

The First Sunday in Lent
March 13, 2011
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (NIV)

What are some things people might fight to get, go to battle for, or even start a war over? At times people will engage in battle over some pretty silly things. The familiar Hatfield-McCoy feud was said to be started over ownership of a hog. In 1325, in Italy, a 12 year war was started when a regiment of soldiers from Modena invaded Bologna to steal a brown, oak bucket. In 1900, in what is now Ghana, a war broke out between the British and Ashanti Empires over a golden stool. And perhaps the topper, according to Xenophon, the Spartans attacked the city of Elis literally and entirely "because they had no one else to fight at the time." But more often than not, battles take place because people or nations want to fight for things that are important. Land, money, protecting life, rights and freedoms are usually at the very top of the list of reasons people go to war.

This morning, my friends, we see a battle over something extremely important. It's a battle for souls. How important is a person's eternal soul? I will let Jesus answer this one for you: "***What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?***" (Matthew 16) That's what makes this war we witness today a very, very high stakes one. May we pay close attention as we witness: **A Battle for Your Soul.**

Who is battling for your soul? God, on one side, created you, body and soul, and wants you with Him for all eternity. Then there is Satan who wants your soul to depart from God into the eternal hell fire prepared for him and all the devils. And the scary part is the devil really seems to know how to get the best of us. We need to look no further than the opening book of the Bible. There we see Adam and Eve in the Garden falling into the devil's trap. Since that time all of us have been born into Satan's clutches. We inherit a sinful nature from our parents. We commit actual sins. Even after the Lord rescues us by making us His own, the tempter still gets us. He lies and we listen. He fills

us with doubt and we disobey. He tricks us and we do not trust our good Father. The devil's goal is to get us to sin because he knows that sin separates us from God.

And the devil has not lost a single battle with any man or woman ever. Until now! This morning we are reminded ***“the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work” (1 John 3)***. We need to remember that Jesus did not just face the devil on the cross. His battle had begun much sooner than that. Right as Jesus' begins His public ministry we read: ***“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.”*** For the next forty days an intense battle occurs in this wilderness. The Son of God verses Satan. And yes the stakes are high! One sin, one small slip up, and each and every soul would be lost. There would be no salvation.

We are given a glimpse of this battle with three temptations. ***“After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'”*** The old evil foe tells a hungry Jesus to use His almighty power to do two things - satisfy your hunger, and prove once and for all that you are who you say you are - God's Son. But by doing so the devil knows he would be leading Jesus to rely on Himself instead of trusting in God the Father to provide and take care of Him. So Jesus answers: ***“It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'”*** Jesus turns to a passage which shows that He relies on God's Word and promises. This passage from Deuteronomy was used for Israel when God provided for them their daily bread with manna each day in the desert. The devil tries but Jesus trusts. Jesus is the victor.

But the tempter continues. ***“Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'”*** After Jesus shows that He will not bend when it comes to trusting God the Father, the devil is now basically telling Jesus to prove it. You see how crafty Satan is - he even uses the Scriptures now. But the devil misuses and twists God's words and Jesus points this out with the answer: ***“It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'”*** The devil attempts to fill with doubt but Jesus does not disobey. Jesus is the victor.

But the battle is still not over. ***“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'”*** At first glance this doesn't appear to be much of a temptation at all. Why would Jesus do this? Satan is clearly lying and once again offering what is not even his to give. Which of course is one of his favorite and most successful tricks. But why in the world would Jesus fall for this? Walk with Jesus on Wednesdays and then come on Good Friday and we'll see why this is so tempting. Jesus knew the path that was ahead - the torture, the pain, the abuse, the ridicule, the suffering, the cross where He will endure the wrath of God for all sin. The devil offers another way. ***“Just a quick bow to me and you can avoid all of that Jesus. No one is even around or looking.”*** The devil lies but Jesus will not listen. Jesus is the victor. ***“For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'” Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.”***

There are several things we are able to learn from this battle. One is the devil is real and crafty and wants nothing more than to destroy us and take our eternal soul. He really is a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Secondly, and more importantly, Jesus defeats the devil. Jesus wins every single battle and His victory is ours. He provides us the holiness we need. By His perfect life Jesus gives you the robe of righteousness you need to wear before God. And Jesus would not avoid going to the fiercest battle to win for us the war. The devil would still have his darkest hour. Satan would strike Jesus' heel as Jesus' sinless life would be taken on a cross - as Jesus would be forsaken by God the Father - as Jesus would feel sin's sting. But by doing so Jesus crushed the devil's head. Jesus suffers and dies to take away all our sin - the sin that separated us from God. There is not a more clear or complete sign of victory than the open grave on the third day. We win because of Jesus. Our souls belong to our Savior.

It is also good to note how Jesus defeated the devil here in the wilderness. He didn't use His almighty power to send Satan reeling. He didn't perform spectacular miracles. Jesus used the same armor with which God wants to cover us. Jesus wielded the same sword of the Spirit God has placed into our hands. He used the Word of God to defeat the devil. Doesn't that teach us something about how to resist the devil's temptations? Jesus shows us what we need to resist the devil and win more of those individual battles in our new lives of faith in Christ Jesus. Paul writes: ***“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes” (Ephesians 6)***. If we do not know God's Word the devil has us right where he wants us. The less we know the Bible the more Satan can twist and turn and misapply what God says and wants for us. We can be certain the devil will use all the tricks in his bag to try to rip us away from Jesus.

This is one battle that is not over something silly. This is dead serious. Satan wants your soul. Since the devil lost the war to Jesus, he is working frantically to win every individual battle that he can. That's why we need to run into the saving arms of our Victor again and again. In His grace we are safe and secure - even from the old evil foe. In Lent, you also see just how important your eternal soul is to God and Jesus. He died to buy it back. This is one battle where being on the winning side means everything. Thankfully, when we are on the side of Jesus and His Word the war is already won, and one day we, both body and soul, will enjoy the sweet taste of eternal victory. Amen.