

At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert,¹³ and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

¹⁴ **After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.** ¹⁵ **“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”** (NIV 84)

Theme: Christ’s Lonely Victory Leads us to Struggle.

1. Christ withstood Satan’s temptations.
2. He calls us to struggle with our self righteous pride.

Every year many people give up something for the season of Lent. Typically, the motivating force behind doing this is to suffer like Christ suffered. And it is true the season of Lent is a call to struggle. But Lent is not a call to struggle by not eating red meat, or watching your favorite TV show, or refusing to drink any pop. No, Lent is a call to struggle with our sinful flesh. It is a call to put aside the desires of the sinful mind and look to Christ. Along with this, Lent is a season of repentance, which includes believing that through the struggles of Christ all our sins have been paid for.

Today we see that Christ’s victory leads us to struggle. He withstood Satan’s temptations, and he calls us to struggle with our self righteous pride.

Jesus started his ministry when he was baptized. Right after his baptism the Holy Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness. Jesus spent 40 days and 40 night by himself in the desert. He had nothing to eat and drink the whole time. During this time the devil visited Jesus. He was tempting him and trying to get him to sin. At the end of the 40 days, when Jesus was at his weakest physically, the devil again tried to tempt Jesus. Mark just mentions this in passing, but Matthew and Luke record in detail what happened. In three separate ways the devil tried to trick Jesus into sinning by twisting God’s Word. As the father of lies often does, he changed God’s word just a bit—just enough to tempt someone to sin.

But Jesus didn’t bite. The devil wanted Jesus to prove that he was the son of God by turning some rocks into bread—after all Jesus had

nothing to eat for 40 days. But that would be using his divine power for his own benefit instead of trusting in the Father to take care of him. So Jesus replied, **It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.** Then the devil wanted Jesus to jump off of the highest point of the temple, because God promised that he would send his angels to protect him. But Jesus replied, **It also is written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’** Finally Satan wanted Jesus to bow down and worship him, and he would give him the world as his kingdom. So Jesus replied, **Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.** No matter how hard the devil tried, Jesus didn’t fall. He withstood the devil’s temptations. He was able to do this because he is God and as God he cannot sin.

As he tried with Christ, Satan tries to get us to sin. He comes at us in many different way and from all angles. He often uses the same trick he used on Adam and Eve—the same one he tried to use on Jesus. He lies and deceives by twisting God’s Word. He takes the Word of God and changes it just enough. He hopes that you don’t notice that he really didn’t quote God—or at least not accurately. Jesus warns us that the devil will try to do this. For he is **the father of lies**. He is constantly looking to get us away from Christ. As Peter warns us, **the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.**

We know the devil attacks us from all sides. And at times it may seem as if we are fighting the devil all on our own. That we are out on an island, trying to face and defeat the devil by ourselves. We lead ourselves to think that there is no one who can help us. That we have to fight the temptations of our sinful nature all by ourselves. And so, we try to take the devil on our own. After all, we are strong, independent, and able to do anything we put our minds to. But if we try to fight this battle on our own, we will soon realize that we are just that—on our own.

Jesus knows who we feel. He was all alone in his fight against the devil. Mark is the only gospel writer to mention how alone Jesus was. His only companions during those 40 days and nights of temptation were the wild animals. No encouragement from friends. No one to

lean on, or to talk to. He understands the feeling of loneliness. As he fought the devil's temptations, he was all alone.

Jesus may have been alone. But he still defeated Satan. He didn't fall into his temptations. As the writer to the Hebrews tells us, **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.** Jesus was tempted in every way that we are. So he understands what it's like living in this world. He knows the lonely feeling. That it often seems as if we are fighting this battle on our own.

But we are not. For the same means that Jesus used to fight the devil off, he also gives us to us. All three times the devil tried to tempt Jesus, Jesus replied by correctly quoting God's Word. Actually, Jesus replied with quotes all from the book of Deuteronomy. God has graciously given us this same Word. At our disposal we have what we need to fight the devil's temptations. It takes a knowledge of Scripture to notice false doctrine. To be able to recognize when someone twists God's Word, means that we first know what God's Word says in the first place. So we get into his Word and study it. So we to may be ready for his attacks.

Plus we are not alone in this fight, even though it may seem like we are. We have our fellow Christians with us. Those who are going through the same battles that we are. They are able to help us through our temptations. They are able to do this by using the Word. But that is not all. We also have Christ by our side. He is with us every step of the way. He helps us in our time of temptation—for he comes to us through the Word.

Even though we have many people, including Christ himself, helping us in our fight against the devil, we don't always defeat him. But when we fall into temptation and sin, we go to Christ in repentance and believe that he forgives us.

The next event in Mark's gospel that he records after the temptation of Jesus, is his preaching up in Galilee. There Mark tells us that Christ, proclaimed **the gospel of God.** The gospel of God is the good news of his mercy. That he is a merciful God who is slow to anger and abounding in love. So Christ preached about himself. How he came

to save us from our sins. He came to live a perfect life for us. To suffer through the pain and agony of hell. That he came to take all our sins upon himself. So that he could rise three days after his death and take us to live with him in heaven forever. That is the message of the gospel that Christ proclaimed.

And in view of this message, he also preached repentance. **The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.** The time had finally come for the people of Galilee to hear the message of Christ. Through the gospel that Jesus preached he was going to rule in their hearts through faith. So they needed to repent of their evil ways. They were to realize and have remorse over the many times they fell to the devil's temptations. They were to strive to change their sinful ways. And finally believe that Jesus is their Savior, who alone can take away their sins. This message of repentance and forgiveness is the one that Christ preached to the people of Galilee. And he also preaches it to us.

And it is a message we need to hear. For there are many times that we fail to fight off the devil and his temptations. There are many times that our sinful nature gets the best of us. And no matter how hard we try, we are still going to sin. There is no one who is immune. Even the best Christians sin many times every day. As Solomon says, **there is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.** And so we go before God and bended knee. We bow before him and confess all our faults. We must admit that we are horrible miserable sinners who often look toward our own interests instead of his. And we know that we deserve nothing but God's wrath and punishment in hell for our sins. And there is nothing we can do about it.

But we don't want to repent by nature. The last thing we often want to do is admit that we were wrong. Or that we did something that we weren't supposed to do. By nature we think we are better than we really are. We tend to think that we aren't that sinful. Sure we mess up every once in a while. But overall, we're not bad. We think that we do a pretty good of keeping God's law and don't really need to repent that often. So when it comes to repentance we try to get out of it, or blow it off. For that is for real sinners, not people like me. That is part of the suffering that Lent is all about. It is suffering by denying yourself what the sinful nature wants. It is fighting the

temptation to sin. But it is also being man enough to admit when you did wrong. It is admitting that you deserve eternal punishment for your sins. That you can't save yourself. That you need help from the only one who is able to save you—Jesus Christ.

And Christ is able to save you because he kept God's law. He never fell into temptation. That is difference between us and Christ. We can't withstand the devil's temptations. But Jesus did. He lived the perfect life that we could not. And he gave us that perfect life. That is what Jesus told us to believe in. That is what he led us to believe in. He fought that lonely battle against the devil for us. And he won that battle and all others like it, so he could be our Savior.

For many Lent is a season of giving up something. And that is true. But for us, we don't give up something trivial—we give up our sinful desires. We give up our pride and confess our sins before God. We go to him in true repentance, knowing that he won that lonely victory over Satan. And he won the ultimate victory when he rose from the dead. His victory is now our victory and will be forever. Amen.