

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on February 14, 2016 on Luke 4:1-13 at Victory of the Lambⁱ.

Series: Scandal
Today's Focus: The Plot

"A Child of God > A Super Bowl Champ"

I know chances are your favorite team wasn't playing in the big game last Sunday, but how many of you watched the Super Bowl? Of course every year the teams change (for the most part). Yet it's always a championship game between two opposing teams vying for the title, the Lombardi trophy, and the glory that comes along with being crowned world champs.

And every year leading up to the game there are endless debates...who's going to win? Who's got the better offense? The better defense? The best playmakers? This year it was, Can the vaunted Denver defense stop the multi-dimensional Carolina offense? And of course Denver's D did just that. Von Miller was named the MVP. And yet if you watched the post-game stuff, every member of the Denver Broncos got their chance to touch or kiss the trophy. And every member of the team and coaching staff will be receiving their very own championship ring. They will all be going to visit the White House. Every member of the organization will get to participate in the winner's parade and receive the glory that goes along with the title of Super Bowl Champs.

The Super Bowl is about as epic a contest as there is. People's fortunes rise and fall sometimes on the outcome of the big game. But even more so, this was true about another contest that took place 2,000 years ago except that it wasn't contested in a crowded stadium filled with cheering fans, but in the lonely Judean wilderness far from creature comforts. It was an epic clash between evil and good. A clash between Satan—the "father of lies", and Jesus Christ—the true Son of God the Father.

Here's the story as the Holy Spirit inspired it to be recorded by a man named Luke:

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 If you worship me, it will all be yours."

8 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. 10 For it is written:

*“He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you carefully;
11 they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”*

12 Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

So we hear this was not the end of this great conflict but yet another epic chapter in a story that goes to almost the very beginning of time. Let’s just go back to the beginning for a moment because it explains how we’ve ended up here. We’re told in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, that the world was once a perfect place. In the Garden of Eden no human sin yet marred the world that still sparkled in pristine splendor from its loving Creator’s hand. In this perfect Garden, Adam and Eve, the first people, were surrounded on every side by countless reminders of their Creator’s perfect kindness. They were surrounded by the goodness of God who had provided them with everything for their enjoyment. Can you even imagine it?

But then, when Satan told them to grab for what suddenly seemed to glisten before their eyes rather than to hold to what was already theirs in their Creator, they believed the lie that they needed this to be truly happy. When Satan urged them to dare God to reveal he wasn’t bluffing when he promised that those who eat would die, they believed the lie. So they doubted God’s Word. And so they doubted God’s goodness. They bought into Satan’s lies. And all this even while they were in the Garden of Eden itself, already surrounded by everything they could ever need to be ultimately happy.

How much harder to trust God sometimes when it feels like we’re in the wilderness. When the evidence of God’s goodness doesn’t always seem to be close at hand but rather feels far away. When you’ve learned the hard way that the things you thought would make you happy, haven’t. When the dreams you’ve chased have turned out to be more like a mirage. When the opportunities you thought would be there didn’t materialize in the way you hoped. When the human beings you placed your hope in didn’t come through in the way you were counting on. When hopes of better health, a wonderful marriage, a happy family, more money or a successful career have given way instead to illness, or brokenness, or loneliness, or worry and stress. Where is God in the wilderness when your heart is broken and your soul is empty, aching to be fulfilled? Does God still exist? Is God still good? Does he even care? Is he worthy of trust? Adam and Eve doubted God’s goodness in the garden even when they were surrounded by it. How many times have you or I done the same? If you’ve perfectly trusted God in every season of your life please raise your hand.

But what a contrast then we see in Jesus! *1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.*

Jesus’ temptation does not take place in a garden surrounded by every possible reminder of his Father’s goodness. No, rather the Spirit leads him into the barren wilderness where for 40 days he (who is true

God but also true man) goes without food. Plagued by hunger pangs in that barren wilderness, the fading echoes of the Father's words at his baptism about being his beloved Son could so easily have sounded like empty words. Where was that Father now as he seemed to be wandering in that wilderness hungry and alone—except of course for the Tempter dogging his every step?

And so it was at this time, as those 40 days reached their conclusion, that Satan launched his perfectly-aimed attacks. "Does the Father love you? Are you really his Son? Where is his care as he leaves you to starve in this god-forsaken place? What you need to do is take matters into your own hand and command one of these stones to become bread!"

Yet resting in his Father's Word, the same word we have in the Bible, what did Jesus say in return? Basically, "Satan, you're lying!"

So Satan countered. "Oh, so you say you live by this Father's Word huh? Well how about this...Will you also die by his Word? Doesn't this Father by whose Word you say you live point you to suffering and a cross and to unimaginable agony for an ungrateful world where most people will ignore whatever you do for them? Where's the love in that? Here Jesus, do you see all the power and authority and glory of this world? I'll give it to you...and I ask no painful cross for it. Just bow down your weary bones before me for a moment, and it will be yours—all of it!"

Yet resting in his Father's Word, the same word we have in the Bible, what did Jesus say in return? "Satan, you're lying!"

Of course Satan was not out of lies yet. Transporting our Lord Jesus to a peak of the temple he hissed, "So, I see you trust and worship this Father, but if he is truly worthy of such trust and worship then surely there can be nothing wrong with putting him to the test? He promises to protect you, doesn't he? Let's just see about that, Jesus. Throw yourself down and let's see him and his angels get to work for a change rather than allowing you to suffer!"

Yet resting in his Father's Word, the same word we have in the Bible, what did Jesus say in return? "Satan, you're lying!" And then, finally defeated, we're told that Satan left him alone. *When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

Friends, wouldn't it be awesome if you and I were able to say that, resting in our Heavenly Father's Word, we had always said to the great deceiver, "Satan, you're lying!" Wouldn't it be awesome if we had the record of perfect battling on the field of temptation so that the devil always ended up fleeing from us, defeated, his lies—like his head—helplessly crushed by God's truth?

O but we can and we do! You see Jesus did not contest Satan and win these temptation battles only for himself. Jesus clothed himself in our flesh and blood as the 2nd Adam, one of us, because the 1st Adam and Eve had lost. And so after 33 years of blistering attacks, Jesus, the 2nd Adam, held the field and he won the victory for us so that all that he accomplished as our substitute might be securely made yours and mine.

This season of Lent is a time when we focus on the journey Jesus made to the cross, but we do so beginning with the assurance of why his death there on the cross ultimately counts. You see there are two sides to the coin, so to speak, of what Jesus did for us. One side is that on the cross Jesus took upon himself the full penalty for the sins of humanity. This side of the coin we might call Jesus' *passive obedience*. It's certainly important. But we can't stop here. The other side of the coin is just as important. We might call it Jesus' *active obedience*. In other words we celebrate Jesus' death on the cross not only because Jesus suffered in our place for our sins but because throughout his entire life Jesus himself never ever sinned. He perfectly obeyed, perfectly loved, and perfectly trusted his heavenly Father. Jesus never doubted his Father's goodness, never indulged in Satan's plot to get him to think selfishly for a change, never sought to take an easier road that would have kept him from going to the cross. But as our substitute Jesus overcame every single one of the Tempter's tactics even when walked alone through the wilderness of this world which led to his being left alone to die...for us...and for our salvation. So where we have failed...friends, Jesus prevailed!

That's why I love the season of Lent. You see Lent doesn't really tell us what to do. Lent tells us what has been done. Lent doesn't give us a list of instructions to follow. Lent hands us a cancelled bill. Lent is about our sins that have been forgiven now that Jesus, the 2nd Adam, has come and undone what the first Adam and Even did. So the result now is that even in death, heaven is secure for us. Even in death, all is not lost for a Christian, because in Christ Jesus you have won. Though as children of Adam, we will all die, yet as children of God, we will live forever!

And so the next time Satan whispers, "Do you really think that God cares about you?" or "Do you really think God could love you?" just remember, you have been clothed with Christ's perfect record of obedience. Through your baptism everything that God says about his dear Son he now says also about you. You are pleasing to him. You couldn't be more perfect in his sight. You are his beloved son or daughter. And that's why **being a child of God is better by far than even being a super bowl champ!**

Do you know who Ryan Clady is? He's a Left Tackle for the Denver Broncos. The thing is Ryan Clady didn't play a single snap this season. He tore his ACL in the spring. In other words he contributed absolutely nothing to his team's success. He stood on the sidelines during the Super Bowl. Yet guess what? As a member of the Broncos team, he's going to get a Super Bowl ring. He's going to get to go to the White House. He is a world champion.

Friends, being a child of God is kind of like this. We didn't contribute anything to our status. We didn't make any big plays to help win the big game. But if Jesus is the MVP of your life...you are a world champ. A world champ over Satan through the Savior of the world. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

My Next Steps

A Thought to Ponder: Lent doesn't tell us what to do. Lent tells us what has been done.

How does the world, or sometime even the church, turn this truth upside down?

A Treasure to Share: *“For we do not have a high priest [Jesus] who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”* (Hebrews 4:15-16).

A Challenge for the Week: Prayer is a great way to arm yourself against temptation. Here’s a short prayer to memorize for the start of each new day of God’s grace:

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

- Martin Luther’s “morning prayer”

ⁱ For this sermon I am indebted to significant key thoughts from my one of my dear Seminary Professors, Prof. Rich Gurgel, in a devotion he wrote for pastors called “Devil, you lie!”