israel. Of course, the LORD gave David victory, and David knew it.

The spiritual application of David and Goliath sometimes gets mistaken. I've heard pastors or teachers say it means that God will help you slay the proverbial giants in your life. So it's kind of inspirational. But, in reality, if you fight someone who is twice your size, you will probably lose. And there are challenges you will face in life that you will not win. God is capable of giving us victory in our challenges, whatever they might be. And he does promise to shepherd us and guide us through life. But he does not promise to give us victory or success in whatever we want. Sometimes his blessing is that he allows us to fail, but he faithfully brings us through our trials. He continues to give us daily bread, even if we fall into poverty. He forgives our sins, even though we continue to sin against him. He preserves our faith, even though our hearts may be heavy with doubt. David beating Goliath does not mean that God will help you overcome the proverbial giants in your life.

So what does it mean? First of all, it simply means what it says. David killed a giant, and the LORD gave victory to Israel. Sometimes stuff in the Bible is just history. It doesn't need to have a personal application to your life.

But second, there is a messianic application. It foreshadows Jesus, who stands in our place and fights for us. David fighting Goliath as the champion of Israel establishes the biblical principle that one man can stand in the place of many. And, especially because it was David and not some random soldier, it looks forward to Jesus, who is called the Son of David. It foreshadows the way Jesus stands in our place as our champion. He fights for us and wins. So this becomes the personal application of David and Goliath: not that we will receive power to slay our giants, but that Jesus will stand in our place and destroy our real enemies: sin, death, and the devil. He is our champion.

So in Jesus' temptation, we see him standing in our place. He contends with the devil as our champion, and he resists so that we will share in his victory.

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness reminds us of the Exodus. The Exodus was that event in the Old Testament when Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and into the land God promised to give them. Moses parted the Red Sea so that the people could walk through on dry land to escape from Pharaoh's army. Then, once they were free, they camped in the wilderness for 40 years. Finally, they entered into Canaan, which then came to be known as Israel.

In his temptation, Jesus is reenacting or fulfilling the Exodus. It started with his baptism in the Jordan River, which Luke records in chapter three, and he makes mention of it at the

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beginning of chapter 4 when he says that “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit,” who came upon him at his Baptism, “returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days” (4:1-2). So Jesus’ Baptism echoes Israel crossing the Red Sea, and his forty days in the wilderness echoes the forty years Israel spent in the wilderness. The parallelism is very significant, because each of Jesus’ temptations reenacts a temptation Israel faced. But Jesus succeeded where Israel had failed.

On one occasion during the Exodus, Israel grumbled about having no food, so God gave them bread from heaven (Ex. 16). On a few other occasions, they complained about not liking the food (Num. 11:4-6; 21:4). They did not trust the LORD to give them their daily bread, which he was always doing. So where Israel failed, Jesus resisted temptation when he said, **“Man shall not live by bread alone”** (4:4). He was quoting Deuteronomy, which was written during the Exodus, and the rest of that verse is, “But man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3).

In the second temptation, the devil tempted Jesus to worship him. And there were several occasions during the Exodus when the people of Israel worshipped false gods. The most notable is when Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments up on Mount Sinai, but down below the Israelites were creating a golden calf to worship (Ex. 32). So where Israel failed, Jesus resisted temptation when he said, **“You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve”** (4:8). That was another quotation from Deuteronomy (6:13).

In the third temptation, the devil tempted Jesus to test God. Israel tested the LORD when they came to a place with no water. And instead of simply asking the LORD for water, they made it a test, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?” (Ex. 17:7). They doubted the LORD and made him prove himself to them. So where Israel failed, Jesus resisted temptation when he said, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test” (4:12). Again, just like the other two temptations, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy (6:16). And by doing this with each of the three temptations, he demonstrates that he has received and lives according to the Law of the LORD. Like he said in the first temptation, he lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Jesus stood in the place of Israel. He reenacted and fulfilled the Exodus. Where Israel failed, Jesus was victorious over the devil. He is their champion, and he is the champion for all who trust in him. He is your champion. Of primary importance, this is what Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness means for us. He resisted temptation in our place. He remained sinless, so that, at the cross, he could take our sins upon himself and suffer the payment for sin. And in exchange for our sin, he gives back to us his righteousness. Jesus is our champion. He resisted the devil and triumphed over him in our place as our champion. This is the primary application of this text.

A secondary application is that Jesus gives us an example to follow and offers to help when we are tempted. And it’s important that we keep this as a secondary application. If Jesus is reduced to nothing more than an example, we lose the Gospel. Then the burden falls on us to overcome the devil, but this is something we cannot do. We need to remember that the primary meaning and the primary application of Jesus’ temptation is that he resists and overcomes the devil in our place. He is our champion.

But we would be foolish to not recognize the godly example Jesus gives us, because the devil also tempts us, and there is no better example than Jesus.

There are some places where we should not follow Jesus’ example. And that is not because he does things that are wrong. He does not. Everything he does is right. But, while we are merely men, he is also God. So he has the divine prerogative and responsibility to do things that we

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should not do or cannot do. We should desire to be like Jesus as regards his humanity, but not as regards his divinity.

Remember the first sin, when the devil tempted the woman and her husband to become like God. The devil tried a few tricks, but the one that finally worked was when he told the woman that if she ate the fruit, she would become like God. Becoming like God sounds good, but it is really the greatest idolatry, and that desire was the first sin. So we should often follow Jesus' example, but we should be careful to discern what he did as an obedient servant living under the Law of the LORD and what he did by his divine prerogative.

There are many today who attempt to create a Christian ethic based on the example of Jesus. I have friends who do this, and it concerns me. They try to use the Gospel to create a new law, and they end up losing both. The true basis for Christian ethics are God's commandments. And Jesus affirms this when he says,

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:17-19).

Those who attempt to create a Christian ethic based on the example of Jesus often dismiss the commandments of God if they do not find them in the example of Jesus. They reduce the example of Jesus to love, then they define “love” in their own way and overwrite the commandments of God.

The really ironic part is that they're not actually following the example of Jesus. In the temptation of Jesus, we see that he submitted himself to the commandments of God. He did not try to reason through what the “loving thing to do” is. He trusted the Word of God to tell him the *right* thing to do. And the right thing to do is always the loving thing. God's commandments teach us how to love one another. When we try to reason it through on our own, we will make “love” mean whatever we want.

Jesus could have easily reasoned it through, saying, *I don't see the harm in turning this stone into bread*. But it would have been wrong to submit to the devil's direction, and it would have been a departure from the path of suffering his Father had sent him on.

He could have reasoned it through, saying, *If I bow down and worship the devil, I will gain all the kingdoms of the world, and I would be a much better ruler over them than he is*. Sometimes we think that the ends will justify the means. But they do not. There is no such thing as doing the wrong thing for the right reasons.

We should follow the example of Jesus when he, as a man under the Law of God, submitted himself to God's commandments and lived by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

It's helpful to compare the way Jesus resisted the devil's temptation to the way Eve attempted to in Genesis 3. Jesus never entered into a debate with the devil. He did not try to reason with the devil. He did not try to persuade the devil to his side. He simply quoted the commandments and submitted himself to them. There is an implicit agreement, when you enter into a debate, that you can be persuaded. So do not enter into debate with temptation, because temptation has no intention of being persuaded by your arguments.

Eve actually started out well. The devil's first trick was to question God's Word: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Gen. 3:2). That is often his first

trick. He tried the same thing with Jesus. The temptation of Jesus follows his Baptism, where God the Father said, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). And the devil’s first words to Jesus are, “If you are the Son of God.” And he does the same thing to us. *Did God actually say, “You shall have no other gods, remember the Sabbath, honor your father and mother, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not covet,” or are those merely the words of a man?* If the devil can get us to question God’s Word, then every temptation is easy for him. But Eve correctly responded with the command of God that they should not eat from that one tree in the middle of the garden (Gen. 3:3).

But she was open to further debate, and she listened as the devil tried a more circuitous route. He blatantly lied, which is more effective than we might think. He said, “You will not surely die.” When a lie is spoken, even if we know it’s not true, the speaking of the lie makes us think about it. And the devil has many lies that are spoken over and over again. *Worship whichever god you want, or none of them. Do what makes you happy. You can be whoever you want. Follow your dreams. Toxic people don’t deserve your love. Love is love. As long as it’s consensual. If no one gets hurt, there’s nothing wrong.* These are all lies. And, at one time, most Christians easily recognized them as lies. But they get repeated over and over again, and we are tempted to entertain the lies until we start to think, *Well, maybe.* The devil has been a gaslighter from the beginning.

Then Eve was open to listen to the devil’s reasoning. And he said, “When you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). This was also a lie, but it worked, because it made evil look good. And this is what happens when we listen to the devil’s reasoning. It’s what happens when we entertain the reasoning of the world. They take something evil, and they explain it in a way that actually sounds good. They define “love” differently than God does. They promise happiness, which sounds desirable to us, but all the devil has to offer us is death.

So when you are faced with temptation, follow the example of Jesus. Do not reason with the devil, simply submit to God’s commands. Furthermore, seek help from Jesus. He does not leave us to resist temptation on our own. *The Letter to the Hebrews* gives us this great promise:

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:14-16).

You are not alone in your temptation. Seek help from your Savior. Pray, as he taught us, **“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”** (Matt. 6:13). And you should expect him to help.

But, above all, confess your sin and trust the mercy of Christ.

I have bad news for you, but you must accept it: you will fall into sin. You will be tempted, and you will sin. If you follow the example of Christ, and if you seek his help in temptation, he will help you. But you will not resist every temptation. Your heart will not let you. Part of the way Christ protects us in temptation is that his Holy Spirit preserves our faith. God does not abandon us when we fall into temptation. That is one of the devil’s lies. He wants us to think that we can wear out God’s mercy. But it’s not true. “We flee for refuge to [God’s] *infinite* mercy.” You will fall, and you will fall again. But God’s mercies are new every morning (Lam. 3:22-23).

Jesus did not resist the devil only to be an example to you. His example is secondary to his victory. He knows that we do not have the same strength or purity as him. So he resisted the

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devil in our place. He resisted the devil, because we do not. And so he is your champion. He is the one who fights the battle in your place. He triumphed over the devil in the wilderness. And even greater still, he triumphed over the devil at the cross. The only truth the devil used to be able to use is that we deserve death because of our sins. But that ceased to be true when Jesus took our sins and paid for them on the cross. Now the devil's accusation is a lie. You are not guilty. Your sins do not condemn you. Because every sin was paid for and is covered by Jesus' blood. And with him, you will have life through his resurrection. He won the victory for you. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.