

How We Win

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[0 : 0 0] Right, so, who voted this week? Put up your hand. If you, who still hasn't managed to take this thing off your thumb? So it's doing its job, good.

Well, it has been an interesting week with the election, and with, I think a lot of us might be feeling anxious about the results and what it might mean, and worries about who will run our country. And so it's important in moments like this, where we might feel anxious about our country, to remember the things we can celebrate about being South African, that we can be proud about as South Africans, like, for example, Dr. Russi Erasmus.

Yes, last month, Russi received an honorary doctorate, if you didn't know. Honorary doctorate means you don't have to write exams and study for it, you just get it, because you're that cool. He received an honorary doctorate from Northwest University in coaching science, and the reason, I quote, that he received this doctorate was, in recognition of innovative management of the Springbok rugby team, his significant standing in the international coaching arena, his focus on diversity and inclusion, and his commitment to social responsibility.

[1 : 1 7] That was apparently the reason he received his doctorate, but we all know the truth. We all know why he got that doctorate. Because he found a way to win against France, and then England, and then New Zealand, in the 2023 World Cup.

Two back-to-back World Cup wins, and the fourth World Cup title ever received by any rugby team, and against all odds as well. I don't know if you watched those knockout games, do you remember the heart palpitations we had?

Winning those knockout games by one point each, and yet, somehow, Dr. Erasmus and his coaching staff, and the Springboks, found a way to win.

And that's why they are national heroes today. Why am I talking about that? Well, this morning, as we open up to Matthew 4, we're going to learn how Jesus came here from heaven to earth to find a way to win for us, against humanity's greatest opponent, against our ancient enemy, an enemy we fight every day without even knowing it.

But reading Matthew 4, and knowing how Jesus found a way to beat our ancient enemy, will actually teach us how we can in our lives as well.

[2 : 4 8] And so let's get into it. Open your Bibles, Matthew chapter 4, and let's look at what happened in this, I think, well-known story, but there's so much more going on here than meets the eye.

And the first thing we see is how, before Jesus could confront this enemy, He needed to draw him out. And so let's look at from verse 1, Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Now, look at what happens in verse 2. After he had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. Okay, as I'm sure you would be too. Now, let's just pause there. Anybody here gone 40 days without food? Put up your hand. Always got to be careful asking those questions, because there's some interesting stories here.

But nobody here has gone 40 days without food. Do you know what happens to your body when you go without food for that long? It starts literally feeding on itself.

[4 : 0 2] So the body starts, after a few days without food, when it realizes you're not giving it anything, it starts to consume the carbohydrates that are stored in your body. But then it moves on to consuming your fats.

Now, that doesn't sound too bad. But it doesn't stop there. After about a week, it gets more serious, and the body, after not getting any food for about a week, starts consuming muscle tissue itself, including your heart.

So literally, when you've gone without food for that long, your body starts eating your own muscles and your own heart. And after a longer time, the body stops supplying nutrients to key organs. And so that's when hallucinations start, convulsions, and people lose the ability to think clearly. And statistics show that death typically occurs from starvation any time between 43 and 70 days of no food.

Now, that's pretty serious. And that's what Jesus would have experienced. As being fully human, he didn't have any immunity to those effects.

[5 : 13] He would have experienced those kind of things. And he put himself on the very edge of starvation, of dying from starvation. Why would he do that?

Why did he do that? There's many reasons, actually, for this 40 days in the wilderness of fasting. But one of them we pick up in verse 1.

I want to read it again. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

So verse 1 tells us that this was intentional. It was the intentional plan of the Trinity, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that he would go out into this wilderness for the express reason of being tempted.

To draw out this hidden enemy who couldn't resist now to take a shot at the Son of God at his most vulnerable that he's ever been.

[6 : 18] When he's physically and mentally vulnerable. That's when Satan appears. Verse 2, after he had fasted 40 days and 40 nights he was hungry.

Then the tempter approached him. And so we meet the enemy now who's appeared. Who we know by various names in the Bible.

Even in this passage he's called the tempter, Satan, and the devil. The thing is we don't hear about him too often in Scripture. He appears at certain points but he doesn't feature a lot and he likes it that way.

He prefers to work in the background of this world and of what's going on. So much so and he's so good at working stealthily in the background that in modern society we've almost completely forgotten that he exists.

In our modernistic scientific way of thinking we don't often think about what's going on in the unseen realm. and we can forget he exists at all and yet here Jesus draws him out and shows us that he's real he's there he exists.

[7 : 40] A supernatural intelligent being who is quite literally hell bent on ruining God's plans for this world he hates humans he hates humanity and he hates God's plan for humans to rule this world under God because this world is currently under his rule.

Did you know that? Jesus says so. Jesus elsewhere says he calls Satan the ruler of this world because even though we don't know we don't see it even though he's not sitting on a on a literal throne or sitting in a literal government he is ruling because he is the one who influences how cultures think he is the one who influences the agendas of cultures how people think in our culture you wonder why you know through as you look at history why cultures just change direction about what they think about sexuality and things who decided that well it's spiritually you know it's a spiritual battle that's going on and he's the one in charge of the agendas of the cultures and the societies we live in.

He influences that he is at work every day doing that and he's intelligent and he's real and he's got plans and he's got strategies but he also influences individuals. Jesus warns us to pray specifically against him in the Lord's prayer he teaches us to deliver us from the evil one that we pray deliver us from the evil one Jesus wouldn't have taught us to pray that if he wasn't a threat to us individually and he is because and we must pray we must engage with prayer against this intelligent dangerous spiritual being because he is right now planning to turn you away from God right now he is thinking of ways he knows your name and he is thinking of ways to get you away from God he is thinking of ways to get you caught in sin and he never sleeps and he is wily and he is subtle and his power to influence us is stronger than our power to resist him and he is used to winning against humans he has had far more practice at it than you have had practice at resisting him he is used to winning against humans until he meets this one the son of God who came to represent humans in our struggle against evil and in our weakness to fight in our place that is why he came to fight the battle we could not win against evil and sin like a superhero you know you see those superhero movies and the whole point of a superhero

Alex and I just recently watched Batman the new one not the old ones the new trilogy newish trilogy and it is a cool movie and Batman is a cool superhero and just like all superheroes he comes to fight enemies that the ordinary people can't fight that is what a superhero does he's got some special ability that makes it possible for him to fight the villains that the ordinary people in the street can't overcome well that's what Jesus did for us really he is the true superhero because he came to fight what ordinary people you and me could not fight and do it for us and do it on our behalf but he doesn't fight this villain in the way we would expect from a superhero you know how do we expect superheroes to take out the villains well you've watched maybe enough superhero movies to know that it ends normally in this epic climactic showdown you know in the final sequence of the movie where there's this big explosive kind of show of force between the superhero and the great villain like

Superman's fight with General Zod at the end of the Superman movie if you know what I'm talking about even if you don't basically the scene is these two powerful figures just ruining a whole town explosions and smashing stuff and just this show of force against each other that's what you would expect when these powerful figures go against each other but that's not what happens here that's not how Jesus fights Satan with this big epic climactic show of force and the reason is because that's not how Satan fights us he's not obvious when he fights us he prefers to use something much more subtle which is his most effective weapon against humanity which is temptation temptation we need to understand the nature of how Satan works and that's what this passage also helps us to do it helps us to understand how Satan uses this weapon of temptation his favorite weapon against humanity and here in the passage we see three temptations

[13:02] Satan uses against Jesus now there's a lot going on in each of these temptations especially how it connects to the Old Testament we don't have time this morning to go deeply into each one but for now what I want to do this morning is show you a common theme of all three of the temptations they all connect together they're all actually of the same type in that in all of them Satan is trying to get Jesus to doubt his father in some way Satan's trying to get Jesus to doubt his father in some way in all of these temptations so let's briefly look at them the first one Satan is trying to get Jesus to doubt his father's provision for him by persuading Jesus to provide for himself food so verse three then the tempter approached him and said if you are the son of God tell these stones to become bread you can do that right it's a simple thing to do and it won't be sinning

Jesus to do that you know you need this you fasted 40 days surely that's enough and it's interesting because it's not this first temptation is not actually tempting Jesus to sin in any way did you notice that turning stones into bread wouldn't be sinning it wouldn't be morally wrong for Jesus to do that if it's in his ability to do that and yet he doesn't because he knows that to provide for himself in this situation would be to defeat the whole purpose of him being out in the wilderness it would be to bypass him relying on his father which is what he's there to do actually if you go deeper and you look at why the significance of the number 40 40 days and 40 nights aligns with Israel's 40 years in the wilderness where they had to learn as the son of God they were called the nation of Israel they had to learn to rely on

God but they didn't learn that lesson so Jesus has come now in the place of Israel where they failed to show them what it's like for a human to fully rely on God his father and so that's what he's there to do and so to provide for himself would be to bypass his need to rely on his father but that's what Satan loves to do with humans the first thing not quite to tempt them to sin yet just to get them to stop relying on God that's his first most subtle strategy to persuade us to bypass trusting God and we do that often especially for example how we this is just one example how we use our money when we keep it to ourself rather than being generous with it because we believe that we have to provide everything for ourselves and we don't actually trust God that if we give what's actually his money towards his purposes and we're generous with it that he will provide what we need and so we bypass having to trust that by keeping it to ourselves we can be our own providers we do it all the time you see and that's

Satan's first temptations to find ways that we don't have to trust God we don't have to be put into a position where we now have to trust him by by sacrificially giving away our money and our time and we keep it to ourselves so we can be our own providers Satan's very very subtle and wily because it's often not even an explicit sin to do that and yet it's it's a failure to trust God the second temptation the first temptation Jesus is tempted to doubt God's provision the second temptation Jesus is tempted to doubt God's protection and this time Satan ups the ante and he actually uses

the Bible he loves to do that as well to misquote scripture does it all the time in our world gets people to misuse scripture to read scripture out of context and he does it again here from verse five then the devil took him to the holy city had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him if you are the son of

God throw yourself down for it is written he will give his angels orders concerning you and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone you see Satan saying come on the Bible says this your father has promised this to you don't you believe it well then prove you do show me that it's true show yourself that it's true and yet again Jesus doesn't fall for it because he knows the simple truth that if he needs to test his father he doesn't really trust his father right I mean if you're in a relationship with someone say your husband and wife and the husband promises the wife something and she constantly has to test give him tests to see that his promise is true well that's going to spoil the relationship that's not trusting testing is the opposite of trusting and that's what Jesus realizes he's not going to test

[18:36] God's word he's not going to test his father but people today do that every time you have people saying oh God show me a sign show me a sign show me that you're real or show me that you really love me what is that it's testing God it's not actually trusting him those kind of people live in constant doubt actually of God the ones who need to see signs all the time and that's that's another way Satan tempts us did he really say that remember he did that right from from Eden that does God really do that did he really promise why don't you test it don't you need a sign why don't you just ask God to show you to prove to you that he really loves you that he really has these plans for you it's Satan and then the third temptation and this is the most climactic one is to doubt God's plan let's pick it up from verse 8 again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor and said to him

I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me okay now we read this and we go come on Satan why would Jesus ever do that you know that's ridiculous why would Jesus ever worship you well this is a legitimate temptation why is it a temptation for Jesus well because of what it offered look what Satan offered here and he was going out on a limb to offer this and he could offer it because he does have authority over the kingdoms of the world and he showed him all the kingdoms all the world and he said to him I will give these things to you this is Satan's final play it's the last thing he can do and it's the most blatant and powerful temptation actually because that's exactly what Jesus had come to earth for right if you think about it what did

Jesus come to do here what was his whole mission well to win back the world from Satan's rule and right here just four chapters into the gospel it's on offer it must have been a temptation because that's exactly what he came to do and to take it this way to align himself with Satan rather than his father is to receive what he had come here for much easier than his father's plan I mean his father's plan was for him to go through suffering and death on the cross in order to receive the authority of the kingdom and here Satan is offering him a much easier version to form a coalition government with him to align with Satan but you see this is what Satan does he tries to convince people that there is a quicker and easier way to get what God has already planned to give us but in his time and his way

Satan always because God has planned to give us humanity great things but Satan one of his favorite tactics is to come to you and to convince you no no no there is a better easier way to bypass God to get that thing it is a classic tactic and we end up falling for it more often than we think because we end up worshipping other things more than God now as Christians we say no we don't we worship God but actually what gets you most excited in the week is it God or is it other things in the world that you actually believe will give you happiness and satisfaction and joy more than God will be honest we love the many things in the world more than we love God because we believe that those things can give us what what God can't give us which is another failure to trust God we get more excited about these things than about

God about money and about our sport and about our recreation about our screens whatever it is because we believe these things can satisfy us more than God can and so we end up living for them rather than God we end up worshipping them and so you see how in these three temptations there are all ways that Satan tempts humans temptations he tempts us he tempts us and he uses these same strategies against us to get us to doubt God to get us to worship other things because we believe that they can make us happier than God they're a quicker and easier way to get things but you see at the root of all of these the thing that binds all of these temptations together the same

pattern of Satan's temptations throughout is all a failure to trust God Satan wants us to not trust a God not trust our father that's his ultimate strategy and that's actually all he needs to do to get us to sin he's just got to get us to stop trusting God because did you know that every sin you commit is actually a failure to trust God in some way think about it every sin you commit every sin that can be committed by humans is actually rooted in a failure to trust God to give us what we think the sin can give us instead

[24 : 22] Martin Luther famously put it this way he said the sin underneath all sins is to trust the lie of the serpent that we cannot trust the love of God and must take matters into our own hands that's why the world is like it is because it's full of humans who have taken matters into their own hands because they don't trust God enough and that's how Satan rules Satan rules by keeping us from fully trusting God and therefore to take matters into our own hands and then he sits back and he just watches the results and he laughs actually it's a brilliant strategy you've got to take your hat off to him it's a brilliant strategy to get out to mess up this world to spoil God's plans for humanity is just to just to aim at getting us to not trust God and then all these other things flow from that it's a brilliant strategy but it doesn't work on

Jesus you see Satan never expected this Satan never expected that the one person who actually has a right to take matters into his own hands doesn't and instead he trusts his father completely and this is how Jesus wins this is how Jesus wins Jesus knows that as a human the temptation is always to doubt God's word to doubt what God has said and so look at what happens every time the moment Satan tries to tempt him what does he do tell me he quotes scripture did you notice that every time Satan does the first thing he does is he reads God's word he quotes God's word and he believes what his father has said even when the alternative looks better he still believes what his father has said and that's how he wins by doing something that we were never able to properly do for us on our behalf as a human come to represent humanity to fight the battle we could not win Jesus is the only human who has been able to beat evil in the history of the world and that's why we need him as our king that's why you need him as your king because you can't fight Satan in your own power you can't fight Satan who right now is planning on your eternal destruction right now he has a strategy in his filing cabinet with your name on it and it's his strategy to take you down it's his strategy to destroy you for eternity in hell you can't fight that by yourself but Jesus is showing here that when you come under his rule he is giving us humanity a way to fight for the first time he's giving us a way to resist because he has come as one of us and he's prevailed over evil for us for his people and not just here in in Matthew chapter 4 this is the beginning of his battle with sin but ultimately you know where he prevailed over temptation for us is on the cross that was his ultimate test on the cross when he died when he again faced temptation you know what happens it would be very interesting to read Matthew's account of what happens on the cross three times people come the thieves on the cross the people walking past him in the road and the chief priests and the Pharisees and they say if you are the son of God take yourself down off the cross show us who you are how tempting would that have been for Jesus because he could have done that and yet he didn't he still entrusted himself to his father's plan there on the cross and all he does in Matthew in response to to what they say on the cross all he does the only words that he utters in Matthew is to quote scripture and by doing that by trusting his father's plan and by dying on the cross for us he breaks the power of sin he breaks Satan's power to accuse us he breaks the stranglehold Satan has had over humanity for millennia there on the cross and because Jesus did that because he overcame temptation on behalf of his people the Bible says there are two results for those who belong to him because of his defeat of Satan because of his overcoming of temptation we benefit in at least two ways firstly the

Bible says because of that because he overcame temptation we can now approach God with confidence even in our weakness even when we do fail because he succeeded for us we're here read this in Hebrews 4 15 to 16 listen to these words therefore since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens Jesus the son of God let us hold fast to our confession for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who has been tempted in every way as we are and yet without sin therefore let us approach the throne of grace with boldness so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need because Jesus overcame temptation for us we have that access now even when we fail even when we fall and secondly secondly though not only do we have that access because of what Jesus achieved on our behalf but we ourselves the Bible says are now able to resist Satan's temptations he gives us

his power to do that let me read to you 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13 no temptation has come upon you God's people except what is common to all humanity but God is faithful he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able but with the temptation he will also provide a way out so that you may be able to bear it that is the promise that we have as God's people as

[31 : 16] Christ's people because of Christ winning for his people Christians now have a way out a weapon against our ancient enemy that's what Jesus has equipped his people with a weapon against our ancient enemy and what is that way out that God provides for us what is the way out of temptation what is the weapon it's this it's God's word it's it's this this is this is our weapon against demonic activity in this world this you know not not not not to misuse it to misquote scriptures or to try make incantations or to hold it up and say in Jesus name I bind you you know you often see that using using the Bible as some kind of talisman no I mean reading it and understanding it is our weapon against Satan okay as we read this and we understand it and we learn it and we remind each other of it throughout the week and we absorb the truth that God wants us to know you know what it does it builds our immunity against

Satan's most powerful weapons of doubt and temptation in our lives and that's why we take the Bible so seriously here at St. Mark's you may have noticed that's why we study it that's why we preach sermons on it that's why Dylan and I spend most of our time in our week diving into it and reading the Greek and Hebrew to make sure we're preaching it faithfully that's why we have courses on it during the week that's why we read it in our daily devotions that's why we gather together in growth groups and and read it and make sure we're understanding it properly that's why we we read it on Sunday morning that's why we gather on Sunday evening again and read the word because this is our weapon this is our weapon against forces that we can't see but are very real and that's why you need to take it seriously in your life you need to start taking it much more seriously you need to take every opportunity you can get to open this word with God's people and get these truths into your life and let them change you you need it much more than you think you're not as independent and as strong as you think you need this word in your life in your mind in your heart much more than you think you need to take it much more seriously because as Jesus says in verse 4 to Satan man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God is God's word your daily bread is it what sustains you because it must as

Satan tries this week and he will mark my words to take you down to make you doubt God so that you take matters into your own hands to persuade you to worship other things because you think that they can give you what God can't and through these temptations to lead you into all kinds of sins that's what he will try this week will he win or will you the way Jesus showed us how let's pray oh Lord we thank you so much for your word and opening it up to us we thank you not only for teaching us this through your word this morning but for showing us that in your word we have the ultimate weapon to fight against the evil of this world and against the evil that seeks to take us out and destroy us

Lord Jesus we praise and thank you that you came and fought the battle and won that we could not win and we thank you for leaving us with your spirit and this great great weapon of your word help us to wield it help us to take it seriously in our lives and and through it Lord would you continue to win the fight against evil in this world in Jesus name amen you