



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 4:1-11

Topic

The devil fights Jesus in the Judean wilderness
and is soundly defeated

Title

"I Fought The Lord and The Lord Won"

Introduction

It's called *single combat*. It is a duel between two single warriors which takes place in the context of a battle between two armies.

Often it is champion warfare, with the two combatants considered the champions of their respective sides.

Typically it takes place in the no-man's-land between the opposing armies, with other warriors watching and themselves refraining from fighting until one of the two single combatants has won.

- A biblical example of single combat would be David versus Goliath.
- A literary example would be Achilles versus Hector in the *Illiad*.
- My favorite single combat would have to be Captain Kirk versus the Gorn in the original Star Trek episode, *Arena*.

The greatest, most significant, single combat in all history in all the universe was Jesus versus Satan in the Judean wilderness.

It's most often referred to as the temptation of Jesus by the devil. While that is certainly an accurate description, I think it waters-down the fact it was spiritual combat.

The devil tempted Jesus; that was his strategy, his weaponry. But God the Holy Spirit drove Jesus out to the no-man's-land of the desert in order to take the fight to Satan.

Immediately after this encounter, in which Jesus is victorious, He will begin to announce that "the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." He will go about destroying the works of the devil: casting out demons, healing all manner of disease and illness that is attributed to Satan, and setting free those held captive by the devil.

Make no mistake - this is combat on a cosmic level for the souls of men.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Your King Took The Fight To The god Of This World, and #2 Your King Put To Flight The god Of This World.

#1 Your King Took The Fight To The god Of This World

(v1-10)

In his Gospel, the apostle John three times records Jesus as calling Satan "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He is elsewhere called "the god of this world" (Second Corinthians 4:4), and "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2).

John goes on to say that "the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil" (First John 3:8). Jesus once referred to His fight with Satan as "binding the strong man" (Mark 3:27).

There is a very clear, very obvious, warfare motif to the ministry of Jesus. The whole idea of preaching the kingdom of Heaven reminds us that the kingdoms of this world are under the influence of the devil, and that men are held captive by him.

In the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ the devil is described as making war with God's saints (13:7). There is even warfare in Heaven (12:7) as Michael the archangel fights against the devil and his demons and throws Satan out of Heaven once and for all.

The apostle Paul described our salvation by saying that Jesus "rescued us from the domain [kingdom] of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

When Jesus announced "the kingdom of Heaven is at hand," it was an assault against the rule of the devil on the earth.

Make no mistake. What we call the temptation of Jesus was an impressive single combat between the champions of these two kingdoms - the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of darkness.

Mat 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Chapter three ended with God the Father attesting from Heaven that Jesus was the Christ, the long awaited Messiah and King. The Holy Spirit alighted upon Jesus in the form of a dove to anoint Him for His ministry.

His first order of business: single combat with the devil in a non-man's-land. One on one. Mano-y-diabalos.

Mat 4:2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

You gotta love the *Rocky* franchise of movies for the training sequences. Whether he was hitting slabs of beef in a deep freezer or lifting logs out in the Siberian wilderness, Rocky was gonna be at his physical best.

Jesus was going to be at His physical... **Worst!** I'm sure you've heard it said that forty days is about the limit the human body can go in fasting; and that once you feel hunger again, you'd better eat or you will die. (My limit is about forty minutes!).

Jesus was at the end of what He could endure physically. We might see it as a weakness, giving the devil an advantage. In fact, it was part of Jesus' arsenal, a weapon Satan was not ready for - prayer and fasting, and voluntary physical weakness that would reveal God's spiritual strength.

Two things stand out about Jesus' fasting:

1. First, you are put on notice immediately that the warfare Jesus is going to wage to defeat Satan and establish the kingdom of Heaven is very different than anything we would ever imagine. It reminds us that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal; they are not the natural things of this world. They are spiritual, but they can pull down strongholds and defeat our enemies.
2. The second thing that His fasting - especially His hunger - announces to us is that Jesus would be fighting Satan **as a man** - *not* as God. He was the God-man, fully God and fully human. But while on the earth in the first century, Jesus did not utilize His deity. He acted as a man born of, filled with, and baptized by, God the Holy Spirit.

I wonder what, or who, Satan expected to show-up in the wilderness? This idea of God becoming a man was new to angels and demons, too. No one really knew what to expect from Jesus.

I wonder, too, if Satan thought it would be relatively easy once he saw Jesus in the flesh? After all, the last time anything even remotely similar took place was in the Garden of Eden. There Satan found it quite easy to tempt Eve to disobey God, and Adam to sin and forfeit the rights to the kingdoms of the world over to him.

Adam was in a perfect environment, in a perfect body. Jesus was in a body suffering the ravages of hunger, out in a barren wilderness.

As to choice of venue and the physical condition of his opponent, the advantage seemed to be with the devil.

The other Gospels indicate that Satan tempted Jesus throughout the forty days but it's clear there was one, great fight at the end.

Mat 4:3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

Satan is called "the tempter." Think of it like a descriptive nickname we give boxers or ultimate fighters. He was, and is, a master at temptation - at soliciting you to disobey God **and** to think you're actually doing something good.

Remember when Satan tempted Eve to disobey God? He got her, and Adam, thinking that the forbidden fruit was "good," even though God had explained the terrifying consequences of eating it.

Don't be fooled, or fool yourself, when something seems 'good' if it is obviously contrary to God's Word or His will. It's a temptation with terrifying consequences.

How do you handle a hungry man? Well, if He is the unique God-man, you tempt Him to turn stones into bread.

That sounded like a good thing. There was even a tradition among the Jews that the Messiah would reproduce the miracle of the manna in the wilderness. What better way to kill two birds with one 'stone?' (Get it?).

The devil is so good at temptation! As I said, he makes disobedience to God seem like a good thing. A lot of Christians are living in some sort of compromise with what God calls sin because it seems 'good' to them. It's not.

Mat 4:4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.' "

A memory verse from Sabbath School was all Jesus needed to overcome the devil's initial blow. No miraculous powers. Just the Word of God.

Throughout this fight The Lord will use nothing besides the Word of God. Nothing. Don't forget, though, that the Word is called "the sword of the Spirit." It's a weapon that cannot be defeated if unsheathed and wielded properly.

The Spirit-empowered Word is enough to gain victory in life. We can be too quick to suggest that God's Word is insufficient; that we need further help. I'm not saying there won't be an ongoing struggle. But, in the end, the Spirit empowered Word of God is what will gain the victory over temptation and sin - not the words of men.

Satan tempted Jesus physically and it led to what we would call an infirmity. An "infirmity" isn't a sin. It's a temporary weakness that requires some strengthening. In this case, Jesus was temporarily weakened by fasting and would need food to be strengthened.

It gives new meaning to the verse in Hebrews that says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our infirmities, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus was acting as a man - a man born of, filled with, baptized by, the Holy Spirit. He was empowered to keep His physical appetites under the control of the Spirit.

If He could, **we can**. OK, maybe Jesus had the advantage of being perfect - of having no sin nature. I'm not saying we have this strength on our own. I'm saying that we are in Him and can therefore do all things through Christ Who strengthens us.

Don't underestimate the devil. He is able to adapt. Seeing that Jesus, as a man, is going to let the spiritual part of Him control the physical part, Satan next tempts Jesus spiritually.

Mat 4:5 Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple,

Scholars debate about whether the devil actually transported Jesus or if this was a sort of vision. I'm thinking Jesus was really there, on that pinnacle - otherwise the temptation loses its force.

There was another Jewish tradition, this one saying that the Messiah would appear suddenly on the pinnacle of the Temple.

While we are looking at Jesus on the pinnacle, doesn't it freak you out just a little that God the Father permitted Satan to transport Jesus in such a manner?

Truth is, we don't always like the permissions God gives regarding the circumstances and events of our lives. There are some things, in the arena of suffering, that we would much rather avoid entirely.

Mat 4:6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'HE SHALL GIVE HIS ANGELS CHARGE OVER YOU,' and, IN THEIR HANDS THEY SHALL BEAR YOU UP, LEST YOU DASH YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.' "

This is the second time Satan began by saying, "**if** you are the Son of God." It should be translated, "**since** you are the Son of God." Satan was not disputing Jesus' identity; he knew who Jesus was. He just didn't know what to make of Him. He'd never faced an opponent like this before.

The devil thought he was calling Jesus' bluff. If Jesus trusted God so much to care for Him spiritually; if He cared not for physical things; then jump - trusting God would save Him. And, after all, hadn't God said He would do just that? That seemed to be the point of the Scripture Satan quoted.

Don't overlook the fact that Satan knows the Bible. He's been studying it for thousands of years. He can quote parts of it to suit his purposes. He is the one who, on the surface, can make the Bible say almost anything he wants.

Satan omitted the part of the verse that says, "to keep you in all your ways." It was thus a text out of context. God never promised He would rescue you from doing stupid, presumptuous things. No, He promised He would sustain you by His grace as you walked with Him along paths He had designed for you.

Texts out of their context are lethal weapons. They are like having a gun jam and explode in your hand - backfiring, as it were.

Mat 4:7 Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'YOU SHALL NOT TEMPT THE LORD YOUR GOD.' "

Jesus didn't simply point out the misuse; He quoted a verse that showed why the misuse was so sinister. It would be tempting God.

Satan was saying, "You trust God so much, then jump." Jesus responded, "I trust God so much that I won't jump."

If you have to prove God, then you don't really trust Him, do you?

We like to say that trust is earned, and maybe that is true on a human level. God, however, does not need to earn our trust. He deserves it and we prove we trust Him by abiding in our circumstances.

Sometimes, in a fight, you go for broke. You know you are losing. You try to land one last haymaker.

Desperate, on the ropes, the devil goes for it.

Mat 4:8 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

Obviously there is no peak from which you can observe the history of the world. I think Jesus was literally transported to "an exceedingly high mountain," but, in this case, He was then shown a vision of all the kingdoms this world has produced from the fall of man forward.

They do have a certain earthly "glory." We look back and marvel at them, at their extent, at their achievements. We talk about 'the wonders of the world.' The great pyramid of Giza. The hanging gardens in Babylon. Tourist stuff like that.

Did you ever consider that some of those achievements might be satanic? When Satan is called "prince" by Jesus in John's Gospel, the Greek word is *archōn*, which means the highest official in a region. He was active in those successive kingdoms.

I guess what I'm saying is that, for example, maybe the mystery of how the pyramids were built is that Satan engineered them.

Mat 4:9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

I think it is profound that Jesus would not dispute Satan's right to offer the kingdoms of the world to Him. Satan was certainly not the rightful king, but he had the rights to the kingdoms because of what Adam did in the Garden of Eden. Adam forfeited mankind's stewardship over the earth; he handed it to the devil.

Blinded by his own sin of pride, Satan thinks that the kingdom of Heaven is just another in the long succession of kingdoms. He thinks Jesus wants to establish another of those earthly kingdoms. In Satan's warped perspective it's just another way to rule over lost, Hell-doomed men and women.

He cannot begin to fathom that the kingdom of Heaven is the righteous rule of God among men whom He loves and who love Him in return. Satan cannot envision submission and service to God as the highest, greatest purpose for a created being who has exercised their free will to yield to God rather than rebel against Him.

His last punch, as it were, misses the mark totally. Jesus hadn't come to establish a kingdom over men whom He could subdue by omnipotence and rule by dictatorship. He came to redeem them, to reconcile them, so that we could live forever with God in love.

He came to save them; to save us; to save you; to save me.

Think of the succession of worldly kingdoms. What kingdom of man's, influenced by Satan, would you like to live in? They were all corrupt and corrupting. They all fell in upon themselves in immorality and injustice.

How about today? How about our great nation, the United States? How are we doing, as a kingdom? Immorality and injustice are the norm. Without revival we will not survive.

Mat 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND HIM ONLY YOU SHALL SERVE.' "

Worship is reserved for God. Worshipping Him, voluntarily, is the highest purpose for men and angels. Anything else is ugly, is evil, is limiting, is destructive.

Satan thought he could bribe Jesus to worship him; that worship was about what you can get. Do we worship God because of His gifts? Or because He is God and worthy regardless of His gifts?

It was over. Jesus had won. The devil's weakness - his pride - had been exposed. Jesus - as a man, not as God - could command the devil to flee from Him.

Jesus chose to let the spiritual rule over the physical, and to worship God as His highest, greatest purpose. He lived it out by submitting to God, suffering, and, ultimately, dying. When in the fight, He used the Word of God skillfully.

So can we do all those things through Christ!

#2 Your King Put To Flight
The god Of This World
(v11)

After the victory there was an after party.

Mat 4:11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

I'm just speculating, but maybe the angels - and the demons - had box seats to this single combat.

Why not? We sometimes forget there are angels all around who most definitely see into the human realm.

I think this was witnessed by multitudes of the heavenly host as well as the fallen angels said to be under Satan's authority. It makes sense it would be seen by them.

Jesus' 'corner help' came and "ministered to Him." We assume they gave Him food, but I think "ministered" is a much bigger word than that. Nevertheless we are not told the extent of their ministry so we must leave it at that.

Jesus put the devil to flight. He had won, but the war was far from over. Every step of His ministry, The Lord would confront the kingdom of darkness. Demon possessed individuals. Diseases attributed to demons. The release of men taken captive by Satan to do his will.

Eventually the devil would incite men to betray, arrest, convict, and crucify Jesus. The devil gloated; the demons celebrated. Little did they know, twisted as they are, that it would mark the final, once-for-all end of the devil's reign when three days later The Lord was alive forevermore - still a man, but now the rightful sovereign over the universe.

Soon - very soon - a scene from the Book of the Revelation will play out. It is that time when,

Rev 11:15 ... "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

It hasn't happened yet. Jesus won the war, but battles rage on.

We live between D-Day and V-Day. The enemy fights on, tempting you. Draw your strength from The Lord. Use the spiritual weapons available to you. Believe that in your weaknesses He is made strong.

Put simply: Resist the devil and he will flee from you, too.