

### Skirmishes

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*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Heb. 4:15)*

Can someone tell me, why is it that if I go online to look at something like an NFL mock draft, then the next time I go online, another six NFL mock drafts show up on my browser? And if I look up an address on Google Maps, it automatically shows me where all the nearest restaurants are to that location? And if I purchase a new fishing rod on Amazon.com, then I'm inundated with ads for new fishing rods? Tell me, is this all purely a coincidence or is someone trying to tempt me to do something I shouldn't do?

Actually, it's neither. Instead, it's the application of a new science known as "Captology." Every heard of that word before? Yeah, neither had I—until I did a little research on it. The word captology is actually an acronym, based on the first letters of words Computers As Persuasive Technology. CAPT-ology is the study of using computers to persuade people to think or act a certain way. And in case you hadn't noticed, this is becoming really big business. No matter what device you happen to be looking in, there are people trying to change the way we think (for example, how we think about a particular candidate or political position), or change the way we behave (for example, how we spend our time and how we spend our money). It's like suddenly, wherever we go, there is someone kind of working behind the scenes to get us to do what they want us to do, or think, or feel. It's kind of creepy, isn't it? To think that there's always someone out there trying to manipulate us. Trying to persuade us to do what they want us to do.

But you realize, this science of captology is not really anything new. Oh maybe the technology part is new. But the idea that there is someone always kind of working behind the scenes to persuade us to do what he wants us to do, even if it's not in our best interest, well, that guy has been around since the Garden of Eden. He's called the Devil. The Bible calls him the Tempter. Maybe we could call him the great Persuader. His goal in life is to persuade every human being to think and do what he wants, rather than what God wants. Every day of our lives, Satan is fighting to lead us into sin. And if we're honest, we'll admit that we've lost a lot of battles against Satan's temptations.

But you realize, you and I are not the only ones who have been at war against Satan. 2000 years ago, another warrior went toe to toe with Satan. And by his death and resurrection, Jesus defeated Satan once and for all. But before that final victory, Satan engaged Jesus in a number of what we might call:

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That is, situations where Satan tried to get the upper hand on Jesus, tried to persuade him to go against God's will. Today we want to take a little closer look at a number of those skirmishes, in order to see, first of all, the impact that those skirmishes had on Jesus' behavior. And secondly, the impact that Jesus' behavior has on our lives today.

Now, when you think of the attacks that Satan made against Jesus, you probably think first of all, of the account of Satan tempting Jesus in the desert. (We had that as our sermon text

a few weeks ago.) In that account, you had Satan tempting Jesus to be more concerned about his own physical comfort (namely, having a full stomach), rather than listening to the word of God. Then there was the temptation to test God, rather than trust God. And finally, the temptation to worship anything other than the true God. You might say that those are the most famous skirmishes between Satan and Jesus (or at least the most well-documented skirmishes). Three of the four gospel writers record those interactions between Jesus and Satan. But you realize, those certainly weren't the only times that Satan tempted Jesus. In fact what does Luke's gospel tell us? Luke writes, *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil.* In other words, it was not merely that Satan tempted Jesus after he had spent 40 days without eating. No, Satan attacked Jesus throughout those 40 days. In fact, you can be sure that Satan's skirmishes with Jesus started long before those 40 days in the desert.

For example, when we read about Jesus spending time in the temple as a 12 year old boy, you don't think Satan was whispering in Jesus' ear, "Jesus, what are you doing in here? All this talk about religion—it's so boring! This is such a waste of time! Wouldn't you rather be out playing with your friends?" Do you think that Satan brought that temptation against Jesus? Of course he did! How do I know what that? Because our text for today says that Jesus *has been tempted in every way just as we are.* If you've ever been tempted to think, while sitting in church, "I can't wait for this sermon to be done." Or, "I would so much rather be doing something else." Or, listening to God's word is such a waste of time"—if you've ever had Satan whispering those thoughts in your ear, whether you're 12 years old or 52 years old—you can bet that Satan was whispering those same temptations in Jesus' ears too, even when he was 12 years old.

You might say, that's an example of a skirmish that took place between Jesus and the devil before those 40 days in the desert. But remember how St. Luke concludes his account of Jesus in the desert. He writes, *When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.* Hmmm. I wonder what Satan might consider to be an "opportune" time? What other occasions in Jesus' life might Satan try to use to his advantage? How about the time when a lovely young lady came to Jesus and started caressing his feet, anointing them with oil, and wiping them with her hair? Don't you think Satan was whispering in Jesus' ear, "Jesus, this girl is in love with you"? "I'll bet she do anything for you. I'll bet she do anything with you" Come on Jesus, you're a man. Indulge yourself, at least in a little fantasy."

Do you think Satan used that temptation on Jesus? Of course he did. Why wouldn't he? If Satan's whole goal in life was to lead Jesus into sin, do you think Satan is going to say, "Oh, I'm not going to use that temptation on Jesus"? No, he's going to use every weapon he has. He's going to fire every last bullet in his holster. You can be sure that every temptation that Satan uses on us, he also used on Jesus!

But there is one more skirmish that we need to look at. It's the one that took place on the night before Jesus died. Actually, you might say that the closer Jesus got to the end of his life, the more fierce his battle with Satan became. By the time Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane, more specifically when he went off by himself to pray, that's when Satan, in effect, really took the gloves off. Remember what Jesus said at that moment in his life? He said, "*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*" (Mk. 14:34). Jesus specifically told his disciples, "*Watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation*" (Mk. 14:38). Jesus knew that Satan was coming after all of them. But Jesus knew that Satan was especially coming after him.

Can't you just imagine what Satan was saying to Jesus in that dark hour? "Jesus, you've lived your whole life obeying the rules of God and this is what you get for it? You get sold out

by one friend and deserted by the rest? You do everything right and now you are the one who will be beaten and scourged and left to die on a cross? You think that's fair? You think that's an expression of God's love for you? Jesus, does it feel like God loves you? Does it look like God loves you? Why would you put your trust in God if this is what he has in store for you? Jesus, you should just run for it now. Don't waste your life like this." My friends, you can be sure that with those temptations and more, Satan pounded Jesus, minute after minute, hour after hour, until the blood trickled down his face.

And yet, through all of those temptations, what does Scripture say? "*Yet (he) was without sin*" (*Hebrews 4:15*). It's hard to fathom, isn't it? I mean, it's impossible for us to humanly comprehend how Jesus could be tempted to sin without actually being guilty of sin, at least, in his mind. I mean, scripture says that when you are I look at a woman lustfully, we've already committed adultery in our hearts. But not Jesus. Scripture says about Jesus, in 1 Peter 2:22, *He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth*. In other words, Jesus defeated every single attack that Satan made on him. He overcame every single temptation. Jesus lived a sinless life.

The question is, so what does that mean for you and me today? What does it mean that, as our text says, *we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin*? Well, it means two things. First, it means that, when we are tempted to sin, Jesus knows exactly what we are going through. It means that Jesus has already wrestled with a very same temptations we're going through. That's what the writer to the Hebrews means when he says *We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses*. Jesus knows what we're going through. Jesus can relate to our trials and temptations. For example, when you see that good looking girl or guy and you have to fight back some lustful thoughts, and so you pray, "Jesus, help me", Jesus is not going to say, "What are you talking about? I can't relate." No, he's going to say, "I know exactly what you're wrestling with. Satan tormented me with that very same temptation."

Or maybe you're in a situation where you know what God wants you to do and Satan is really tempting you not to do it. Satan is tempting you to take the easy way out, and so you bring it to Jesus in prayer. Is Jesus going to say, "Huh? What do you mean you're being tempted to take the easy way out? I'm having trouble resonating with your struggle." No, he's going to say, "Christian, did you see me in writhing on the ground in the garden? Did you see the drops of blood on my forehead? That was me, wrestling with the very same temptation that you are wrestling with."

You might say, that's the first thing you can take away from Jesus's skirmishes with the Devil. You can know that Jesus can always relate to what you're going through. But if all Jesus did was simply to go through the same battles that we do, only to lose them just like we do, well, he could still empathize with you and me (kind of like a teammate who says "Yeah, I feel just as bad as you do about losing that game."). But if Jesus loses the game along with us, it really doesn't help our record or our feelings.

But the fact is, Jesus didn't lose the game. He won all his matchups against Satan. Jesus went undefeated against Satan, preseason, regular season, and post-season. And now, incredibly, Jesus gives his perfect winning record to you, and me, purely by grace. Jesus tells you that through faith in him you and I get credit for every battle that he won against Satan. You might say that because Jesus went undefeated throughout the course of his life, now we get to take home the winning trophy.

My friends, do you see why it's worth our time to study these skirmishes between Jesus

and Satan? Not only so we can see how Jesus defeated Satan's temptations, often using the Word of God as his defense against the Evil One, just as we can do in our lives. We study these skirmishes, not only so when we can come to Jesus in our time of need, we can know that he will help us and be our shield against the attacks of the Evil One. But most importantly, we study these skirmishes so that we can know that every one of those battles that Jesus has won, he's won for us. Because he was victorious, so are we! Because he is righteous, now in God's eyes, so are we.

Is it true that between now and the end of our lives, we will likely lose a few skirmishes with Satan? Yes, that's true. But because of Jesus, our mighty Warrior, we can be sure that, in the end, we win the war! And that means, by God's grace, through faith in his Son, we'll join our mighty warrior in a victory parade that will last to Eternity. May God keep us in His grace until that glorious parade begins. In Jesus' name. Amen.