



Lent 1

2/22/2026

Matthew 4:1-11

## How to Fight the Devil

As a kid, I was a big fan of the Chronicles of Narnia. Christian fantasy series by CS Lewis. And there's a scene from one of the books that has always stuck with me.

In *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, a group of characters is sailing across the sea in search of a group of lost kings. They discover the coordinates to one of the Kings they are looking for, and when they arrive they find an island shrouded in total darkness. As the ship gets closer, the light of the sun disappears. The lights of the ship don't seem to shine as brightly as they should. They don't even know how long they have spent sailing through the gloom, when all of a sudden, a shout comes from one of the sides of the ship. Against all odds, it's the king.

They bring him on board, everyone is excited to see him, but they don't get the reply they are expecting.

"The moment his feet reached the deck he said: 'Fly! Fly! About with your ship and fly! Row, row, row for your lives away from this accursed shore... This is the Island where Dreams come true.'"

Right after that, the people on the ship hear strange noises in the surrounding darkness. They can hear \*things\* begin to climb up the side of the boat. Their nightmares are coming to life, they are taking shape in the darkness, and they are trying to climb on board.

That scene stuck with me partly because of how creepy it was, but it also made me think: what could you possibly do in that kind of situation? Where your own dreams have been turned against you? How do you get away from something that springs from your own mind? How do you kill a nightmare?

I couldn't help but think of that as I read through our verses for today. Because as you look at the way that the devil tempts people - and the way he tries to tempt Jesus - that's exactly what he does. Satan is in the business of making people's dreams come true, of giving them what they want. He uses our own desires and minds against us. What can we possibly do? How do you fight the devil?

To answer that question, we don't need to go to a Dark Island. We need to go to the desert. To the middle of the Judean wilderness where Jesus was tempted by Satan. We'll learn a lot about the devil's strategy as he throws three deadly temptations Jesus' way. But even better than that, we will learn from Jesus how to fight the devil. And win.

Before we take a look at the details of this showdown, we need to take a look at how Jesus got into the wilderness in the first place.

Right before this, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. We took a look at that incredible event a few weeks ago, where Jesus starts his public ministry, God the Father shouts from heaven and the Holy Spirit comes in the form of a dove. I'm sure it's a moment that his cousin John never forgot.

But John the Baptist isn't the only one who takes notice. Whether Satan was there at the baptism personally or not is impossible to know for sure, but one way or another he certainly heard about what had happened.

So this is God's chosen one? Satan thinks to himself. Well, he had dealt with "chosen people" before. First there was Adam and Eve. They had fallen for his lies in no time. But even more recently, there was Israel in the wilderness.

God had rescued the Israelites, his Chosen People, from slavery in Egypt. And Satan had gone on the attack. His strategy? He kept tempting them with things they wanted, convincing them to turn away from God... and plenty of them listened.

As far as the devil was concerned, this seemed like the perfect setup. The Holy Spirit led Jesus straight to him. He was without food for 40 days. He's all alone, on what the devil would have considered his home turf.

So, Satan wastes no time getting to work.

The first temptation... might sound goofy, until you see how it worked on the Israelites before this. Just two chapters after the parting of the Red Sea, the Israelites get hungry. And they say this: READ Exodus 16:3. **The people used their discomfort as a reason to shake their fist at God.** Satan figures Jesus, hungry as he is, will do the same thing. God the Father isn't providing for you! Why wait? Make some bread for yourself!

Jesus shrugs it off... READ v. 4

Second temptation. Get noticed, get glory for yourself. Hasn't God promised to protect you anyway? And if God the Father doesn't give you his protection and favor, doesn't give you what you want, is he worth following anyway?

But again, Jesus isn't fooled... READ v. 7

I'm guessing Satan was feeling frustrated at this point, so he cuts right to the chase. READ v. 8-9. When you skim through the three temptations, they sound kind of strange. Like Satan is pulling his punches. *He tempts Jesus with the most basic human desires, and Jesus is so good at resisting it makes the temptations seem lame and ridiculous...*

Until you realize that we fall for this temptation all the time. Don't believe me? See if any of these temptations sound familiar. "Why not go for a few extra drinks? With all the stuff I've been dealing with lately, I deserve it. And if God really loves me, he'll understand." "Why would I let that person off the hook after they've wronged me? Somebody needs to make them pay. And if God really cared, he should have done something about it!" "I know we're not married, but I'm in love with my girlfriend! Shouldn't God understand that? Accept me as I am?" Any of that sound eerily familiar?

This strategy of Satan isn't new. Take one last look at the Israelites. In Exodus 32, they are at the base of Mt. Sinai. God is at the top of a mountain, his glory hidden behind a cloud. They haven't heard his voice for a while. Moses, their leader, is at the top too. They haven't seen him for 40 days. Satan sees his opportunity, and he goes for the throat. The true God is beyond your understanding, bigger than you, totally distant, he whispers to the Israelites.. You don't want a god like that. Worship something you understand – and therefore something that understands *you*. And Israel listens.

See a pattern? First, the devil plays on our fears. God doesn't love you as much as you think he does. He wouldn't be so far away if he cared. He doesn't seem to give you what you want. Then, he whispers the alternatives. Worship sex. Worship money. Worship yourself... WORSHIP ME. Every single time you fall for a temptation, that is what you are doing. Every time we sin, we are bowing down to the devil instead of the true God. The temptations that look so limp wristed against Jesus have ripped apart humanity one generation after another, all the way down to us.

So what do we do? How do we fight the devil and his lies? How do we fight our own desires... and OURSELVES? What weapon could we possibly have, where could we turn?

To answer that question... take another look at Jesus. When the devil comes at him a third time, he says: READ 4:10.

God's chosen people, the Israelites, fell for this exact temptation. Miserably. So do we. And God's response? Does he abandon his people? Destroy them? No. He sends a substitute. A champion to fight in the place of his people. A one-man Israel to win the battle the Israelites could never win for themselves.

And not just for people who were Israelites by blood, but for ALL of his people. Jesus is fighting in your place too.

And he wins. Not just here in the wilderness. But in another place too.

See, at the end of this first showdown, the devil slinks away but he doesn't give up. Luke tells us he leaves until an opportune time. It's almost like the break that happens between boxing matches, like in the Rocky movie. The coaches give the boxers some water, slap them on the back and send them back into the ring to keep fighting.

So when does that rematch happen? I suppose Jesus is fighting Satan with his whole ministry, but I think it's safe to say that the main event starts in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is in anguish, literally sweating blood. He prays to God the Father: If it is possible, take this cup from me... but not my will, but your will.

In the wilderness, Jesus isn't willing to turn his back on God's will to save himself discomfort. What about in the Garden? When it becomes clear that the cross is the only way to save humanity? Even then, Jesus doesn't turn from his Father's will. Because he's not interested in saving himself.

But in saving you.

How do you think Satan reacted when it became clear Jesus was going to the cross? When he was arrested and his suffering began? He probably was having a field day, thinking: "I might not be able to beat Jesus myself, but that's fine. I'll get the people he loves so much to do the dirty work for me."

But what Satan was too stupid to understand is that the moment he thought he was giving Jesus giving the killing blow, it was the ultimate defeat for HIM. Because by dying on the cross, Jesus won forgiveness for all people. For you. The devil's head was crushed. The devil is already defeated!

**So now, Satan is like a snake in its' death throes.** It is going to be destroyed. But as it lashes around in a rage, it can still bite, can still unleash its' poison. Even after his defeat, the devil is still after God's people. You still have temptations. He still tries to use your own sinful desires against you.

So how do we fight the temptations still hurls our way?

Fight the devil by running away.

If that sounds a little strange, let me give you a Biblical example. When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, he didn't stay in the room and say, "Let's see how long I can stay here without falling into sin." No, he high tailed it out of there. We should follow Joseph's example. If something causes you to lust, run away from it. If something causes you to be tempted, don't just stand there and try to fight it on your own. Run away, as far away as possible, as quickly as possible. **And run TOWARDS your champion.**

Run to your Savior where he promises to speak to you. In his Word. You can use the truths of Scripture to blast apart the devil's lies, just like Jesus did in the wilderness. But even better than that, ***the Bible is the place where God says what he really thinks of you.*** When you feel like you couldn't possibly be forgiven and are tempted to despair: Isaiah 1:18. When you experience a time of doubt, and wonder if God loves you after all: Isaiah 49:16. When the hardships and troubles of life tempt you to think God has turned his back on you: Romans 8:37-39. Run to Scripture no matter what the temptation might be. Listen as God reminds you who you already are through faith. Watch him fight for you. And win.

Sometimes, this world can feel like we are stuck on that dark island from the chronicles of Narnia. You struggle with the same temptations over and over again. The mistakes of your past haunt your steps, and maybe they haunt your nightmares too. But let me tell you something: the darkness can't win. Satan's head is already crushed. The light of the gospel is already shining in your heart because of what Jesus has done, because of the faith God has given you. Your Champion, Your Savior, always wins. And he'll share his victory with you, now and forever.

Amen.