

### One Little Word Can Fell Him.

***“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’ Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “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 answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.”***

We don't know exactly when Luther wrote *A Mighty Fortress*. Scholars think he wrote it probably sometime between 1527 and 1529. If this is the case, we can understand why he wrote it then. This was a discouraging time for Luther. A friend of his was martyred for being part of the Reformation. His books were being burned. Controversies surrounded him. And it was during this time his second child, Elizabeth, died and she didn't even see her first birthday. Friends noticed that Luther was suffering emotionally. So it makes sense he wrote *A Mighty Fortress* at this time. The more depressed he felt, the more he needed the Lord as his strength. One copy of the hymn had this inscription on it: “A hymn of comfort.” No wonder he asked friends to come and sing it to him.

For centuries the church had the temptation of Christ as its gospel reading on the first Sunday in Lent. The idea was to show how Jesus has come to take on the devil for us and how he wins! So Luther took this hymn, *A Mighty Fortress*, and used it for Lent. Maybe you can see the connection between the temptation of Christ and *A Mighty Fortress*. Jesus proves he is our refuge and strength, so flee to him.

*I. Jesus battles the devil, and wins, of course.*

***“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.”*** Don't just breeze through these words. Jesus was baptized by John. Immediately God leads him out into the wilderness. Why? It is for our benefit. God wants us to see Jesus do battle with the devil. Yes, God the Holy Spirit led him out there. But don't think Jesus was dragged unwillingly. He wanted to go. He was ready. Note also how Jesus fought the devil. Jesus used the same weapons you and I have, God's Word and faith in that Word. That's it. Jesus and the devil didn't hurl thunderbolts at each other as you may have seen in some fantasy movie. Nor did Jesus fling vengeful angels at him like cruise missiles. He used the same Word and faith you and I have.

Also, notice how God starves Jesus for forty days. He makes Jesus as weak as humanly possible. This means that Jesus didn't win because of his physical or emotional strength. Jesus won solely because of God's Word. Now, let's begin.

***“The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’ Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*** God said at Jesus' baptism that Jesus is the Son he loves. So the devil suggests, “If God loves you, if you are his son, why does God make you suffer like this? Why hasn't he fed you in forty days? Stop your suffering. Make some bread from the stones.” What would you do? I know what I would do. I would turn the stone into a special kind of bread, a bun with a grilled half-pound burger with bacon and cheese, French fries, and coleslaw.

Do you see what the devil does? He calls reality a lie and what is a lie he calls reality. The reality is God loves us. He had made us his dear children through Baptism. That is a fact. But listen to how the devil tries to turn that reality into a lie. If God loves you, then why do you still suffer? Why doesn't he take your pains away, improve your financial situation, and give you success? So the devil suggests that God doesn't really love you. You are all alone out there in the wilderness so you better take matters into your own hands. You can't rely on God.

Look at Jesus. Immediately he says, ***“It is written.”*** We don't live and survive on bread alone. Rather we live and survive because of God's promises. Jesus didn't doubt God's love. He trusted his Father would not abandon him in the wilderness.

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Here is how it works with us. You know the song. "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Only the devil teaches us to sing it like this, "Jesus loves me, this I know, and that is all I want to know." He tempts to know Christ and nothing else about God and his Word. He tempts us to think we that as long as we were Baptized and went through confirmation, we are free to do whatever we want: lie, cheat, hurt our neighbor. He tells us we don't even need church anymore.

Jesus again said, "**It is written.**" Yes, God promises us this, but he also tells us that. Angels protected Jesus, but he also didn't mock God by ignoring the rest of the Bible.

**"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"** Think about Jesus and what he would have to suffer to save the world. The devil is suggesting Jesus can have it all without the cross. No nails. No wilderness. No suffering. All you have to do is worship me, just once.

What would you have done? It is hard to follow Jesus. People will hate us. It means giving up "fun" things like sin and revenge and selfishness. It means doing things the hard way like working honestly rather than cheating, or resolving and forgiving instead of fighting. But the devil offers us the easy way. You will have more money if you cheat. It feels good to get back at someone. The world is much better than heaven. There is only one catch. You must worship the devil. We do this when we do what he says. How many times have we listened to him?

But look at Jesus. He says again, "**it is written,**" and explains the first commandment. Jesus refuses to take the shortcut. He came down from heaven willingly. He willingly went into the desert. He will take every step to the cross through all that misery and pain. He will drink every bitter drop from that cup so God in love can forgive us and we can worship him and not the devil.

## *II. Jesus did all of this for us.*

Ok, Jesus never sinned. He fought the devil and won. So what? Here's what. He did it because we can't. There is a thing out there known as a champion. We think of a champion as someone who wins. Originally, a champion is one who wins for another. In the Middle Ages, knights would joust. The Queen would pick one and tie her handkerchief around his lance. He would be fighting for her. That was the agreement Goliath made. Send out one of your men to fight me. The winner will determine which nation wins. You will see this at the Olympics this summer. Athletes are not merely competing. They are competing for their home nation. They are doing it for us. They are our champions.

This text isn't a manual on how to fight the devil on your own. Nor does God come to us and say, "You sinned. I am sending you out there again. Do better this time." It is about Christ. It is how he serves as our champion. He was going to the cross to suffer hell itself so we don't have to. On the way he fought the devil every step of the way and won because we can't. He did it for us.

Jesus defeated the devil. We belong to Jesus. But the devil still tempts us. What should we do? As it says in the hymn, "one little word can fell him." What is that word? We discussed it in the office on Thursday. Is that little word God's Word like how Jesus kept saying, "It is written?" Is that little Word actually Jesus who is described in John as "the Word?" Luther didn't fully explain it for us. But there is an interesting letter he wrote where he makes reference to this hymn and suggests that this little word is "You lie," or "liar." The little word that fells the devil is when you tell him he lies.

Someone is lying to you. The devil wants you to think God is lying. God doesn't love you otherwise he would be treating you better. But it is the devil who is lying to you. How can we recognize his lies? Jesus exposed the devil's lies with God's Word. So can we. Suddenly memory work makes sense. Studying the Bible at home makes sense. And I think we understand why Luther wrote *A Mighty Fortress*. Jesus did all of this so we can find refuge in him. Hide behind him. And when the devil still tempts you, hide behind God's Word. Amen.