

# First Sunday in Lent

**SATAN, BE GONE!**

**Matthew 4:1-11**

**First Sunday in Lent**

**Analysis by Paul Jaster**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

5Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,'

and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

7Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

11Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

---

## **DIAGNOSIS: Occupied and Owned by Satan**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Dueling with Jesus***

En garde! It's a duel. Challenge and riposte. Slippery Satan versus yet another Adam. The freshly-minted beloved Son of God. And we? Attentive spectators free to choose sides? "No," says Jesus. We are conscripts captive in a strong man's house-the devil's own (Matt. 12:29). We are territory occupied by hostile power. And we are so under Satan's thumb that the tempter's taunts are a part of the same pokes we thrust at Jesus: If you are the Son of God prove it. Do something about world hunger. Satisfy our belly needs. Bail us out of our high-risk behavior. Serve us and our need to exploit the world with all its splendor. Gold, not God-especially gold. Don't make us hunger, wait, die to our old self, sacrifice, or suffer.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Avoiding & Deflecting***

The sole aim of all these pokes and jabs is to divert Jesus from the cross. To get him to use his favored Son status to serve himself rather than to save others. This is seen so clearly when Satan speaks again (through folks like us) at two important junctures: Peter's "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you" and the crowd's "Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him." It's always tempting to avoid the cross and take a short-cut instead. Even Jesus flirted with it, "Father, let this cup pass from me." Yet, to do so betrays the Father's will. Unlike us, Jesus lives by "every word" that comes from the mouth of God, including the "cross word," and not just those few proof texts we cherry-pick to make self-serving points.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Sent Away**

The cross of Jesus is death to Satan and his forces. No wonder he and his avoid it. Even weak and famished Jesus has the power to dismiss Satan with a single word: "Hypage!" (Five letters in the Greek. To hell with you! Go away! Be off! Be gone!) Blessed Martin Luther was right! One little word subdues him. Asked what that word was, Luther said, "Boo!" But the truth is it also means "boo-hoo" for us, unless we are severed from the devil's power. Else the end-time judge will say to us as well, "Depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Think Waco. How do you storm a strong man's house without damaging the contents? Think the flood. How do you destroy sin without destroying the sinner? Think medicine. How do you treat and cut out a cancer without killing the patient? Raw power doesn't cut it. Redemptive suffering, does.

## **PROGNOSIS: Ministering by the Spirit (Jesus' Own)**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Truly He Is the Son of God**

The same crucified Jesus who is death to us and Satan is also life to us in spite of Satan. God doesn't put a protective bubble around God's beloved Son: Jesus enters our wilderness with its captivity and is tempted every way that we are. Yet, Jesus does what no son of Adam or daughter of Eve has ever done before and remains obedient unto death, even death on the cross. Jesus relies totally on God's word of promise, not his own powers. He "did not cling to life even in the face of death" (Rev. 12:11). With one hand he clings to us ("Father, forgive them. They do not know what they do. They are possessed!") and with the other he clings to God ("Not my will, but thine be done. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. For I belong to you!"). And by that faithful obedience, Jesus is "snatched away and taken to God" in such a way that the Satanic accuser is simultaneously thrown down and can no longer accuse us before

God day and night (so the central chapter of the book of Revelation tells us, which is The Passion seen from God's perspective). In the highest court of all, Satan has "no standing." And our case is severed from his. With Jesus, we are "snatched away and taken to God." For the only testimony God admits into evidence about us now is from the one who, through the most-severe of all testing, has proven to be the faithful witness, firstborn from the dead, the ruler of the kings of earth. That is, God's own. And Jesus, the faithful witness, points to those whom he has marked in holy baptism and says, "Father, I know these; see my brand: This fold, this flock, belongs to me. Satan has no power over them. I own them now. And you do, too! For I am yours and they are mine."

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Submitting to the Cross**

Those who are called, claimed, and owned by the crucified Christ are led by his Spirit through their own trials and tribulations. And eventually they learn to submit to the cross rather than to succumb to the constant temptation to deflect it and avoid it. In a baptized School of Hard Knocks (the church) fed by Word & Sacrament, they learn the truth of what Jesus says, "Those who seek to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." Through disciplines like Lent, they discover the very same thing that Israel learned (much to its amazement) in its wilderness wanderings of forty years: that even in a place where there is certain death, there is life because God is there. Peter and the others learned it. It took them many years. And many, many trips and stumbles. But they learned it. We can learn it, too, in this School of Hard Knocks.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Coming and Ministering by His Spirit**

The end result? "The devil left him, and suddenly angels (angeloi) came and waited (diakonoun) on him." Throw into this

last line the great new thing (Gk. "eu-") that Jesus adds to the Word of God-the value added-and we end up with "eu-angelion" and "diakonia." The two great ministries of those who are freed from Satan's bonds and who are members of Christ's household: evangelism and service. Proclamation of the good news and hands-on help, the waiting on tables, the washing of feet. Not only do we join the ranks of heaven singing "Now!" ("Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah," Rev. 12:10), but we also become those angels (aides and messengers) who come to where Jesus is in solidarity with the last, the least, the little and the lost. We proclaim the good news...and extend his service...to the famished and the possessed...in their wilderness times...and in their wilderness places. After all, is not this the fast God chooses (Isa. 58:6-7; Series A, Epiphany 5): to loose the bonds of injustice, to let the oppressed go free, to share bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into your house, to cover the naked and hide not from our own kin. No longer are we dueling with Jesus. Avoiding him. Denying him. Rather we are an extension of his own mission and his ministry. Take that, Satan! Boo! Be gone! Take a hike. A flying leap. "Hypage!"

*Postscript: Note the conflicting biblical hermeneutics in this duel. The question is not, "Do you know and believe the Bible?" Jesus and Satan use the Bible as a weapon. Satan is a biblicist. Satan knows Scripture inside and out: both the commands and the promises! Satan knows and believes Jesus is the Son of God and that Jesus can make bread from stones (children of Abraham, too, if need be). None of this is in dispute. But to Satan all parts of Scripture are equal. They are an épée-they make a single point (...and a blunt one, at that): "Do this, or else." And if Satan can use that word to trip us up or to poke a hole in our faith on just one point, he has us nailed. For Jesus, however, the word of God is a "two-edged sword." Against us, yes (Law);*

*but also for us (Gospel). The death and resurrection of Jesus says that this latter word is stronger and superior to the other for it is God's last and final word. Consequently, the gospel of the cross cuts to the heart in a very different way than does the law and announces, "For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:39). Jesus is God-for-us, not against us.*