

### 3 Devotions for the First Sunday in Lent

#### **Joshua 7:1, 10-12, 16-26**

Each Sunday we gather together to worship God with the singing of songs, prayers, and the reading of his holy Word. The Christian Church has long made it a practice to focus on 3 readings in the Sunday worship service, one the 4 Gospels, one from the Old Testament, one from another New Testament, usually an Epistle (though sometimes it's from the books of Acts or Revelation). The Gospel carries the service theme and usually gives the worshiper the guide map for gaining wisdom and instruction from the other lessons as well.

Today is no exception! Our Gospel which we will read in a few moments is the account of Jesus Being Tempted by the Devil. I don't think I'm spoiling the ending by telling you the Jesus withstood those temptations, that is why our Service theme today is **Christ Won the Victory for Us**.

Our Old Testament lesson for today takes place in almost the same place as the gospel, only close to 1500 years earlier. Jesus had just crossed the Jordan River, heading into the desert for 40 days, God's people at the time of Joshua had just crossed the Jordan River in the other direction, having completed 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. This was the beginning of a new chapter in their storied history. The Age of the Patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were over. Their 400 years in Egypt were done. Forty years in the desert under the guidance of Moses, complete!! Now under Joshua, the land which had been promised to God's people for almost 600 years was about to be given to them. Joshua was going to lead God's people into a flawless military conquest and the people would live happily ever after.

At least it worked that way for one city. "Joshua fought the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down!" that's how the song goes right? I've never heard a song about the first battle at Ai. That's because it did go so well. An Israelite man named Achan had taken some forbidden treasures from Jericho. God had told the people not to take anything – that Jericho would be the first fruits of the Promised Land that would go entirely to the Lord. All the treasures would be put in the Lord's storehouse and everything else was to be burned as a sacrifice to the Lord. But Achan kept some treasure for his own his own and hid it from the people.

We might look at a story like this and wonder how Achan could be so rash and so bold. How could he be so stupid to not listen to God! But at the heart of it all, Achan fell to a temptation that we often fall to – greed! God asked his people to give Jericho as the firstfruits, but instead Achan got the dollar signs in his eyes and held back what should have been God's. Achan was told to trust in the Lord to provide for him with what was coming, but Achan decided it would be easier to just take some silver and gold for his own. Is that so much different than us? God asks us for a generous firstfruit offering, yet too often we give God leftovers. God asks us to trust in him to provide for our needs, yet aren't we reluctant to fully trust in him when it comes to our offerings. Don't we sometimes fall to the greedy temptation to hold back some for ourselves?

We can relate pretty well to Achan. The temptation that was placed before him is before us all the time, and we often fall like he did. But our Savior, who resisted all temptations, was never greedy. He wasn't looking for his own gain, but even gave himself up – to die on the cross. He suffered loss, so that heavenly gain could be ours in his name.

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#### Hebrews 4:14-16

A middle aged woman lingered in the hall after everyone else had left. With tears running down her face, she tried to make sense of it all. “How could God have taken my son away? He was only 18, he had a full life yet to live.” It was just then that the door in the back squeaked open and in walked a woman maybe 15 years older than she. The crying woman kind of recognized her as the lady that sits towards the back at church. That woman came and sat next to her speechless for a minute or two. She shared a few tears with her and then began to speak. “I know how hard this is on you! Ten years ago, my seventeen year old daughter was in a car accident and went home to heaven!” She had never known that about the lady who was merely an acquaintance at church. But now she was able to be a mentor and a friend. She had a unique advantage called *emphaty*.

Empathy is kind of like a special kind of sympathy. It’s more than just feeling bad about a situation, it’s knowing how bad someone else is feeling, because you have been there before. The lady who had lost her daughter could offer empathy to the grieving mother because she had been there before.

Support groups are built on empathy. A person who is in need can form a special bond with a person who has been in that same need. They have a unique perspective that other people aren’t able to have. When it comes to showing Christian friendship and love, it’s good to have sympathy, but think of how much of a blessing we can be to others when we show empathy!!!

Our second lesson talks about one who could empathize with us all and the situation that we are in. Jesus can offer us a special comfort when we face temptation, because he faced those same temptations. He knows what it is like to be weak – he was physically weak when the devil confronted him in the wilderness. He knows what it is like to have to hold back the instinct to fight when others are ridiculing us. He knows what it is like to be tempted to shy back into the crowd when the time comes to stand up for what is right.

But it’s more than forgiveness we gain through Jesus. ***For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*** Jesus was tempted like us – yet was without sin. Jesus was put in the same difficult positions that we are put into, but he always came out on top. Jesus was attacked by Satan like we are, yet Jesus always won.

Jesus’ perfection brings us forgiveness in the face of failure. Every day we fail the test, but everyday he passed with flying colors. Every day he obeyed so that the record of our disobedience could be wiped clean. Every day he was perfect, so that when he yelled “It is finished” from the cross, he was talking not only his own victory, but ours, too. Through Jesus’ life and death, we have New Life in his name.

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#### **Luke 4:1-13**

The fisherman checks his gear carefully before leaving for the big fishing trip. His tackle box has to be fully stocked so that he doesn't run out of lures or bait. Without the hooks and lines, it will be difficult to tempt the fish to bite into the hook.

Maybe you don't associate fishing with temptation, (unless it's you being tempted to do more fishing!!) But that's exactly what it's happening, right? Somehow it sounds less honorable if you describe it that way! "Today we're going to go deceive some fish into biting onto our hooks. We are going to tempt them into thinking they've got a free lunch, and then by the time they know what hit them, they'll already be in the cooler. Think about what you put on the end of the line by the hook – it's 1 of 2 things – a) either "bait" or a "lure" both are temptation words. You are trying to alter the fish's behavior to do what you want – namely to bite down on the hook. You dangle before the fish either something that they want or something that looks like what they want, and then you've got them where you want them.

Isn't that exactly what the devil does to us? He dangles before us the things that we want - wealth, power, prestige – so that we can chomp down right where he wants us to. The things that he offers us are sinful or the ways to get there are, either way he has won. Sometimes he really does deliver what he has promised, and sometimes we find out that we've been duped! The devil tells you that happiness is at the bottom of the bottle, but you've tried it many times and it hasn't been there. He tells you that your life will be easier if you just forget about God for a while – but you come to find out that God was the only one who was holding it together at all. He says that the only way to get ahead is to serve yourself, but all that has gotten you is loneliness and despair.

The devil dangled the fishing line in front of Jesus, too. He presented Jesus with the things that he thought Jesus would want at the times he thought he might want them. He was trying to bait Jesus away from God's way. He was trying to lure him from perfection and thus from his ability to be the Savior. But his efforts failed. All of Satan's attempts to derail the salvation train came up empty. Jesus won all the battles and he won absolute victory. To fulfill the words that were spoken to Adam, with the resurrection, Jesus crushed the serpent's head.

And Jesus still fights on our behalf. He dwells within us and strengthens us against temptation. He equips us for battle and empowers us for victory. He allows us to honor him with our obedient lives and to thank and please him with the way that we live. Jesus is still winning victories for us, and he will continue to win them until the day that the ultimate victory is ours as we enter the gates of heavenly glory. There we will sing anew each day the joyful words that we just sang to close Martin Luther's hymn, "Our victory is won! The kingdom's ours forever!"