

Rev. Shawn Arndt
Sunday, March 19, 2023
Know Your Enemy
Matthew 4:1-11

Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The great military strategist Sun Tzu said: **Know your enemy.** In warfare, understanding your enemy is essential for victory.

Our lessons today remind us we are in the midst of a real and horrifying war. We have an **enemy** who is out to destroy us. In fact, that is literally what the name **Satan** means – **Satan** is Hebrew for **enemy**. So let us listen as God’s Word teaches us to **know** our **enemy**.

The first thing to know about the devil, is that he is very real. **The devil took (Jesus) to a very high mountain.** The devil loves it when people don’t take him seriously. He is delighted when people view him as a fairy tale or as a red suited prankster with a pitch fork.

But no, Satan is real. He actually tempted Jesus for those forty days in the wilderness. He fought against the Son of God. The devil is every bit as real as Jesus is real.

The devil is a powerful fallen angel who rebelled against God and lost, but who then attacked the first man and woman and plunged God’s good creation into sin and misery.

Unlike in the movies, where heads spin around or furniture flies around the room, it’s not always so obvious when the devil is at work, because he is extremely cunning and deceptive. He uses tricks, temptation, lies and doubt.

And so when Satan came to Adam and Eve in the guise a serpent, he did not say: “I’m here as the great enemy of God and mankind to lead you astray from the Lord and bring sin, death and chaos into the world, but he acted like he was their friend, and only wanted the best for them.

You know, just like he does when he comes and makes sin sound so good and wants us to think God’s Word and ways is too restrictive or too old fashioned.

Of course, the Almighty and all-knowing God truly knows what is best and in love only commands what is best for us. But the devil wants us to doubt all that and still **be like God** for ourselves, and act like we know better than our Creator!

And so the devil tried the same thing with Jesus when the Savior was hungry and exhausted after forty days of fasting in the wilderness... **If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.**

Basically, Satan says, oh no Jesus! Look at this, this isn't good, you're suffering... God isn't taking good care of you, you need to take matters into your own hands and take care of yourself!

Now maybe at first, Jesus making bread out of stones doesn't seem like a big deal, but we need to listen to how the gospel lesson starts: **Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.**

Jesus was hungry at this time because it was God's plan that he be out in the desert for forty days without food. When the time was right, the heavenly Father would provide for his needs. If Jesus would have turned rocks to bread He would fail to trust God's promise, reject God's plan and doom us all.

So, **Know your enemy.** The devil lies with great craftiness and deceit. He either wants you to think toying with sin is no big deal or even worse to start to buy in to the idea that God doesn't really know what he's talking about, and you should just do what feels good and sounds good to you.

And hey, above all, avoid any suffering right? That can't possibly be good!

Ah, but wait, that would be another one of the devil's lies! God's Word teaches us suffering is included in the all things God works out for our eternal good. Our Savior even tells us to take up a cross and follow Him. Following Jesus will cause suffering as His Word puts us in conflict with the devil's temptations, the world's philosophies and our own sinful nature.

And so avoiding suffering was what another of the devil's temptations to Jesus was all about. It's like this: "Don't go to the cross to save the world Jesus, just bow down to me and I'll let you have it" (never mind that was a lie too!)

Don't miss that the devil even knows and tries to misuse the Bible when He tempted Jesus to false trust at the temple. Most false teachings will quote a Bible verse ripped out of context or take what a verse says and make it say more than it does by ignoring what is clearly taught elsewhere in God's Word. Like when someone quotes the words **don't judge** to say don't confront me with my sin, but completely ignores where Jesus tells us that in love and

compassion we are to **go to our brother or sister** who's caught in sin and **to restore them gently**.

And don't be surprised that the devil would be hard at work in a congregation to distract us from the gospel or to use the sins of others to pull us away from Jesus' Word. After all, Satan even dared to tempt Jesus at the temple!

Know your enemy. The more we know the devil's lies and tricks, the more we see how he is hard at work around and in us every day. And then we'll see even more clearly how utterly he has defeated us again and again.

If Satan can't lead us to fall for some obvious evil, then he pushes us toward sinful pride that says: look how good I am, because I didn't do *that!*

Think how often he gets us to worry, panic or doubt God's care, even though we rarely face things as serious as going without food for forty days! And how often we've caved to the temptation to do wrong and we did it for so much less than all the **kingdoms of the world**. And so we all deserve to join the devil in the eternal fire prepared for him and his angels.

And that brings us to what we need to know the most: How our **enemy** is defeated. And here it is: **Jesus -- Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.**

Jesus. That's what you need to know most about your enemy, the devil. **The reason the Son of Man appeared was to destroy the devil's work** (1 John 3:8). **Jesus** met Satan in the wilderness and where we and all mankind failed, Jesus won the resounding victory!

Time after time, not only here, but throughout Jesus' whole life, Satan attacked Christ with all his might, lies and craftiness. And each and every time he tried it, the Devil fell flat on his face and had to crawl away beaten like a serpent wriggling on its belly and eating dust.

And don't think: "well, that was easy for Jesus, after all He's true God." You see, just like most of His life, when Jesus battled Satan He did not use His mighty power, but laid it aside and took on the tempter as a true human being! After all, it was not God that the devil defeated, but human beings, including us, so it was as true man, born of Mary Jesus smashed the devil's power.

And we will not call Jesus' battle against Satan 'easy,' because it was filled with real suffering and real sacrifice, so great is His love for you and me! Indeed, the Bible says: **He suffered when he was tempted... (Jesus) has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin** (Hebrews 2:18, 4:15).

In fact, not only did Jesus willingly embrace suffering to save us as he was **tempted**, but really He suffered twice. First He suffered as he resisted and defeated every temptation, he suffered hunger, pain and rejection out of faithfulness to God's Word and ways. And then Jesus suffered the result of temptation... that is every time we gave in to sin as He, the holy one suffered the hell our every sin and toying with the devil's lies earned. All that, He suffered on the cross to forgive us and free us!

Yes, Jesus won the victory with nothing more than the very tools God has given to us: His Word. Jesus said over and over '**It is written.**' And when the devil tried to bend a Bible verse for an evil purpose as false teachers do, Jesus came back with another clear Scripture to set the record straight: **Again it is written.**

Now please understand why I bring up Jesus using the Bible to defeat Satan. It is true that in the Word we find strength and power in our fight against temptation. But, please, please, please *do not view* this Gospel account as a how to lesson, like see what Jesus used to fight the devil, now you can too!

No! No! A thousand times No! That's not the main point! No! First and foremost see Jesus as your Champion who fought and won the war in your place, who did everything to save us, since all we could do was lose. The point is Jesus won the war and did it for you!

On account of Jesus, who gave Himself for you, you are now counted the victor. Indeed, as one who has been brought to trust in Jesus, you are what the book of Romans calls: **more than conquerors.**

It's like this. Christ won the fight against Satan, sin and hell and secured the trophy of eternal life. Imagine that trophy has a name plate on it that says: Jesus. This is what He does: He takes and puts your name on the trophy! That's what happened when the Holy Spirit ripped you out of the devil's kingdom of unbelief and clothed you with Christ in baptism. Now you are holy and victorious in Christ alone!

Yes, as people who God declares holy, we have new hearts that naturally want to do holy things and daily fight against sin and temptation. But understand the victory depends not on you, but on Jesus who won the war in the wilderness, on the cross and at the empty tomb and now gives you the prize of sins forgiven! Jesus has crushed the old serpent's head and gives you eternal peace.

Above all, **know** how **your enemy** was defeated – by Jesus Christ your Savior who will finally bring you to the never ending victory celebration! Amen.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.