

Two warriors meet in a desolate no-man's land, armed and ready for battle. They fight not only for their own personal fame and fortune, but as substitutes, representatives of the army they belong to. These ancient warriors were called "Champions." The best warriors their people could offer.

Sometimes as an appetizer to set the tone for the coming battle, or sometimes to replace the battle altogether, the two sides would send out their champions to fight each other. Two mighty warriors facing off, the hopes of their people squarely on their shoulders. Our minds go to examples like the boy David defeating the giant Philistine champion, Goliath. Or in Homer's *Illiad*, when Achilles, the Greek champion, battles Hector, the champion of the Trojans.

But before us today is the most important Champion Warfare account in history. Two champions-- the Prince of Peace and the Prince of Darkness-- squaring off in a desolate desert, with the eternal fate of mankind hanging in the balance! Jesus goes to battle as **A Champion...For You!**

Jesus was fresh from the waters of the Jordan River and his baptism, where he was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and the Father announced from Heaven, "***You are my Son, whom I love.***" But directly from those glorious waters, Jesus is led to a battlefield. "***Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit...was led by the Spirit into the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.***

First, note that Jesus didn't fall into an ambush. God the Spirit led Jesus into that desert battlefield, because God knew Jesus had to endure that time in the wilderness, for the sake of our salvation.

During those forty days in desolate isolation, Jesus prayed to his Father, meditated on God's Word, and fasted—to prepare and equip himself for the work of salvation he had stepped into when he stepped out of the Jordan River.

Certainly, both Jesus and the Devil understood the weight of this battle between good and evil. If Satan could get Jesus to sin, then the promise of a Savior that God made to Adam and Eve after their fall into sin, would come crashing down. A sinful Savior couldn't save from sin. And so the devil came after Jesus, wielding every tempting weapon in his arsenal. Luke highlights three temptations.

We're told, "***[Jesus] ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.***" Talk about an understatement! The fact is, Satan is a diabolical tempter. The Bible describes him as a roaring, prowling lion. Just like a lion stalks prey that is weak, injured, or isolated, Satan's constantly waiting for when we're spiritually weak and vulnerable. Seeing Jesus famished and weak from 40 days of fasting, Satan strikes...at Jesus' empty stomach. "***If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.***"

Can you even imagine how hungry you'd be after 40 days? I barely survive the four hours between breakfast and lunch! Likewise, for Jesus—a true man with an empty stomach-- this would have been a real temptation.

Certainly Jesus, who turned water into wine, and fed 5,000 people with a boy's lunch could have easily turned stones into bread. But if he had, Jesus would have shown a lack of trust in his Father's care. Here, and also in the other two temptations we'll observe, Satan wants Jesus to take shortcuts in his mission; to pursue earthly glory, and dodge the suffering of the cross. "Think how the people would love you if you could turn stones into bread for them! Everyone would want to follow you, Jesus! No one would crucify a bread king! Take the easy way out!"

But even though Satan dangled bread in front of Jesus' starving eyes, he doesn't fall. Instead, Jesus fights back with God's Word, quoting from Deuteronomy 8, "***Man does not live on bread alone.***"

Jesus' counter is beautiful for two reasons. First, Jesus shows a perfect trust in his Father's care for him. Jesus didn't need to take matters into his own hands, because he knew his Father would open his hands and satisfy his needs when the time was right. Can't we trust God to do the same for us?

Second, in Deuteronomy 8, Moses reminded the Israelites how they had rebelled against God when they lacked food in the desert, even after God had provided miracle bread, manna from Heaven. Jesus' words here are a reminder that he came to do what Israel couldn't, what we can't. Jesus perfectly avoids Satan's temptation.

But Satan wasn't giving up easily. Next, he took Jesus up on a mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, saying, ***"I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."***

Again, Satan tempts Jesus to take shortcuts from his mission, and bypass the suffering of the cross. Satan pictures the two possibilities of what Jesus' life could become. ***(Show clip from Bible miniseries)*** "Jesus, you want to be king of kings and Lord of lords, right? If you follow me, I'll give you earthly power and glory right now! But if you follow your Father's will, you're going to suffer and die! Take the easy road to a crown, not a cross!"

But Jesus counter attacks, ***"It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*** This time, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6, where Moses warns the Israelites against falling into the hollow, dead idolatry of the surrounding nations. And yet... the Israelites repeatedly pushed away the true God to pursue hollow, fleeting desires.

Ultimately, Jesus knew that Satan was making empty promises. The world wasn't his to give! The same can be said of everything Satan promises to give you through sin. All are empty promises he can't and won't give you.

Israel failed to resist Satan's temptations towards idolatry. But Jesus came to do exactly what Israel couldn't...what we can't. Jesus perfectly avoids Satan's temptation.

But the Devil wasn't done fighting yet. This time, he takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem, and tempts ***"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here."*** After being repeatedly refuted by God's Word, the Devil tries to quote some Scripture, too, referencing Psalm 91 to prove his point. ***"He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."***

For the third time, Satan tries to tempt Jesus to shortcut his mission, and bypass the cross for earthly glory. Tearing Psalm 91 out of its context, Satan tells Jesus, "Jump! If you're indeed the Son the Father loves so much, he won't let you fall!"

As Israelite people went about their daily activities in the Temple courts a hundred feet below, there would have been plenty of wide-eyed witnesses to Jesus' high dive. Especially if they saw God's angels gently carry him and set him softly down without so much as a stubbed toe! "The people will flock to be your followers, Jesus! That way, you can prove to everyone that you're God's son, and avoid the cross completely!"

For the third time, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy. ***"It says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*** In Deuteronomy 6, Moses reminds the Israelites how they'd rebelled against God, demanding water as a test to prove that God was really with them.

Israel failed to resist Satan's temptations to put God to the test. But Jesus came to do what Israel couldn't, what we can't. Jesus perfectly avoids Satan's temptation.

Did you catch the recurring pattern? Satan tempts. People fall into sin. It's been that way from the beginning, when Adam and Eve failed to resist Satan's first food temptation. And it remains that way today as every person, present company included, continue day after day to fall in battle, pierced through the heart when Satan's temptations sprout into sin.

As we observe the carnage of our own failures to resist Satan's temptations, it's easy to see that our battle against Satan's temptations is far more often a pillow fight than a fight to the death. Our resistance is often flawed by desires to trade in our crosses and take up earthly crowns and hollow, fleeting pleasures. As we fail again and again to avoid Satan's temptations, we're left feeling helpless...powerless...defeated.

But there's another recurring pattern too. Satan tempts. Jesus perfectly resists temptation. Jesus came to this world to do what we can't.

That means Luke 4:10-13 isn't a self-help book. It's not "How to Resist Temptation for Dummies." It's an epic account of champion warfare. Jesus isn't our role model, or our life coach. He's not an example to emulate or a cheerleader on the sidelines. He's our champion. And as our champion, that means he fought the battle *FOR* us, and his victory is *YOUR* victory!

For ***"we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted like us in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*** We need no further test to determine the Father's love for us than that. God didn't sit back and wish us good luck. He stepped onto the battlefield to fight for us. He gets his hands dirty, facing every single one of the same temptations we face and fall, but perfectly avoiding every sin...for you.

And our righteous Champion, gives us his perfection through faith! As Paul writes, ***God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*** Jesus refused to bypass the cross of suffering. From this battlefield, he will continue his quest to a skull-shaped hill, on which it looked like our champion was defeated. But Satan was trying so desperately to get Jesus to avoid the cross, because God knew that cross was the weapon Satan couldn't survive. With his perfect obedience, and innocent death our champion Jesus has won the victory...for you!

And that means you can ***"approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*** When Satan comes with his temptations, don't fight alone. Flee to your Champion. When the battle is fiercest, look to his cross. Find peace, rest, and security in the God who is our Mighty Fortress; our trusty shield and weapon! Take heart, fellow soldiers, and take up the battle. For in Christ, the victory is already won.