

The two sides don't like each other. There is a fundamental disagreement between them. They aren't trying to get along or play nice. They're at war. Two sides at war are out to destroy each other. That means kill. Just ask soldiers who have seen combat and directly engaged the enemy. It's kill or be killed. War is sometimes long lasting. Just ask soldiers who go back for their third or fourth tour of duty. War means using every tool to battle the enemy and achieve victory.

We may not be the ones wearing fatigues or uniforms. We may not be traveling overseas to engage an enemy in combat. There is still a battle going on around us. And we're fighting in it whether we know it or not, whether we want to or not. God obligated us to keep his commands. Alone we struggle with something basic like obedience. We have the right tools to fight in this battle. But alone we struggle to make use of them properly.

In this war, the battle we fight has been fought before. Others have fought and gone. They too would have lost if they fought alone. But this war has been fought before us by someone stronger and ready for the fight. As we look at the gospel we watch the battle scene unfold. More importantly we see we have...

**Victory through Christ
He holds the field
The kingdom is ours forever**

Alone, hungry, and in the desert, Jesus was a prime target. Like Special Forces deep behind enemy lines, Jesus operated alone. No backup. No support. Since he hadn't been eating the desert only magnified his risk. The hostile environment, his weakened state, this wasn't the best time to engage the enemy in battle. But the battle came to him anyway. The devil swooped in and for 40 days was relentless. It was a make it or break it moment. The battlefield seemed up for grabs. It was like warning sirens just continuously as temptation after temptation from the devil rained down on Jesus threatening to break him and win the battle.

The three temptations all come from different angles. The first simply attacked his hunger. **"If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."** You can imagine Jesus' empty stomach convincing him as the devil picked up a stone about the size of a bread loaf that probably was the color of bread. Just one thought, one twinkle of his eye, hardly anything for the Son of God and the mirage could be reality. He'd be eating. A little divine power to benefit himself, but it would be crushing for humanity. The second temptation came from the angle of the easy way out. The devil made an audacious claim. **"I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."** Did the devil have the power to give this? He's called the ruler of this world. But at best it's half a truth. God never gave the devil this power and authority. But if the half-truth rolled around in Jesus' brain, it might have seemed like an easy way to glory, but it would be crushing for humanity. The third temptation attacked his claims as the Son of God. The devil poked Jesus saying it'd be better if he knew for sure that he was the Son of God and the Messiah. The only way to know was to test out the hypothesis. **"If you are the Son of God throw yourself down from here. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."** God promised, now let's see if God keeps it. Just a little test. Surely Jesus was confident. But God's always making promises. Maybe Jesus couldn't be sure unless he knew for sure, but it would have been crushing for humanity.

I can't answer how these were temptations for Jesus, but they were. All I know is that in my mind even the temptation brings thoughts of giving in to the temptation. That's already sin. Going to see an attractive woman or good looking man in a movie that's temptation. But the way your mind objectifies them or imagines scenarios with them immediately, that's sin. Finding money in a parking lot or getting extra change from the checkout person there's temptation. The way our mind starts making excuses for why it could be ours immediately, that's sin. Facing a difficult situation with our children or at work with coworkers that's temptation. The way our mind figures ways to avoid the pain or silently wonder where God is when things are getting tough, there's sin. Temptation and sin go together. Entertaining the temptation even for a moment is sinful. So in what moment have we successfully faced temptation that wasn't also sin? Where can we say we've battled the devil's temptations and won?

Jesus had no such problems. He fought off each temptation and held the field. Not with his divine nature but with his human nature. He was just like us in every way, yet without sin. His weapon was only one. Expertly thrown grenades? A powerful gun? Shoulder fired rockets? No. Jesus picked up the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. In each he relied on the promises of God's Word. Promises to provide, **"Man does not live on bread alone."** Instructions not to bargain and compromise with the devil, **"Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."** Warning because of God's promises, **"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."** Facing the devil, who had never lost in tempting a human being, Christ fired back with the one capable weapon. The fight was major, the stakes were high, and the enemy was strong. But Christ Jesus was sent for this purpose. He achieved victory and held the field.

Holding the field didn't just happen once and then it was over. Battles often go on for days. To hold the field is a major effort. The battle Jesus faced wasn't just these three temptations. It wasn't even limited to 40 days. Jesus held the field his entire life on earth and especially during his three years of ministry. Near the end it got real bad. But he never broke. Jesus held the field. And now he's victorious. No more battle to fight. No more field to hold. Now the kingdom is ours forever.

The devil kept up his assault on Jesus throughout his life. **“When the devil had finished all this tempting he left him, until an opportune time.”** Opportune times presented themselves often. Jesus’ closest friends basically said, avoid your suffering. Fight back with all your strength to set yourself up as king. In the Garden of Gethsemane his temptation was to not drink the cup of suffering, to not go to the cross, to not pay the high price. The devil tried convincing him people weren’t worth it. They didn’t even have a relationship with God. They were sinners.

Why was Jesus fighting the devil? Why be in this battle? Why fight for you and me? **“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert.”** His time on earth was no vacation. Jesus loved us. Full of the Holy Spirit he willingly stepped into the desert to do what he came to do, enter the battle. He didn’t fall for the tricks, tests, or enticements of the devil. None of those were worth it. Saving the world was worth it. Having people with him in heaven forever was worth it. You and I were worth it. Love for sinners meant his intention was to win so he would get the spoils of victory. We were those spoils. Now we get the benefits of Christ’s victory. The kingdom is ours forever.

Jesus may be off the battlefield but we aren’t. We still face temptations from the devil. And we fail. We can admit we aren’t perfect. The devil tempts us then throws our guilt back in our face. He makes us feel awful for things he tempted us to do. By ourselves we have no tools, no weapons, and no will to fight back. But this war we fight with the devil, it’s already been won. The victory is ours through Christ. Jesus stood toe to toe with our enemy and defeated him. Because of that victory we’re emboldened to fight back. Our weapon is the same on Christ used, the Word of God. It’s the little word that can fell him, as Luther said in the hymn of the day. The Word can fell the devil because it’s infused with the power of God and the victory of Christ. It’s the truth about Jesus, our Savior. The truth hurts the devil because it proclaims him defeated. That’s the devil’s harsh reality. Christ’s win is our win.

The kingdom is ours forever. Nothing will keep us from heaven. When it looks like the devil has us up against it with no way out, remind yourself of the victory through Christ. We appropriately use the Word of God and wield it as a weapon against the devil’s attacks. From any angle he chooses we fight him off with Scripture. In moments of relative peace turn again to read what God would have us do to keep the peace and live that way. Look forward to and enjoy the peace we have with God and the promise of eternal life in the kingdom forever.

Spiritual warfare with the devil is messy. But the outcome isn’t up for grabs or unknown. Jesus Christ stepped forward into the battle. He fought the devil and won, repeatedly. Here in the desert, in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion, and on the cross. Victory is ours through Christ. He held the field and the kingdom is ours forever.