

Follow Jesus to Victory

✠ **First as our Substitute**

✠ **Now as our Leader**

In the name of Jesus our Champion, dear fellow disciples overcoming temptation:

Is it just me growing up, or are there more applications than ever to the temptation of Christ in the wilderness? There's an all-out assault on Christians today that resembles Allied plans to attack across the English Channel at Calais. If you know your history, we're talking about a fake. "To give the appearance of a massive troop buildup in southeast England, the Allies created a largely phantom fighting force, the First U.S. Army Group, headed by George Patton, the American general whom the Nazis considered to be the enemy's best commander and the logical man to lead a cross-channel invasion. The Allies broadcast endless hours of fictitious radio transmissions about troop and supply movements and planted wedding notices for fake soldiers in local newspapers. They deceived Nazi aerial reconnaissance planes by fashioning dummy aircraft and an armada of decoy landing crafts...painted canvases pulled over steel frames...inflatable Sherman tanks...moved [at] night [on] rollers [leaving fake] tire tracks..."¹ German spies were flipped into double agents and fed tons of false information, using Enigma Codes which Hitler did not know were broken. Christians are falling for the fake today by focusing on the wrong enemy.

While the blame-game continues with pointing fingers, the Lord keeps whispering in His Word that ***"our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*** (Ephesians 6:12 EHV²) Jesus fought the real enemy. Today we want to **Follow Jesus to Victory**.

✠ **First as our Substitute**

There was no faking Jesus' life and ministry. Bible critics could do themselves a big favor by closing the books and blogs about the Bible, and just reading it. Nowhere else will you find a family tree like that of Jesus in Matthew 1. His birth to a virgin named Mary, righteous stepfather Joseph, Wise Men coming and going, flight to Egypt and King Herod's massacre of Bethlehem's baby boys – none of this fits the template of myth and legend. Matthew and the other Gospel accounts (Mark, Luke, John) keep repeating hundreds of ancient prophecies all the way to John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness until he baptizes Jesus too along with the crowds. And that's where the story really gets interesting.

It was ***"to fulfill all righteousness"*** (3:15) that Jesus was baptized **First as our Substitute**. Luke reports that Jesus was ***"full of the Holy Spirit"*** when He was led by that same Spirit to battle Satan in forty days of non-stop temptations. The Holy Spirit records three of them to help us not only overcome our temptations, but to see Jesus **First as our Substitute**. Human science needs lab rats and collision test dummies. But God gives us His own Son as our **Substitute** and Champion. Jesus steps in for us against the overwhelming powers of darkness we cannot see. Matthew's order of record hits our temptations in the realm of medical, then personal, then political. This will be another of the Bible's 40-day periods for a complete salvation event on earth. In any temptations, one slip of Jesus' feelings, and we would be lost. Only the blood of an innocent man who is also God Himself could rescue us all from eternal damnation.

¹ https://www.history.com/news/fooling-hitler-the-elaborate-ruse-behind-d-day?li_source=LI&li_medium=m2m-rcw-history

² EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

Medically, Jesus did not need a vaccine. After forty days and nights of fasting, He needed food! ***“He was hungry”*** – way past when most would say, “I’m starving!” If just once Jesus used His power for personal needs, He would no longer be the perfect **Substitute** God’s Law demands for every single sin in your head and heart and hands. So easily Jesus could make stones into bread. So easily fail us all.

Personally, why shouldn’t Jesus follow God’s Word? Satan quotes the Holy Scriptures from Psalm 91:11-12. He only left out one line: ***“To guard you in all your ways.”*** Didn’t Jesus trust God enough to throw Himself off that high pinnacle of the temple? Didn’t He trust the angels to catch Him? Quoting Scripture right and left, some preachers try to put a name on every prophecy in the Bible. As long as I can remember, presidents, dictators, politicians, storms, disasters have been identified by men absolutely sure of those names. Maybe they miss a word or two as when Jesus told Pilate, ***“My kingdom is not of this world.”*** (John 18:36) Couldn’t Jesus go along to get along? Does He have to quote Scripture against Scripture? Jesus said to Satan, ***“Again, it is written: You shall not test the Lord your God.”***

Politically, how easy could it be for Jesus to compromise just a minute or two? All that suffering and death and shame that lay ahead could easily be avoided by a simple nod to Satan. Couldn’t Jesus just act as if He were worshiping and maybe cross His fingers at the same time? Couldn’t He just give up a few of His hard-headed principles to achieve a great political victory like controlling ***“all the kingdoms of the world and their glory”***? Would that be such an epic fail **as our Substitute**? Oh, yes! Yes, it would!

✠ Now as our Leader

On another occasion Jesus would set the record straight on Satan: ***“He was a murderer from the beginning and did not remain standing in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he lies, he speaks from what is his, because he is a liar and the father of lying.”*** (John 8:44 EHV) Satan spoke his native language of lies to deceive Eve and overcome Adam with that tiny concept of “If...” *If* you really want to reach your potential, you must rebel against God. *If* you’re absolutely certain that “the ends *do not* justify the means,” but *if* you think that your life and happiness depends on political victories, you’ve already aimed the big guns of your heart at the wrong target. It’s so easy to be impressed with Patton-like characters in the news, but none is your Savior from sin, death and hell. No one but Jesus **our Leader**!

If you’re bouncing around so much in the Bible that you can’t pay attention to what it actually says, how are you going to beat back the spies that want to turn your heart from God? You have a traitor living inside you called your sinful nature. So do I. God gives us Christian loved ones and friends to warn us *if* we’re falling for the codes in life’s enigma. Adding or subtracting from Scripture is death.

If bread cannot even save your body, how can medicines, vaccines or surgery save your soul. God gives us these awesome gifts of medical technology in His grace and mercy, but not as substitutes for His kindness and love. We all have decisions to make. God can bless your body as He wills. Most of all He wants to bless your soul so that when we finally see all this darkness defeated in heaven’s eternal day, you can enjoy your glorified immortal body like the One that walked out of the grave on Easter morning. More than a question between you and your doctor, it’s between you and your loving Lord and Savior. Where is your heart? Whom are you really following? Only One could stand up to the old evil foe.

Then Jesus said to him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” Christ the Lord **as our Leader** – ***It is written: “I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you.”*** (Hebrews 13:5) Especially if you are broken-hearted and feel forsaken, for ***it is written: “the LORD is close to the brokenhearted.”*** (Psalm 34:18) If you already messed up or fear you might, His consoling Spirit arms around your shoulders. ***It is written: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”*** (Proverbs 3:5f) Jesus bears **Victory** scars from the cross in His hands, feet and side. Substituting Himself, He won your **Victory** over Satan, sin and death. Jesus put His weapon in your mouth: ***“It is written.”*** Wield that sword (Psalm 149) against the real enemy as you **Follow Jesus to Victory**. Amen.