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SATAN MEETS HIS MATCH-YOU!

Today's Text: Lk 4: 1-13

Extracts:

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" ...Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time [Lk 4: 1-4, 13]

Thirty-six years ago, there was a "Rumble in the Jungle," the epic world boxing heavy weight title fight between the then champion, George Foreman(25), and his challenger, Muhammad Ali (31).¹ It took place in Africa in the then Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo. Some years earlier, Ali had been stripped of the title for refusing to serve in the US military as a conscientious objector. Following his victory at the Supreme Court, he returned to boxing with a famous loss to Joe Frazier, the then champion. Foreman (winner of a 1972 Olympic gold medal) was feared for his punching power, size and sheer physical dominance. He had destroyed Frazier in two rounds to take the title, and other challengers in like manner. So, when loquacious Ali challenged him, his admirers were scared for his life. The odds were 3-1 in Foreman's favour. But in the fight, Ali used what became known as the "Rope-a-dope." He lay against the ropes while teasing Foreman, and let the giant throw largely deflected punches until he tired himself out. When Foreman became vulnerable Ali knocked him out in the eighth round! Foreman had met his match! How about you?

Right now, Satan has driven you into a state of despair. You are scared to death by his relentless zeal to steal, kill or destroy you or your possessions. For how much longer are you going to run? I have good news for you. Two thousand years ago, Satan tried to take down Jesus Christ, by tempting Him in the wilderness for forty days. Satan met his match and lost badly. Jesus has given believers the ability to do better. Let us find out how from this week's study.

¹ Story is based on the following sources: Frank Lotierzo, "Thirty Years Ago: Ali and Foreman Rumbled in the Jungle," <http://www.eastsideboxing.com/news.php?p=2100&more=1> and "The Rumble in the Jungle," from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rumble_in_the_Jungle

1. Introduction: Satan is real!

Satan has so many names, such as the serpent [Gen. 3: 1], Lucifer [Is. 14: 12], the devil or the “accuser of our brethren” [Rev. 12: 9], the thief [Jn 10: 10] or the father of lies [Jn 8: 44]. When God asked Eve why she ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and also gave to her husband to eat, she answered, “The serpent deceived me and I ate” [Gen. 3: 13]. When David took a census of the children of Israel without God’s approval, we are told, “Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel” [1 Chron. 21: 1]. When Peter denied Jesus, Satan was behind it [Lk 22: 31-32], the same way that he made Judas Iscariot betray Him [Lk 22: 3; Jn 13: 27]. Job’s calamity came to him because Satan asked God for permission to test his faith in Him [Job 1: 9-12].

In sum, when people plead, “The devil made me do it,” it may well be true. Satan does not come ugly-looking but poses as an angel of light [2 Cor. 11: 14]. You will not find him in the assembly of those who are already on his side, such as in brothels or among thieves. Instead, like a virus, he is in the assembly of those who profess to be followers of Jesus, trying to deceive or persecute them to give up their faith in Christ to their detriment [[Rev. 2: 12-13; Rev. 12: 17]. Therefore, let no one deceive you that Satan does not exist or that he is not powerful. That is why the word of God has warned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because *your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” [1 Pet. 5: 8-9]. In this week’s study, happily, Jesus has shown us how to call the devil’s bluff with a knockout punch!

2. Jesus calls Satan’s bluff!

The story begins soon after John had baptized Jesus in River Jordan. He was thirty years old. Jesus left the Jordan, “being filled with the Holy Spirit,” and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness in preparation for His earthly ministry. The Lord was about to open the eyes of the people that had been spiritually blinded for several thousand years (since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden). That made Him Satan’s prime target. So, throughout the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness, fasting (and praying), Satan tempted Him [Lk 4: 1-2]. Let us follow the story from there:

a) *Satan strikes when you are most vulnerable*

We are told that during those forty days in the wilderness, Jesus “ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry” [Lk 4: 2]. That was an opportune moment for the devil to strike. *He tempted Jesus with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life* [1 Jn 2: 16], as follows:

The lust of the flesh

Jesus was hungry and needed food for His emaciated body. So, Satan said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread” [Lk 4: 3]. Of course, Jesus knew that He was the Son of God but the devil was provoking Him to prove so. Was everything that God created not created through Jesus Christ? So, if He had the power, use it! But Jesus was not about to succumb to such cheap spiritual blackmail. So He fired back with the sword of the Spirit, that is, the word of God [Eph. 6: 17], saying, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God’” [Lk 4: 4], a direct quote from the Law of Moses [Deut. 8: 3].

What did Jesus mean? It is that you need to *be guided by the word of God while satisfying your food and sexual appetites*. For example, hunger for sex can be satisfied with fornication (sex between two unmarried persons) or adultery (sex between two people one or both of whom are married to others) or rape (sex with others without their consent) or incest (sex with a parent, sibling, etc). What do all four have in common? None of them is based on the fear of God which regards only sex between a husband and a wife as holy [Gen.4: 1]. That is why the word of God says, “The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord” [1 Cor. 6: 13]. Yes, Jesus was hungry but Satan should have known that He was the bread of life that came from heaven and whoever eats that bread shall not die [Jn 6: 48]. Jesus easily won Round 1!

The lust of the eyes

Having failed at the physical level (lust), Satan raised the bar a notch higher. He took Jesus up to a high mountain and “showed Him all the kingdoms of the world *in a moment of time*”, that is, in a vision. He told the Lord, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You worship before me, all will be Yours” [Lk 4: 5-7].

Can you imagine a creature of God commanding the Creator to worship him? How many of us succumb to the gospel of *greed* that leads us to idolatry? Some people will do anything to become rich, even sacrificing their integrity, honour or worship of the true God. That was why Paul wrote Timothy, his son in the Lord, “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition” [1 Tim. 6: 9]. Rightfully, therefore, Jesus refused to fall for that. Instead, He reminded Satan that only God should be worshipped and served. Perhaps Satan forgot that Jesus saw him fall like lightning from heaven [Lk 10: 18]. You cannot set a trap for a bird that is watching you [Prov. 1:17]! Satan cannot give what

he does not own or have. Therefore, do not allow anyone to tempt you with material wealth that is not from God.

Here again as in the first temptation, Jesus raised the sword of the Spirit and answered the devil, “Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’” [Lk 4: 8]. Again, Jesus quoted from the book of Deuteronomy [Deut. 6: 13; 10: 20]. Satan had no answer to that. Jesus two, Satan zero!

The pride of life

Having failed to make Jesus fall for flesh or greed, Satan tried a higher level- pride. ***Pride means feeling too big to give honour to whom it is due.*** It is at the very heart of rebellion. It was for it that Satan himself was driven out of heaven [Is. 14: 13-15]. So, to tempt Jesus with pride, Satan set Him up on a pinnacle in Jerusalem and challenged Him to throw Himself down if He was indeed the Son of God. Satan quoted from the Psalms (now himself using the sword of the Spirit) to remind Jesus that the word of God says that God would give His angels charge over Him to keep Him from dashing His foot against a stone [Ps. 91:11-12]. When it is convenient for him, Satan can pose as an angel of light [2 Cor. 11:14] to deceive the gullible. But Jesus was knowledgeable! He went back to the book of Deuteronomy [Deut. 6: 16] to also remind Satan not to tempt the Lord his God [Lk 4: 9-12]. That was the final knockout punch! Satan departed “until an opportune time” [v. 13].

Satan will pump you up to do things that are outside of the ministry that God has called you into. Satan will move people to step on your toes and thus challenge you to defend your power or self-esteem. Satan can lead sycophants to sing your praises to the point of offending God. If you fall for it, you will become swollen-headed. For example, after Herod (the one who killed the apostle James) had given an oration before the people of Tyre and Sidon who had come to sue for peace, the people gave him a standing ovation, saying, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” Immediately, an angel of the Lord struck him and he was eaten up by worms and died “because he did not give glory to God” [Acts 13: 20-23].

Be careful! Recall what an angel (that brought the revelation message) told John the apostle in one of his visions on the island of Patmos. John was about to fall down at his feet to worship the angel when he replied, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!” [Rev. 19: 10]. When the Roman centurion knelt down to greet and worship Peter that he had invited to his house at God’s instruction, Peter quickly lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man” [Acts 10: 25-26].

b) *Satan never gives up*

A knockout once does not necessarily mean a knockout for all times. Ali knocked out Foreman in 1974 but that did not stop Foreman from becoming a world heavyweight champion again in 1987. In the case of Jesus, we are told that Satan merely retreated until an opportune time. Did he not return to Jesus through Judas Iscariot's betrayal or the mock trial leading to His crucifixion? Did Satan not think that He had won total victory until Christ's resurrection, when He finally disarmed principalities and powers and made a show of them all, triumphing over them in it [Col. 2: 15]?

Thank God for Christ's total victory that has given us all hope. However, every battle you win over Satan leaves you with battle wounds. So, just as the scavenging hyena stalks a wounded animal until it dies, or steals the lion's killings, so also Satan stalks believers until they succumb or escape. Therefore, you must remain vigilant so that you do not backslide. Resist him and he will flee from you [Jam. 4:7]!

3. **Lessons for your own victories**

Jesus has assured believers, "Most assuredly, I say to you, *he who believes in Me*, the works that I do, he will do also; and *greater works than these he will do*, because I go to My Father" [Jn 14: 12]. Does that promise extend to you?

From the devil's encounter with Jesus in this week's study text, we can learn the following lessons for our own warfare:

- ***Temptation is not a sin but a mere stumbling block*** on our spiritual journey on earth. In the words of Jesus, it is impossible for offences (stumbling blocks) not to come to us [Lk 17: 1]. It becomes a sin when we fall for it. For example, Potiphar's wife tempted Joseph to lie with her but he refused. So, he did not sin. Instead, he told the woman, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" As she pressed him "day by day," he "did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her" [Gen. 39: 9-10]. On the other hand, David saw Bathsheba, another man's wife bathing. He was tempted and fell. He sent for and slept with her and she became pregnant [2 Sam. 11: 4-5]!
- ***You cannot fight off temptation by will power*** because "though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh" [2 Cor. 10: 3]. It is a spiritual battle because you are not wrestling against flesh and blood but against principalities and wicked forces in high places. That is why you need to put on your spiritual armour, "that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" [Eph. 6: 11-12]. It is instructive that at every stage of the battle, Jesus used the word of God which is the sword of the Spirit [v. 17]. ***Therefore, know and use the Scriptures with wisdom!***

- ***Surrender is not an option because every loss to Satan is a sin in God's sight.*** Even though God will forgive confessed sins (except those against the Holy Spirit), every sin has its own consequences that forgiveness cannot stop. For example, even though God forgave David for his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, God told him that the sword would not depart from his house [2 Sam. 12: 10]. So, incest [2 Sam. 13: 1-14], murder [vv. 27-37] and insurrection [2 Sam. 15: 1-14] within the family plagued David for the rest of his life. Therefore, do not allow any breach in your spiritual fortress for “whoever breaks through a wall will be beaten by a serpent” [Eccl. 10: 8].

4. Conclusion: Go and do likewise!

There was war in heaven between angels loyal to God and those following Lucifer. Satan lost and was thrown down to the earth with his wicked angels. In a vision of that war, John heard a voice from heaven, saying, “Now salvation and strength, and the Kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for ***the accuser of our brethren... has been cast down, and they have overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony***” [Rev. 12: 7-11].

As a result of that victory of Christ over Satan, you are now more than a conqueror through Christ who loves you [Rom. 8: 37]. ***Satan is not omnipresent; he cannot be everywhere at the same time.*** He goes to and fro the face of the earth [Job 1: 7]. So, the next time, he comes near you, ***fight him off with the sword of the Spirit and resist him with the shield of faith in Jesus.*** Then, he will flee from you and go elsewhere far from you.

At last, Satan has met his match- you!