Lent 1 Mark 1:12-15
February 21, 2021 455-472-419-422

Your Lenten Invitation
I. To relive the battle.
II. To share the victory.

Dear Christian friends,

What exactly is Lent? The word Lent comes from the OE word LENCTEN – to **lengthen**. It refers to the **days lengthening** with the coming of spring.

But that's not what the CHURCH SEASON of Lent is about. Lent is 40 days of preparation for a **God-pleasing celebration** of Easter – the most important day in the history of the world. Lent is 40 days because of the 40 days **Jesus was tempted** by the devil in the wilderness.

There are many traditions with Lent – **particularly** the idea of GIVING UP something for Lent. Lent is a PENITENTIAL season. The purple paraments CALL US to **repent** of the many times we've GIVEN IN to temptation and sinned.

But we must be careful that we don't switch the focus of Lent FROM WHAT GOD IS DOING **for us** TO what we're doing for God. Then we would **totally** miss the point of **Lent** AND the **gospel**. Lent is ABOVE ALL ELSE an invitation from God to remember the wonders of our salvation. **In fact**, consider these verses YOUR LENTEN INVITATION. God here INVITES you 1)to relive the **battle** and 2)to share in the **victory**.

I. To relive the battle.

With Lent God invites us to OPEN OUR EYES and SEE THE BATTLE raging all around us AND for us. **Because** we can't see this battle **with our eyes** – **because** we get so wrapped up in our **everyday lives** – we can EASILY LOSE SIGHT of this battle. RIGHT THEN the devil has scored a **major** victory! The devil doesn't want us to see him busy doing HIS DIRTY WORK.

God opens our eyes to the REALITY of the devil. That **fallen angel** is our worst enemy **even though** he will act like our **best friend** OUT TO SHOW us a good time. The devil only wants to HAUL US to hell **even though** he will promise us the world. The devil is SNEAKY. He can ***"masquerade as an angel of light"*** and do ***"counterfeit miracles."***

God opens our **eyes to see** that we were the devil's PRISONERS OF WAR in this battle. With Adam's fall into sin we had all fallen UNDER THE DEVIL'S POWER. We were on a death march to hell and unable to escape. NO AMOUNT of fasting – **self-denial**, etc. – COULD SAVE us from the **devil's grip**.

Lent invites us to RELIVE THE BATTLE that led to the devil's defeat. ***"The Spirit immediately sent Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan."*** This happened right after Jesus' baptism. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness TO DO BATTLE with the devil. Learn well TWO **lessons** here. **One**, Jesus didn't foolishly expose Himself to temptation as we **so often** do. **Two**, if the devil was willing to TAKE ON the **almighty Son** of God don't think he HAS ANY PROBLEM **coming after us**!

Matthew and Luke report THREE SPECIFIC TEMPTATIONS that the devil threw at Jesus. **Mark** emphasizes that the devil kept coming after Jesus – ONE TEMPTATION AFTER another. The devil is not a QUITTER! **If** one temptation doesn't work he'll TRY ANOTHER and another. He will wear us down until he FINALLY **wins**. It doesn't matter how many temptations we SUCCESSFULLY FIGHT OFF if he can get us to EVENTUALLY **give in**. A city under siege MAY HOLD OUT for months but when it finally falls all those **other days** NO LONGER MATTER. It FELL.

Jesus was ALL ALONE as He battled the devil. ONLY JESUS could fight this battle. But let's not think WE can take the **devil on** ALL ALONE and win! **If** we cut ourselves off from the love and **support** – from the prayers and **encouragement** – of our fellow Christians we are only making ourselves EASIER TARGETS for the devil. **Think** of life IN THE WILD. The lion – the **predator** – goes after the **animal** that HAS STRAYED from the herd. It's easier to **take down** an animal BY ITSELF. The devil will try to ISOLATE us from each other. **He'll tell** us we don't need church. He'll PLAY on hurt feelings – **wounded pride** – to DRIVE A WEDGE between us. That's why God tells us to ***"not give up meeting together"*** but to ***"encourage one another."***

The battle wages on. Jesus BEATS the devil again and again. Jesus COUNTERED the **devil's attacks** with God's Word - ***"It is written."*** The devil knows that **if** he CAN SEPARATE us from God's **powerful** Word – get us to ignore God's Word – skip church – not read our Bibles – we will be EASIER PICKINGS for him.

The devil didn't GIVE UP **after** those 40 days. Luke tells us, ***"He left Jesus UNTIL an opportune time."*** The devil would be back – but Jesus NEVER GAVE IN – not once! Jesus ***"was tempted in every way just as we are, yet was without sin."*** Jesus perfectly obeyed all the commandments **all the time** and ALL FOR US! Jesus ALWAYS PUT His heavenly Father first in everything. Then ON THE CROSS Jesus delivered the death blow to the devil. Jesus ***"crushed the serpent's head"*** when He Jesus offered up His holy life as the ALL-SUFFICIENT SACRIFICE for the sins of the whole world. RELIVE that battle **this Lent** because it ends **not** with Good Friday but with EASTER! We are not just journeying to Jesus' BLOOD-STAINED but on to His EMPTY grave.

II. Share the victory.

This Lent God invites us to SHARE IN **Jesus' victory** over the devil. We do that FIRST by hearing again the wondrous story. ***"Jesus went to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God."*** HOW WELL do you know your Bible and the life of our Lord? Are content with that? **If so**, then CHALK ONE UP for the devil! God wants you and me to ***"GROW in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus."*** The ONLY WAY we can grow is by being in God's Word. The devil knows that too. That's WHY HE HAS all those excuses ALREADY MADE UP for you for why you can't come to church every week – **why** you can't make it to those **special Lenten services** – why you can't stay for Bible class – **why** you don't have time to read your Bible at home. The devil uses **those excuses** to keep us FROM SHARING in **Jesus' victory** over him.

"The time has come," Jesus preached. ***"Repent and believe the gospel."*** TO SHARE in **Jesus' victory** over the devil we need to hear the FACTS of that battle. But just knowing those facts WITH OUR HEADS is not sharing in the victory **ourselves**. We need to ***"repent and believe the gospel."***

Literally we are to "BE REPENTING." We don't repent ONCE and then that's good for the rest of our lives. Repentance is to be an EVERY DAY PART of our lives because every day **we sin** against God. **Repentance** is recognizing our sins for what they REALLY ARE – defying and **disobeying** our Creator. Sin is not just a MISTAKE or POOR CHOICE. It's rebellion - REJECTING God's authority and **control over** us. **Repentance** is not SHRUGGING OFF our sins as if God will **just have to** UNDERSTAND and ACCEPT them. No, God promises to punish sin – with hell. Repentance is dropping the excuses and making a FROM THE HEART confession, ***"If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?"*** Repentance is realizing God REALLY SHOULD say to you and me, "THE HELL with you!"

But instead of **"Go to hell!"** God tells us to "Go to CALVARY!" "Yes, repent," God says, "recognize the MESS and TROUBLE your sins have **gotten you into** but DON'T DESPAIR! Give up ON YOURSELF but don't give up on Me. Look to **My Son** Jesus as YOUR PERFECT Savior."

To believe is to TRUST - to RELY and DEPEND on. Believing in Jesus is TRUSTING that Jesus has taken care of everything for us. **Believing** in Jesus is PUTTING OUR CONFIDENCE not in ourselves but in the perfect life Jesus lived for us and His innocent death on the cross. **Believing** in Jesus is RELYING ON Jesus for forgiveness – peace with God – eternal life in heaven. Literally Jesus says, "BE BELIEVING." Like repenting we don't believe ONCE and then that's good FOR THE REST of our lives. EVERY DAY we are to trust in Jesus as our Savior. ***"Be faithful unto death,"*** Jesus says, ***"and I will give you the crown of life."***

Lent invites us TO SHARE **Jesus' victory** with others. If you have a neighbor or friend who DOESN'T GO to church – or you know somebody who has FALLEN AWAY from God – PRAY for them **by name** day after day. Talk to them about Jesus. Tell them about our services on the internet. Offer to bring them to church.

Think too of the **many people** who DON'T KNOW the real meaning of Lent and Easter. Look how many MAKE EASTER ALL ABOUT a **bunny bringing** them candy instead of SAVIOR RISEN from the dead – bringing them eternal life in heaven. As we see how God **made our salvation** HIS TOP PRIORITY – how Jesus even gave His life SO WE could live forever with Him in heaven – isn't Lent the time to REVIEW OUR PRIORITIES and RE-EVALUATE our offerings?

That will be a REAL BATTLE. The last thing the **devil wants** is WORD GETTING OUT that Jesus beat him. The devil has ALL KINDS OF EXCUSES for you to keep your mouth shut about Jesus. **He'll tell** you it won't do any good – people won't listen to you. The devil will play on our FEAR OF REJECTION or being **ridiculed**. He'll play on our **sinful** LAZINESS and SELFISHNESS. He has all KINDS OF REASONS why we can't possibly give more to **share Jesus** with others. The economy is **shaky** – we just CAN'T AFFORD to – we have to take care of OURSELVES FIRST. Sure, God has promised to ***"meet all our needs"*** but the devil will swear we JUST CAN'T TRUST God to keep that promise. The more you GIVE TO Jesus the less you have **for yourself**. The devil will battle us TOOTH AND NAIL to keep us from sharing Jesus with others.

I**t's Lent**. The days are **lengthening**. There is HOPE of winter giving way to spring. But REAL HOPE is not found in the CHANGING WEATHER but in God's UNCHANGING LOVE for us in Jesus. That love invites us to **make our Lenten journey** again this year. That love invites us to RELIVE the **battle** and SHARE in the **victory**. Amen.

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