

## Facing the Lion

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***Luke 4:1-13 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" 5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, "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. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" 9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. 10 For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." 12 Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. (NIV)***

This past Wednesday we began the season of Lent: a forty day reflection on our sins as the cause for Christ's death. Technically speaking, this is the first Sunday "in Lent" and not "of Lent" because the Sundays are not counted as part of the forty days. However, throughout this season we omit the Alleluias from our worship so the sober mood is intensified a bit. And the Gospel lesson for today is significant: ***Jesus...was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.*** the forty days of our Lenten preparation are associated with the forty days Jesus was tempted in the wilderness.

Jesus was being attacked by Satan, the old evil foe, throughout His life and ministry. This is the account of one focused attack at the beginning of His public ministry. Jesus was able to resist the temptations, but that does not mean they were insignificant or easy to overcome. They were real temptations from a fierce and ferocious adversary. Listen to how Peter described this enemy:

***1 Peter 5:8-9 8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.***

This Lenten season is a time for reflection on your sin. When Christians focus on their sinful condition and renew their commitment to resist temptation, the end result is often frustration. You become frustrated because we cannot overcome sin, and, despite our best efforts, you feel the frustration Paul described in Romans 7: [You] do not do the good [you] want, but the evil [you] do not want is what [you] keep on doing!

I want to show you a clip that shows some frustration from a little bit different angle. It is from “Second Hand Lions.” The two old guys are living on a farm somewhere in Texas after 40 years of adventure in Africa. They weren’t ready to be put out to pasture, so they tried to bring a little excitement into their lives by ordering a lion. **(CLIP)**

You can see how disappointed and frustrated they were – all set with guns ready, only to get a “defective” lion. If only the lion we faced were that docile and meek. But that is not the case. **Our is more like the one in the other box on the truck**, the one whose paw leapt out at the kid without warning. That is the adversary we face, always on the prowl, always ready to pounce. And we can feel frustrated at our inability to resist that lion. We let him get the upper hand.

There is some good news for us in today’s Gospel lesson. As Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem for us, on His way to make payment for the sins of the world, He faced the temptations listed here and others. He faced that fierce lion for us. Jesus subjected himself to everything we encounter in this world, including the Law, and fought temptation for us. His resisting of the temptations here reminds us that this was a part of accomplishing our salvation.

**So often we speak of the death of Jesus** as payment for our sins, that His shed blood earned our forgiveness, because that was the ultimate fulfillment of God’s plan. However, the only reason His death accomplished our salvation is that He was offering a perfect life on the cross. He was here in our place, not only to die, but also to live a perfect life and keep the Law of God in its entirety for our salvation. Theologians call this the “Active Obedience” of Jesus, where He kept the law perfectly in our place. This is opposed the “Passive Obedience” of Christ, when He allowed himself be sacrificed in our place.

One of the early leaders in our Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was a fellow by the name of Francis Pieper. His writings are still used as textbooks at the seminary to this day. He wrote about the active obedience of Jesus this way:

**“[Christ] satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; to Him I cling; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me. Thus the Law is silenced”**

**(Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, vol. 2 [St. Louis: Concordia, 1951], 375)**

**The temptation of Jesus reminds** us that our salvation is tied to His victory over temptation in the desert. Yes, we are saved by the shed blood of Jesus, but this is only true because that shed blood was innocent of all sin. If Christ had even once given into temptation, then his suffering and death would have no benefit for us. Christ was already in the process of working out our salvation when he was battling the devil in the wilderness. There, and from then on, Jesus was actively fulfilling God's Law and battling every sin that we battle. The only difference is that where we have failed and continue to fail, Christ was victorious. Christ is our Savior, not just in his dying and rising, but also in his perfect obedience to God's Law in our place.

Our Savior knows what it is to be tempted. Don't be fooled by those who say these were not real temptations for Jesus. They were. The author of the book of Hebrews addressed this:

*Hebrews 4:15 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.*

Let's consider the temptations Jesus endured. First of all, He was tempted to use His power as God for His **personal comfort**. We are also tempted to sin for what we perceive to be what would make us more comfortable. Jesus resisted by quoting Scripture. We all too often give in.

Jesus was then tempted to **worldly power** with a lie. You and I are tempted by Satan's lies with power and pleasure. Where we so often cave in, Jesus quoted Scripture and stood firm.

The roaring lion then tempted Jesus to **test his Father** by distorting Scripture. He uses the same tactic on us, and we yield, whereas Jesus trampled that lion's distortion of Scripture with the truth of God's Word.

Jesus faced that fierce adversary, the **Lion of Satan**, for us and prevailed. We face that same foe with the knowledge of what Jesus has done for us. We can be confident and draw strength from the victory Jesus earned in our place by His perfect life, the sacrifice of that perfect life, and His resurrection from death.

It should not be surprising that Jesus prevailed against that lion, fierce as he may be. After all, Jesus is also called a lion in Scripture. When Jacob was blessing his son's, the promise of the Messiah was passed on to through his son Judah with these words:

*Genesis 49:8-10* <sup>8</sup> “Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you. <sup>9</sup> You are a lion’s cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? <sup>10</sup> The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

That this was understood as a reference to the coming Messiah, Jesus, is affirmed for us in Revelation

*Revelation 5:5* <sup>5</sup> Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Just as we have had to face the lion who was our adversary while here on earth, we will one day face that **Lion of Judah** as well. There is a vast difference between the two. The first lion is our tempter, wanting us to fail. The second is the one who has kept God’s Law and overcame every temptation on our behalf. And your faith in Him assures you that He will welcome you into His eternal kingdom with welcome arms.