

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Do you have what it takes?” I hear that phrase and think of the road to training for some grueling race or contest. Do you have what it takes to run and complete a marathon or an Ironman or a Tough Mudder?

Or...maybe as a college student, do I have what it takes to make it through 4 years of intense schooling, to get a degree in this field I long to study and work in?

Or, as a first-time parent, do I have what it takes, to be responsible not only for my own life, but for the life of another child, a baby? Can I do this?

Well, today, do we have what it takes to join Jesus for the walk to the cross? The road, for us, for him, it's not easy. One filled with potholes and cracks and obstacles. It involves overcoming temptation. So, do we have what it takes?

Did he have what it takes? I'm talking about Jesus, here, very early in his earthly ministry. He had just been baptized by John the Baptist, so his Father had basically just sent him out to begin his work.

Well, you know, there's nothing quite like being thrown into the fire right off the bat. Because that's what happened to Jesus. From the Jordan River, he went straight into the desert for 40 days, with no food, no water, and if that wasn't difficult enough, here comes the devil, primed and ready to give Jesus his first real test, his first real trial, his first temptations.

Did Jesus have what it takes? Well, let's look and see. Here Luke records three of the devil's temptations. You might notice that they're in a little different order from how the Gospel of Matthew lists them. Matthew lists them in chronological order, starting with the bread temptation, then the jumping off the temple temptation, and finally, the temptation to bow down to the devil.

Luke switches the last two around. Probably the best guess as to why he does that is he takes more of a geographical approach to listing the temptations, moving from the desert to a mountain, finally to the heart of Jerusalem, the temple. Now, which order you prefer, your eternity doesn't depend on it.

But what matters most is what the devil was tempting Jesus to do, and how Jesus approached fighting these temptations on his road to the cross.

So we come to the first temptation. You could imagine, Jesus, after 40 days, no food, no water, that on top of having been in the desert, he was a little hungry. And it was that human need that Satan pounced on. “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

Sounds pretty harmless, right? I mean, later on, Jesus would change water into wine, so how hard could this be? Do you see the potential downfall? It wasn't so much the devil trying to get Jesus to prove he was God; the devil would have been fully aware of that. But he was tempting Jesus to use his power as the Son of God for his own selfish purpose: to provide bread for himself.

Well, Jesus wasn't easily fooled. "It is written [in God's Word], 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" Matthew adds, "...but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

The devil focused on physical nourishment; Jesus knew that wasn't enough. It might satisfy his physical craving for a time, but that wasn't enough. A healthy diet of God's Word is what he needed, and that was something Jesus was going to trust his Heavenly Father to provide. Point...Jesus.

Well, if you know Satan, you know he does not give up easily, and I'm sure he was still salivating at the opportunity to haul in his crowning achievement, getting the Son of God, God himself, to sin. So, temptation number 2. Satan led Jesus up to a high place, likely a mountain, which would have given Jesus a good view of a large part of Israel. Once there, Satan's offer was simple. "You see all this? I will give it to you, make it all yours. All you have to do is bow down to me, grovel at my feet, and worship me."

Really? Satan was that conceited that he thought he could claim ownership over what was God's, over what God created? And yet, there was an appeal. Jesus could either have this earthly plunder just by simply bowing down to Satan, and also, rejecting the will of God, or he could go through all the suffering and pain and punishment lying before him, all that so he could rule over the heavens and the earth, all of creation. One was definitely the easier road.

But it's the road Jesus did not take. "It is written [in God's Word]: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" There was only one person worthy of worship, honor, and praise, and it wasn't Satan. Jesus would walk the road, endure the hardships, suffer whatever it would take for you and me, to save us. Point...Jesus.

So, one more chance. Satan thought he finally had Jesus figured out. Jesus responded to all of his previous temptations with the Word of God, so Satan would use that very word as his own weapon.

They went to the most holy place, the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem, a place for all to see the mighty Jesus fall prey to Satan and his cunning. "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it's written [in God's Word]: 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you carefully...so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Hey, pretty convincing. He used God's Word, so it's definitely legit, right? Pretty foolish, actually. Asking Jesus to put his life at risk, to put God and his faithfulness to the test by doing something that no sane person would do, purposely thrown themselves off the top of a building.

Jesus knew that, and his answered showed it, "It [God's Word] says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" So straight-forward. Point...Jesus.

So, how did he do? How did Jesus do? Well, a whole lot better than I would have done, and I'm guessing the same holds true for you, too. Jesus showed he had what it takes, to face Satan's temptations and to come out on top, victorious. Those temptations, defeated, Jesus was ready to walk to long road to the cross.

But what about us? If our theme applied to every one of us here, that the road to the cross involves overcoming temptation, would we be successful? Would we have what it takes? I'll be the first to say no, I couldn't do it. What about you?

Now, not to say that we lose every time. You know, there are some wonderful times, where by the grace of God, we are able to look Satan, look sin in the face and say, "You know what, I see what you're trying to do, lead me away from what God wants, but I want no part of it." And in those times, God be praised for helping us to stand up under those temptations.

But for every time you and I say no, there're at least a handful of times when we don't. Maybe it's your pet sin, like the little white lies you tell so you can avoid the blame, or the times you just can't help yourself, you have this frustration with another person building up in you, you can't contain it any longer, and you just let it out as you tell someone else, not realizing what you're really doing, hurting that other person...point, Satan.

Or maybe Satan's a little more cunning, putting that seed of discontent in your heart, because you see your friend got this new car or this new job or these new clothes, and you're not happy where you are, and you start to get mad at God for not making you as successful as others around you, but for giving you the raw deal...point, Satan.

Or maybe the temptation is so obvious, like God commands me to respect and honor those in authority, but I'm not happy with the rules my parents have set up for me, so I'm going to follow them, or the government is getting out of control, so I'm just going to vocally shred them to pieces every chance I get...point, Satan.

Too often, we show we don't have what it takes, by ourselves, to walk that road to the cross with Jesus and to overcome all the temptations of the devil. And for that, we ought to belong to Satan, to be his forever, to go to be with him forever.

But you know that doesn't happen because God does not leave us on our own. Thankfully, that road to the cross wasn't ours to walk. And, while we don't always overcome temptations, Jesus has.

I want you, for a few seconds now, to turn back to our second lesson for this morning, from Hebrews. What does it say? Let's read verse 15 together, "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."

How well that verse fits with gospel for this morning. The temptations we face day after day, the obstacles Satan throws in our way, tripping us up, causing us to sin, we don't face those alone. No, Jesus sympathizes with us. He knows what we're going through. He even empathizes with us and our weaknesses because he's dealt with the same temptations.

You know, those weren't the only temptations Jesus endured. If you notice in our verses, it says "for forty days he [Jesus] was tempted by the devil." The whole time Jesus was in the wilderness, the devil came at him, time and time again, temptation after temptation, trying to get Jesus to sin.

And then, our very last verse this morning, “When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.” There would be more times throughout his earthly ministry when Satan would tempt Jesus to give it all up, to stop his work and sin.

And here’s where Jesus differs from you and me...“yet was without sin.” He never caved. Not once. The one tempted by the devil personally, and he overcame.

And Jesus, our Champion, the valiant one fighting for us, he overcame sin and Satan for us as well. Take a walk to the cross. See your Champion hanging there. He’s doing it for you. He’s bearing your sins for you. He’s suffering God’s wrath for you. He’s enduring the punishment of hell for you, for the times you give in to temptation instead of overcoming it.

But don’t be sad. Don’t fret. He’s doing it because he loves you. He’s doing it because you mean the world to him. He’s doing it because he wants you all for himself. By his death, you are. And by his resurrection, you will be all his forever in heaven, when you will rise from the dead to live in his kingdom forever.

You know, Jesus, he was able to walk the road to the cross. Jesus, he was able to overcome every temptation. And now he gives us a road to walk, not to a cross, but a road to walk CARRYING a cross, the temptations, the hardships, the sufferings Satan throws our way. And he’s right there with us, enabling us to overcome.

How do we? How do we face temptation, fight temptation? I think Jesus gives us a pretty good weapon here. Martin Luther wrote about it in the hymn we just sang...“one little word can fell him (that is, Satan).”

That’s the powerful weapon of God’s Word. There is nothing better to fight back against the devil than to have God’s Word tucked in your back pocket.

Like, if life is going rough, and there’s the temptation to doubt God, why is he doing this to me...“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who have been called according to his purpose.” “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

There’s a Bible passage to speak against every sin Satan entices us to commit, to overcome that temptation. We can go to God’s Word when sin attacks, for there we find comfort. There we find encouragement. There we find forgiveness. There we find a defense.

Walk the road to the cross. It involves overcoming temptations. Thankfully, Jesus has done that for us already. And now he helps us because our fight is not done yet. But he’s equipped you. He’s given you his Word. He’s by your side. And with Jesus, the devil will not, shall not, cannot overpower us. Amen.