

Wield the Ultimate Weapon

‡ Against identity theft (vv.1-4)

‡ Against failure (vv.5-7)

‡ Against empty “spirituality” (vv.8-11)

In the name of Jesus, our Champion of champions, dearly redeemed children of God:

Nine weeks ago we heard the heavenly Father say something about Jesus, same as last week, but He added one thing. Remember as Epiphany was beginning right after Christmas. Jesus was standing in the Jordan River to be baptized by John when the Father said from heaven, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** (Matthew 3:17 NIV84) After eight Sundays of Epiphany, last week was Transfiguration. On the sacred mountain the Father spoke again, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. [and added] Listen to him!”** (Matthew 17:5 NIV84) Today we not only listen but watch God’s Son our Savior begin His ministry to save our souls from sin, death and hell.

This may come as quite a shock. If you think being a Christian means floating on a rubber raft in the bright sunshine with a tall cool one in hand, you’ve got the wrong idea. Jesus shows us that His followers have a big target on their backs, and not for birds. The fallen angel from hell, Satan the enemy, the devil liar, is out to destroy God’s children. Against his temptations we need the **Ultimate Weapon**.

‡ Against identity theft (vv.1-4)

Did I read this right? **“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil”?** It sounds as if this was on purpose. And it was! God willed this temptation. I didn’t write the Bible. If I had, I surely would not have written it like that! Who would? Why would God will such severe temptation like this for His one and only begotten Son in whom He is well pleased?

Let’s figure this out together. Many people suffer from a personal “identity crisis.” They wonder, “Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose in life if I need so much care from others?” These days, do you know who your children are, not at home but online? Does their *FaceBook* **identity** match who you think they are? And what about all the commercials warning about **identity theft**? Can your **identity** really talk back to you and risk your good name? Can Satan steal your **identity** in heaven? He sure wants you to think so. It’s like the soft spot in our armor.

When the Russians faced the German Tiger tanks in the Battle of Kursk, they aimed between the big gun and the base so their shells could pierce the armor and explode inside. Satan wants to set our souls on fire. So your **identity** is in his crosshairs as it was for Jesus. **The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”** There is no question. Jesus was and is the Son of God. But He had been **“fasting forty days and forty nights.”** So the devil attacked His weakness. Ever wonder, “Does God really love me?” What is your **identity** with God?

Notice the Father does not rush in with White Castles to feed His beloved Son. God’s power is made perfect in weakness. And Jesus lived every thought, word and deed not for self, but for us and for God. Watch Him **Wield the Ultimate Weapon**: **“It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”** We need God’s Word for comfort food. Why expect drugs to take away your anxiety? Does a chemical imbalance cause depression or does depression cause the imbalance? Doctors are still sorting that out. Let them help with the physical. God’s Word heals body, soul and spirit. Treasure hunt in your Bible. Mark passages about fear, worry, anxiety and God’s help. **“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”** (Isaiah 41:10) God’s Word guards us...

✠ Against failure (vv.5-7)

Spiritual battles have many similarities with sports, but the stakes are forever, not just for a season. Think about it. How much of a season do you remember if your team loses the championship? Doesn't it all seem like a **failure** then? True for soldiers too. As Shakespeare put it: "The painful warrior famous for fight, After a thousand victories, once foil'd, Is from the books of honor razed quite, And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd." If Jesus had lost to Satan in the desert, we would have been eternally doomed.

So Satan attacked again. *To the highest point of the temple* he took God's beloved Son to play a little Bible trivia: "***If you are the Son of God,***" he said, "***throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'***" Prove you really trust in God! Make Him prove His love for you!

A little of God's Word can be a dangerous thing. Peter warns that those who taste God's goodness, then reject Him will be "***worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.***" (2 Peter 2:20) They're like a Russian commander who mounted his tank one summer morning in 1943. It could have been his big day. He had a German tank right in his sights, but it moved – right past him only a few yards, then swiveled its turret around and fired. His best day just went up in smoke!

So you drop your children off at Sunday School, send them to Lutheran Day School, but rarely talk about your faith at home? They don't see you read your Bible or go to Bible Class or hear what Jesus means to you? Are you telling them church is just for Sunday? How will they cope if a friend misquotes Scripture as the devil did? Will they know how to defend their faith? Jesus answered the devil's misquote with a real one: "***It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'***" What good is a dull sword rusting on the shelf? You need to **Wield the Ultimate Weapon** in this battle for your soul...

✠ Against empty "spirituality" (vv.8-11)

As if **identity theft** and **failure** were not enough, Satan tries to pierce your heart as with Jesus in the third temptation. Here's how it relates to us. Say, your boyfriend or girlfriend goes to a different church. You check out what they teach, and realize it's not what the Bible says. It does not pass the truth test of Scripture. What do you do? Take the easy way out? Go along to get along? You may not want to think about this, but is your relationship with that special someone more important than with God? Sure you want them close, but do you try to keep God at arm's length?

Then maybe you would rewrite the conclusion to this story? *Again, the devil took [Jesus] to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."* See the temptation? "There's an easier way, Jesus. Why suffer so much on the cross? Why not compromise a little worship when it hurts?"

Satan knows he doesn't have to turn you into a Satanist. He just needs to turn your heart away from God. He likes people to fill up with what Americans call "**spirituality.**" It's like CO – no odor, invisible, and deadly. If Satan get you used to the smell of sulfur, you won't notice explosive gas. If he can keep you living in sin, you'll feel safe. Satan loves that tricky tank tactic, rushing past us, then turning to fire on our weak side just when we think we're safe!

Thank God, Jesus does not fall for **empty "spirituality"**! "***Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'***" God alone deserves our heartfelt worship.

In this life we will be tempted. As Luther said, "You can't keep the birds from flying overhead, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair." So, "***resist the devil, and he will flee from you.***" (James 4:7) Say it out loud: "***Away from me, Satan!*** I am baptized. You cannot rob me of God's comfort and peace. I will keep coming for the Holy Spirit to fill me with Word and sacrament. Jesus won the victory for me. Jesus' shed blood washed away all my sins like a tsunami that takes my doubts and fears away. Jesus gives me life!" *Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind; Sight, riches, healing of the mind, Yea, all I need, in thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.* (CW 397:4) Amen.