

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
First Sunday in Lent
February 22, 2026
Sermon by Pastor Allen Schroeder
Jesus front and center in your spiritual war

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the De-vil. After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The Tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread."

But Jesus answered, "It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God."

Then the Devil took him into the holy city. He placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, and he said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you. And they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

Jesus said to him, "Again, it is written: You shall not test the Lord your God."

Again the Devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He said to him, "I will give you all of these things, if you will bow down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written:

Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Then the Devil left him, and just then angels came and served him.

Dear Friends of the Savior,

"Hostility!" The word says it all. After the fall into sin, God did not say there would be peace on earth. He said there would be hostility. There would be hostility between Eve and the serpentine devil. There would be hostility between the spiritual descend-ants of Eve and the spiritual descendants of Satan. There would be hostility between one particular Seed of the woman, namely Jesus, and the devil. The hostility would see its major battles during the three-year ministry of Jesus. That series of battles begins with Satan's Blitzkrieg against Jesus at his temptation. It ends when Jesus proclaims, *"It is finished"* on his cross. Today, in the account of Jesus' temptations, you find exactly what you need. You see your Champion **Jesus front and center in your spiritual war.**

1. The devil's attack.

The temptation of Jesus was a deliberate setup, not by Satan, but by the Holy Spirit. After his baptism, *"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."* Mark uses a stronger word. He says that after his baptism, *"The Spirit immediately sent Jesus out into the wilderness."* The action of the Spirit is strong. The word *sent* is the same word used when Jesus cast out devils. The Spirit compelled Jesus into the wilderness. The Spirit placed Jesus front and center in your spiritual war.

The devil was waiting for Jesus in the wilderness. Satan saw this as his chance to bring down the Lord's Christ, and with him, God's plan for your salvation. To accomplish his grand goal, Satan carried out a Blitzkrieg against Jesus. A Blitzkrieg is a quick, all-out attack on the enemy. Its purpose is either to end the war before it begins or to so weaken and discourage the enemy that they soon surrender. A Blitzkrieg had one focal point of attack, like a capital city. The focal point was attacked at its weakest point. In this Blitzkrieg, Jesus was Satan's point of attack. The devil saw Jesus' human nature as his weakest point.

That is brought out in Luke's account of the baptism and temptation of Jesus. Luke has that tender moment at Jesus' baptism when God the Father tells Jesus, *"You are my beloved Son. In you I am well-pleased."* Matthew and Mark have Jesus' baptism and his temptation one after the other, *"then," "immediately."* Luke places Jesus' genealogy between his baptism and his temptation. Why? To

underscore that the person God the Father called his beloved Son at his baptism is also part of the lineage of humanity going back to Adam. The devil saw Jesus' human nature as Jesus' weak spot.

Think of the damage the devil could do by enticing Jesus to sin. God the Father would no longer be well-pleased with his Son. The devil could claim that his temptation and influence are stronger than the Spirit's presence and guidance. Then there is the intended collateral damage. The collateral damage involves you and me, and all people. If the devil was successful in getting Jesus to sin, there would be no forgiveness, no salvation. Not for you. Not for me. Not for anyone. Jesus would not be the perfect, innocent Lamb of God who could take away the sin of the world. Jesus would be nothing but another sinner who couldn't even save himself, let alone you.

Listen to the devil's attack. *"Turn these stones into bread."* That would be simple for him who would soon turn water into wine. What harm would there be in it? Jesus was hungry after forty days of fasting. However, from Jesus' answer, it was clear that Jesus saw this as a temptation to prioritize bread for the body over God's word for the soul. Satan was attacking Jesus' relationship to the word of God. Then Satan shows what power he has. He was created with the powers of an angel. He now uses those powers to be a destroyer instead of a guardian. The devil takes Jesus to the top of Herod's Portico on the south side of the temple. It was a 450-foot drop to the floor of the Kidron Valley. Using part of a Bible verse, Satan told Jesus to jump and trust the Lord to send his angels to protect him so that he doesn't even scrape a toe on the way down, leave alone die. Satan was attacking Jesus' faith and trust in God. Then the devil took Jesus to a high mountain. The devil showed Jesus the glory of the kingdoms of the world. As prince of this world, the devil offered to give Jesus the kingdoms of the world, if Jesus would fall down and worship him. Satan was attacking God's plan of salvation, offering Jesus a crown without his cross, glory without the shame, an earthly kingdom instead of a heavenly kingdom. Falling for any of those temptations would destroy all hope of salvation for you. That is what happens when the devil is present.

The Bible tells you, *"Jesus was tempted in the same ways we are tempted."* We can turn that around. *"We are tempted in the same ways Jesus was tempted."* The devil is present with you. He attacks you as he attacked Jesus. He attacks your need for God's word, your faith, and your salvation. You are tempted to not see the Word of God as the one thing needful in life. Is God's word always at the top of your list of needs? You are tempted to play loose with your faith based on false ideas about the Bible? You may think, "I can sin all I want. After all, God is in the forgiveness business." You may think, "I can climb a mountain in 110-degree weather. I can drive like the road belongs to me. I can handle it. If not, that is what angels are for." You are tempted to seek heaven without the cross of Jesus. Do you ever long for the spiritual pep talk or spiritual group therapy session offered at trendy churches instead of walking the well-trodden path of repentance, forgiveness of sins, and new life in Christ. Satan is present in all these temptations, relentlessly attacking you. He wants your undoing. He has a misery that loves company. He wants your company in a sin-filled life, in a fear-filled death, and in a fiery eternity in hell with him. Jesus front and center in the attacks of Satan is exactly what you need. So is Jesus front and center in the counterattack against Satan.

2. Jesus' Counterattack.

Jesus was more than ready with his counterattack against the devil. He had been fasting for 40 days by the time these temptations took place. Don't overlook those 40 days of fasting. In the Old Testament, fasting was only required one day a year, on the Day of Atonement. Other fasts in the Bible were held voluntarily. Those voluntary fasts were neither arbitrary nor meritorious things like not eating meat on Friday or giving up something for Lent.

In the Bible fasting was denying the basic desires of the flesh to spend deep, personal time with the Lord in meditation and prayer. Jesus had spent 40 days meditating on God's word and praying to his Father while facing the temptations of the devil. You might remember a time when the disciples returned to Jesus befuddled that they were not able to cast out a particular devil. Jesus responded, *"This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."* Jesus' point is that sending the devil into retreat is not flippantly

quoting of a magic Bible verse and the devil's gone. Sending the devil into retreat involves intense immersion into God's Word. When the devil asked Jesus to turn his attention from God's word for his soul to bread for his body, Jesus rightly quoted the Bible, "*Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God.*" Had Jesus, in obedience to the devil, broken his spiritual fast of meditation and prayer, he would have died, not as a sacrifice for sin but as the result of his own sin. In that way, Jesus' life was sustained by the word of God.

Jesus' time in God's word and prayer prepared him for his counterattack against all temptation. Jesus placed his faith in the unaltered word of God, not in Satan's version of it. That God will send his angels to watch over his people in whatever they do is not a universal truth. That was Satan's version of it. That God will send his angels to watch over you when you walk in the ways of a child of God is a universal truth. Seeking the kingdom of God without the cross of Christ is worshiping the devil. Seeking the kingdom of God in the cross of Christ is worshiping the true God. Our Champion's time in God's word equipped him to attack the devil's temptations. It was in the face of specific scripture believed, kept, and quoted by Jesus that "*the devil left*" and good angels came.

As our Champion in Satan's Blitzkrieg, Jesus did what you are unable to do. You and I often fall into sin. Jesus remained "*without sin.*" Jesus "*was tempted in the same ways we are tempted, yet without sin.*" Standing front and center in your spiritual war, Jesus remained perfect. Jesus remained innocent. Jesus remained righteous. By God's grace, there, in Jesus your Champion in your spiritual war, God's accepts his perfection, innocence, and righteousness as your perfection, innocence, and righteousness. In Jesus, God considers you perfect, innocent, and righteous. That is exactly what you need. There's more. In Jesus you also see how you can withstand Satan's temptations and send him into retreat. God has claimed you as his child and empowered you with his Spirit in your baptism. You do well to immerse yourself in God's word to arm yourself with its power over the devil's temptations. And do you remember that passage in First Corinthians which says God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear, but with the temptation will give you a way out? The very next section talks about the Lord's Supper. By receiving Jesus' body and blood, given and shed for you on the cross, God is not only forgiving your sins he's equipping you to launch your own counterattack against the devil. Fully armed with baptism, God's Word, and the Lord's Supper, you can face the temptations of Satan and send the devil into retreat.

But watch out! Luke says that, after these temptations, the devil left Jesus "*until an opportune time.*" That is a reminder that retreat is not defeat. Satan continued to attack Jesus during the three years of his ministry. Jesus continued to counterattack the devil. He kept the devil in retreat. It would not be until Good Friday that retreat would give way to defeat, that Jesus' success in his temptations would give way to Jesus' success on his cross. There, while the devil was stinging the heel of our Champion, Jesus was crushing the head of the devil. Satan's power was defeated when the sins of man-kind were paid for and, in his resurrection, the sting of death was removed. That gives you hope when you sin. We are tempted in the same ways Jesus was tempted, but with sin. Jesus forgives you when you fail to resist the devil's temptations and he refreshes you with the assurance of heaven. The devil still tries his best to perpetuate the hostile-ties against you. Resist him every day in your spiritual fast marked with meditation and prayer. Bask in forgiveness every day. Know another day is coming. The day the Lord takes you home to heaven or the day he returns. Then the devil will be forced to leave you forever. Then the ruin of Satan which started as retreat, then turned into defeat, will be complete. The hostilities will end. That is exactly what you need. Amen.