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Luke 4:1-13

## LION FIGHTING IN THE WILDERNESS

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. One illegal activity that is still popular is dogfighting. Some people might call it a sport, but it is cruelty to animals. Dogs are bred to be mean and to fight against each other. People will bet on their favorite dog and hope that the other dog is killed. It is indeed barbaric. These dogs can also hurt humans. Many a child and even adult has been hurt or killed when a pit bull attacked them. If you think that dogfighting could be vicious, you should see lion fighting.

Lions are supposed to be the king of beasts. Lions are ferocious. We would not want to go up against a lion without something to defend us. We know that Satan has been described as a roaring lion, prowling around, looking for someone to devour. He is ready to pounce and tempt people into all kinds of sin. We sadly see his handiwork in the world each and every day. We see it has worked on us too many times to count. But there is another lion, the Lion of Judah, who would go into battle with Satan and come out as the victor. The fight would be long, and the fight would be fierce. This morning we will observe LION FIGHTING IN THE WILDERNESS. There are number of things that are questioned by people in our day and age. They are the existence of God, the existence of evil, and a clear victor.

In today's world people doubt the existence of a personal God. As I said a couple of sermons ago, unbelief believes whatever is convenient for it to believe, even though it makes absolutely no sense. People believe that there is no God. Therefore, the only way the universe could have come into being was through an accident where a dust cloud blew up and formed all the stars and planets. Life had to spontaneously begin in the sea somehow, with every creature coming from the same one celled creature. Mosquitoes and elephants, giraffes and squirrels, robins and rhinoceroses, worms and human beings all had to have evolved from that same creature. It doesn't make sense to me, but many people believe that because they force themselves to believe it.

Many people also don't believe in the existence of Satan, the devil. They laugh at such a thought. They picture the devil as a cartoon character with a tail and a pitchfork. In doing so, they make a fatal mistake. They don't realize that we are involved in a war, a war for our very souls. The apostle Paul reminds us that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." The Bible is true. It tells us that Satan and evil are real. It tells us that Satan wants to destroy us. It tells us that we cannot conquer Satan on our own. It tells us of the one who would destroy the power of Satan forever.

Today is the First Sunday in Lent. The theme is the same every year. Jesus goes out into the wilderness to battle Satan. When we think of what Jesus did to save us, the usual answer is that he suffered and died on the cross. Every Sunday School student will tell you that and it is a correct answer. But it is an incomplete answer. Jesus would have to suffer and die for our sins, but he would also have to be the perfect Sacrifice. He would have to do what we were unable to do. He would have to resist every temptation of the evil one.

Jesus had been baptized at the Jordan River. Heaven itself was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon our Lord in the form of a dove. God the Father declared Jesus to be his beloved Son with whom the Father was well pleased. Jesus would then go out into the wilderness. We are going to see that Satan would do everything he could to get Jesus to fail in his mission to redeem fallen man.

Jesus would go without food for forty days. At the end of those forty days, you might well imagine that Jesus was hungry. Satan would attack him. Satan would tempt Jesus throughout these forty days. He might bombard Jesus with temptations for hours on end. He might go silent for a while. You would wonder when his next attack would begin. All his temptations could be summed up in what the Gospel writers record. We also remember that every temptation is a variation of the first one: "Did God really say?"

And that is where Satan began. "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." God the Father had declared Jesus to be his beloved Son, but that was over 40 days ago. Did Jesus hear the Father correctly? Is that what he was really saying? Jesus is his beloved Son? It sure didn't look like it. He has been out in this wilderness and has had nothing to eat. Think of all the things that would sound so good right now: a steak, some grilled fish, a salad, some fresh bread. Yes, that's the answer. Can you close your eyes and imagine a nice fresh loaf of bread right out of the oven? You can smell it. You can taste it. Obviously, your Father is not thinking about you at all. Perhaps you aren't the Son of God. It's time to take matters into your own hands.

Does this sound familiar? Has Satan ever tried to sow seeds of doubt in your mind? Has he ever suggested that God really doesn't love you? If God loved you, then you would not be dealing with pain or depression or loneliness or any other kind of physical or emotional hurt. If God truly loved you, you wouldn't be struggling with paying your bills or having relationship problems or getting passed over for a promotion at work. If God truly loved you, everything would be going well in your life each and every day. Since everything is not going well each and every day, you can only conclude that God really doesn't love you. Oh, Satan works that one so well. We've all fallen for it temporarily. Some have become convinced to have nothing to do with God permanently.

We also need to remember that temptation by itself is not sin. Temptation can be a sinful thought or suggestion entering the mind. We cannot escape them as long as we are in this sinful world. But the suggestions by themselves are not sin. It is only when we continue to entertain these thoughts and act upon them that they become sin. James describes the process: "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death."

Jesus heard what Satan was suggesting. He simply would not entertain the thought. He would not doubt what his heavenly Father had said. By performing a miracle in turning a stone into a loaf of freshly baked bread, Jesus would be saying that he could not trust his Father to provide for his needs. It would also be saying that Jesus would not want to face pain or suffering, the very reason that he had come into the world.

Jesus would show his trust by turning to the Scriptures. It is written, "Man does not live by bread alone." The nation of Israel had failed the test over and over again in the same wilderness. Even though God had shown his miraculous power many times, they rebelled against him. They did not trust that he would give them food, at least not the kind of food that they wanted. Jesus showed perfect trust in his Father's promises.

The second temptation is built on a lie. Satan is very good at that. He is the prince of lies. He is the deceiver. He is very good at lying. He is the master of it. He can make you believe that up is down and left is right and even that he is God. Yes, that is what he told Jesus. He shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and claims for himself the power and authority that only God has. He says that all the authority and splendor had been given to him and he, in turn, can give it to anyone he wants. "Well, Jesus, I can give it to you. All you have to do is bow down and worship me."

We've heard that one before as well. Satan offers power and wealth and health and glory. You can have these things and you can have them without God. You don't have to confess your sins. You don't have to seek God's forgiveness. You don't need to go to church or read the Scriptures. Just listen to me and you will have everything your heart desires. It sounds pretty good to our ears. Once again, he was telling Jesus that he could have glory without

suffering. Why would he need to suffer and die for the sins of the world? The people of this world simply aren't worth it. Jesus could have riches, power and glory without the pain and suffering and shame of the cross.

Doesn't that sound good to us? Jesus told us that if we want to follow him, we have to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. Satan says that we don't have to do that at all. What would you rather have: a life of self-denial or a life of self-indulgence? What do people enjoy more: Mardi Gras or Ash Wednesday? We know what most people will choose. The thing is that Satan is a liar. His promises always have a catch. There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death. Jesus would tell Satan: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." There is only one God and Satan is not him. Satan is a liar who can only offer empty promises.

In the final temptation, Satan will use the Scripture, but he will distort it. He will try to make it say something that it doesn't say. There are many who fall prey to this one as well. One of our problems today is that we don't know what the Scriptures say. We don't read them like our grandparents did. We know that people can make the Bible say almost anything. The key to our interpretation is always Christ. If he is missing, then we can make it sound only like a book of rules and regulations.

Here Satan will appeal to a false trust of God. In the first temptation, Jesus will show full trust in his Father. Satan now tells him to show that trust even more to the whole world by throwing himself down from the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. Doesn't God promise to protect you from all harm and danger? Doesn't he promise his holy angels will attend you? Go ahead! Throw yourself down! Show all the people in Jerusalem that you are the very Son of God. Is the Word of God that reliable, or isn't it? Maybe it isn't as trustworthy as you think.

Jesus responded, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." God will provide for us, but if we take our entire paycheck and blow it on frivolous things, we cannot complain that God did not provide for us. The Israelites always demanded that God perform a miracle rather than trust in him. The Lion of Judah would conquer and defeat the false, prowling lion. He would do it without the miraculous power that he had as the Son of God. He would do it showing full trust in his heavenly Father.

Satan would not give up. He would attack Jesus over and over again, especially in the Garden of Gethsemane and while our Lord was on the cross. Jesus would remain steadfast. He would resist every temptation. He is our Substitute, not just in his suffering and dying, but also in his perfect love and obedience. Thank God for the Lion of Judah! AMEN.