

“The Battle is the LORD’s!”

I. What that meant for Jesus

II. What that means for you and me today

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Just for a minute, I want you to imagine that you are a soldier in the army of ancient Israel. You are gathered with your fellow soldiers on one side of the valley of Elah. On the other side of the valley stands the entire Philistine army. You are faced with the prospect of engaging in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy, likely resulting in the loss of hundreds, if not thousands, of lives. There’s a major pit in your stomach. But then someone proposes an alternate plan. One of the Philistine soldiers challenges you to go one-on-one against him in a fight to the death. If you win, your whole side wins. But if you lose, not only will you die, but your whole army is taken captive. Oh, one more thing. The man you're going against is not only a professional warrior, he's also a giant. And if he were standing on the floor in front of me, his head would be about a foot over the bottom of that video screen. Can you imagine going one-on-one with a monster like that? Yeah, neither could any of your fellow Israelite soldiers. The Bible tells us, *Whenever the Israelites saw Goliath, they all fled from him in great fear. (1 Samuel 17:24)*

Fortunately for you and your fellow Israelite soldiers, there was someone who was not afraid of Goliath. Someone who was willing to stand up against this pagan warrior who had defied the army of the living God. But David's courage was not based on his ability to wield a sword, or even sling a slingshot. No, his trust was in the Lord. What was David’s confession of faith? He said, “The battle is the Lord's!”

Now, chances are, you and I are never going to have to go up against a 10 ft Philistine who's out to take our head off. Actually, the foe we face is much more powerful, much more dangerous than Goliath. What does the Bible say? *Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12)* In other words, the life or death struggle that we face is against Satan. Satan is the enemy of God and therefore our enemy, as well. And he wants nothing more than to tempt us into sin that will separate us from God forever. And he has the power and guile to do just that. But just the Israelites had someone who went into battle for them, and took down their enemy, so do we. Jesus is our warrior. He crushed the Serpent’s head. He defeated all of Satan’s temptations. And so we can say with king David of old:

“The Battle is the Lord’s!”

In our sermon study today we'll see:

I. What that Meant for Jesus

II. What that Means for You and Me Today

I don't know if you noticed it, but all three of our Scripture readings today were tied together by one idea, the idea of a substitute, that is, someone who stands in for someone else, someone who takes their place. In the Old Testament reading, it was David who stood in for the whole army of Israel, taking on Goliath in their place. In the Gospel reading, it was Jesus who had just finished being baptized in the Jordan River, not because he needed to have his sins washed away, but because he was the substitute for sinners. It was Jesus who was then led by the Spirit into the desert to endure the temptations that sinners face, because Jesus was the substitute for sinners. And here in our sermon text, the writer to the Hebrews brings up that same idea of substitution when he says, *We have a high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God. (Hebrews 4:14)*. Do you remember what the job of the high priest in the Old Testament was? It was to represent the people, that is, to take their place. Rather than having the whole nation try to climb behind the curtain into the Holy of Holies and the presence of God, God sent a substitute. The high priest was the one who offered up prayers and made sacrifices on behalf of the people.

If you know anything about the book of Hebrews, you know that practically the whole book is about how all those Old Testament high priests have been surpassed by the perfect high priest, Jesus Christ. The writer puts it this way in Hebrews 7:27, *Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.*

Now, according to Scripture, the Bible says that, in order for Jesus to be the perfect high priest, that is, in order for Jesus to represent all mankind, he needed to meet two qualifications. Number one, he needed to become one of us. He needed to come from within our ranks. Isn't that right? Think about it this way. If you're sitting in your living room watching Packers play on TV, and the number one receiver goes down with an ankle injury, do you think the coach is going to call you to come into the game? No, he's going to call in an actual football player, someone who's already wearing the uniform. So it is with Jesus. If Jesus is going to be called in to sub for the entire human race, well then, he's going to have to be a human. He can't win the war by sitting on his throne in heaven. He has to get down on the field. He has to become one of us—which is exactly what he did. How did the writer to the Hebrews put it? *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity. (Hebrews 2:14)*. And again, *For this reason, Jesus had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God. (Hebrews 2:17)*

And because Jesus was, as that passage put it, “fully human,” what impact did that have on our lives? What can we now know to be true? The writer tells us here in our text. We know that... *We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are. (Hebrews 4:15)*

Do you realize what that means—that “Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are?” It means that there is not a single temptation that you or I will ever face that Jesus has not already faced. Now, maybe you're thinking, “Wait a minute, does that mean that there were things like internet porn and slot machines back in Jesus' day? No, but the sins that underlie those things, since like self-gratification, or the “Me First” mentality—Satan would have hammered Jesus with those temptations. I mean, wasn't that the essence of the very first temptation that Satan brought to Jesus in the wilderness? Can't you just hear Satan whispering in Jesus' ear, “Jesus, wouldn't a fresh loaf of bread taste good? You've gone without it for so long. You've got needs. You've got desires. Fulfill your cravings. Nobody's watching. Nobody will know the difference. Give yourself a break today.”

If you think about it, Satan's tactics have not changed in 2 millennia. Every one of Satan's temptations, whether they were directed at Jesus or their directed at you and me, all serve the same purpose. And that is, to separate you from your Father in heaven. To get you to question his love for you question his will for your life. Satan is busy trying to sow seeds of doubt. Think of the very first words that the Devil spoke to Jesus. *"If you are the Son of God...."* Satan says the same thing for you and me today. "If you really are God's child, why is life so hard? Why doesn't he let you enjoy all the things that everybody else has? Why doesn't he protect you from harm?" All these temptations that we face, Jesus faced first. Which means what? It means that Jesus knows what we're going through. He can empathize with our struggles. You might say, he's "been there." But—and this is an important "but", Jesus has "been there", but he's never "done that." How did the writer put it? *We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin. (Hebrews 4:15)*

Do you remember when I said that in order to be our high priest, Jesus had to meet two qualifications? Number one, he had to become one of us, tempted in every way that we are. Number two is: he had to never sin. Why did Jesus have to be sinless in order to be our high priest? Well, go back to the picture of a substitute on a sports team. If the coach sends me in to pinch hit for you because you're doing such a rotten job at the plate, and then I strike out—what good did that do? You could have done that yourself. A substitute who merely replicates the person he replaced is not good for anything.

But now, enter Jesus. When God sent Jesus into the world for us, when he, in effect, sent Jesus to the plate to pinch hit for us, Jesus not only did not strike out. He hit a home run. Every single time. He never missed. He overcame every single pitch that Satan threw at him. You might say that Jesus batted a thousand his entire life. And in so doing, he absolutely destroyed the devil. How does the Bible put it? *Having disarmed the rulers and authorities (that is, Satan and his evil angels), he (namely, Jesus) made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:15)* Just as David once disarmed the mighty Goliath and then cut off his head in triumph, so also Jesus disarmed our Enemy the Devil, and ultimately crushed the serpent's head—which is why we can say, "The battle, yes, the victory, is the Lord's!"

But now, someone might say, "Great. The victory is the Lord's. Jesus overcame every one of Satan's temptations? So, what does that mean for my life today? I'm glad you asked. Let's consider that because the Battle is the Lord's, II. What that means for our lives today.

Let's go back to the batter's box. Throughout the course of our lives, when it comes to the temptations that Satan throws at us, you and I have struck out more times than anyone can count. On the basis of our batting average, we truly deserve to be cut from the team. But instead of cutting us, what did God do? He sent in a substitute, who never missed a single pitch. He hit every one of them out of the park. That substitute, Jesus Christ, single-handedly won the game.

Now, here is the best part. God then took the scorecard where he was keeping track of the batting averages. You know, where it said that Jesus batted a thousand. And he crossed out Jesus' name and he wrote your name there instead. Even though God knows how many times you've struck out, in fact he knows how many times you'll still strike out, still, because he loves you, he gives you credit for Jesus' batting average. In God's eyes, on God's scorecard, you, dear Christian, are batting a thousand. Through the faith that God has worked in your heart through Word and Sacrament, God has now given you credit for Jesus' perfect record. He's given you credit for Jesus' righteousness. In fact, isn't that what God said about Abraham, who the Bible calls the father of all believers? Genesis 15:6 says, *Abraham believed the Lord, and he (namely,*

the Lord) credited it to him as righteousness.

And because God did that for us, because God has now given us credit for Jesus' righteousness, do you know what we get to do? The holy writer tells us here in our text. He writes, *Let us then approach the throne of God with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)*

Notice two things about those words. Notice first the attitude with which we can approach the throne of God in prayer, namely, with confidence, not because we did such a great job of overcoming temptations—we may have fallen into the same sin for the 57th time—but the fact is, our standing with God is not based on our victory over sin, it's based on Christ's victory over sin. Christ is our righteousness. And dressed in Christ's righteousness, we can confidently come to God, to receive what? *To receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.* In the real world, we still need a ton of help. And God gives it to us in Jesus. No matter what temptation you are struggling with, no matter how many times you've slid back in that same spiritual ditch, no matter the amount of guilt or shame you may feel, the fact is, there is no end to the grace and mercy God has for you.

In Psalm 50:15, God says, *"Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you."* 3000 years ago, God sent David into the valley of Elah to deliver Israel from their enemy Goliath. 2000 years ago, God sent his Son to the hill of Calvary to deliver us from our enemy, the devil. To this very day, that same great high priest is delivering us from the bondage of Satan forever. In the words of Martin Luther in the Battle Hymn of the Reformation, *You ask, "Who is this?" Jesus Christ it is. The almighty Lord, and there's no other God. He holds the field forever.* When you are confronted with the temptations of life, remember who it is that's gone to bat for you. And then, be assured, "The Battle is the Lord's!" He will be victorious. And therefore, so will you...in Jesus. Amen.