

**+ Hebrews 4:14-16 + Victory Is Ours Over Satan's Temptation +
+ 1st Sunday in Lent + 22 February 2015 +**

Have you ever felt like giving up? At some point, all of us have felt that way. This winter has seemed like a losing battle especially with the past month being one of the coldest and snowiest months on record here in central New York. You finally get your driveway cleared of another layer of snow, but then a plow drops a new layer of snowy sludge at the end of your driveway. Makes you feel like giving up, doesn't it?

Maybe it's not the winter. Maybe it's something closer to home. Has raising your kids ever felt like a losing battle? Maybe it's something in one of your other callings. Does work or school ever feel like you're on the frustrating end of a losing battle? At some point, we've all felt like giving up. Life in general can even feel like a losing battle. Now you might wonder about that especially if your life seems to be going well, but do you realize how often we come under Satan's attack each and every day?

You and I are surrounded by temptations in this world. They can seem pretty overwhelming. The odds definitely are not in our favor as Satan marshals all of his tempting forces against you and me, including that traitorous sinful nature inside each of our hearts. He manipulates every kind of attack from every direction to find your weakness, to make you cave, to deceive you into giving up when you need not do so at all.

Sometimes those temptations seem pretty harmless. "Why not overindulge a little bit? Why not act on that urge? Why not do or get what you want for once? You're not hurting anybody and besides it'll make you feel good." The Deceiver's lies seem almost beneficial, when in reality, they devastate.

Often those temptations seem pretty attractive. "Look what I can give you. Look what you can take for yourself if you just try to get it. Oh, don't worry about the risk. God will protect you! Look at what or who can be yours if you just follow my plan instead of God's. Don't bother spending time in the Bible or in worship when you can earn a little more, have a little more fun, relax a little more, or even get yourself ahead in life. Just follow me."

The Enemy's attacks can be subtle or obvious, but no matter what they're deadly. Satan wants you to give up. He wants you to fall. He knows how to push your buttons. He knows where you are weak. He knows how to manipulate you and what's around you so you might give up. He wants to convince you that life really is a losing battle. Satan wants you to think that victory is nowhere in sight and the odds are overwhelming against you. You may be able to fend off an attack here or there, but even when you succeed, another attack comes along when your guard is down.

The truth is, on your own, you will eventually fall. You will eventually give in to Satan's temptation because you have a sinful nature that wants to betray you at the first sign of temptation. Then with a deadly weapon called guilt, the devil attacks you over and over again until finally you fall headlong into the fires of hell—the place of eternal defeat and condemnation.

Have you ever felt like giving up? We all do at some point. Yes, even Christians feel like giving up at times, but do you have to give up in the face of the overwhelming onslaught of Satan's attacks? Do you have to give in to the devil's constant barrage of temptation? The writer of Hebrews would tell you, "NO! You don't have to give up!!" Listen to what he writes to Christians who were ready to give up in the face of persecution, ***"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess."***

"We have a great high priest..." Did you catch that? Doesn't sound like much of a champion. You won't find any sports teams named the "High Priests." Doesn't sound like much of a warrior either! A high priest in Old Testament times wasn't some kind of Special Forces zealot who was inserted into a war zone and extracted upon completion of his mission.

No, a high priest had a more important role in ancient Israel. He was in charge of the worship life of the people, particularly the animal sacrifices offered to the Lord as burnt offerings for sin, for purification, or for thanksgiving. One day a year, though, the high priest had a privilege that no one else in the entire nation had, not even the king. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was allowed to pass through a thick, heavy curtain in the temple and approach God's throne—the cover or "mercy seat" of the Ark of the Covenant. That curtain symbolized how sin separates us from the holy God, and the only way the high priest could approach that throne was by sprinkling blood on that "mercy seat" to atone for the sins of the people that year. By his actions, the high priest would remind the people that God's forgiveness and reconciliation would come through the shedding of blood—the blood of the Savior to come.

Yet the writer makes it pretty clear that Jesus is no ordinary high priest. He's also our great champion. ***"[W]e have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God..."*** What is it that makes Jesus so ***"great"***? Unlike the high priest who merely passed through the chambers of the temple, when Jesus' work was done, he went ***"through the heavens..."*** to the throne of God where he lives and rules over all things. Unlike the high priest who had to sacrifice animals year in and year out symbolizing how God would forgive the people's sins, Jesus presented himself as the sacrifice once for all. His innocent blood shed on the cross reconciled you and me with the holy God and forgave all our sins. Before the gates of heaven were closed, but now ***"Jesus the Son of God"*** has opened those gates and parted that curtain by his holy, precious blood.

"Alright. I'm forgiven. I have access to God, but what about the overwhelming attacks of Satan? What about those times when I want to give up because I'm tired of dealing with the constant barrage of temptation after temptation?" Here the writer shows how Jesus was truly ***"great"***. ***"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."*** We have a Champion who brings us victory!

Jesus is the Son of God. You could easily think that he just doesn't get what you're going through, that he doesn't understand the attacks and temptations that you have to endure day in and day out. After all, he's God and you're a sinful human being. As true God, he doesn't have any weaknesses no matter how hard Satan tried to get him to give in. Yet the writer makes it very clear that ***"we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses..."*** You have a ***"great high priest"*** who has been where you are, who has been tempted as you have. ***"We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet, was without sin."***

Think about that for a moment. Jesus was ***"tempted in every way, just as we are—yet, was without sin."*** Do you know what that means? It means that because of who Jesus is and what he had come to do, he faced an awful onslaught of temptation never before seen in human history and never to be seen again. As we heard in the Gospel lesson, Satan used every weapon in his arsenal and every demon in his armed forces to break our High Priest, to make him give up or cave in, especially since Jesus was a true human being. Yet as true God, Jesus stood firm ***"without sin."***

By being ***"without sin"*** Jesus proved that he is our sinless Savior without a sinful nature that seeks after temptation or betrays when Satan attacks. Instead Jesus could rightfully tell his disciples on the night he was betrayed, ***"The prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me."*** (John 14:30)

Yet in all that Jesus knows what you and I have to endure on a daily basis. Even though Jesus remained sinless in the face of Satan's constant barrage of temptation, Jesus still knows what it's all about. He knows how you're tempted to put yourself and what or who you want first. He knows how you're tempted by the glittery things of this world that pass away or how you're tempted to follow Satan's deadly path rather than God's way to life eternal. Jesus knows because he's been there, but he didn't give up or give in because he knew that you would. Only Jesus could destroy Satan's power for your sake and reconcile you and me with the holy God.

Now your ***"great high priest"*** truly is your Champion. Your ***"great high priest"*** gives you victory over Satan when temptation comes attacking. When you are faced with temptation, when Satan tries to push your buttons or take advantage of your weaknesses, you can go to the One who will help you ***"hold firmly to the faith we profess."*** Rather than cower in terror before the holy God or foolishly think you can do it on your own, Jesus encourages us to ***"approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*** We have no need to fear God or Satan's attacks because of Jesus!

In your ***"time of need"***, run to Jesus for ***"mercy"***—that completely undeserved love of God that comes to your rescue when you are overwhelmed with temptation and your own weakness. In your ***"time of need"***, run to Jesus for ***"grace"***—that completely undeserved love of God that forgives and pardons your sins. There at that ***"throne of grace"***, we can boldly confess our sins and receive Christ's forgiveness. We can pour out our sorrows and receive Christ's comfort. We can lay down our weaknesses and receive Christ's strength. We can present our losing battles and receive Christ's eternal victory over Satan's temptation. We can be confident that no matter what temptation or attack Satan throws at us, victory is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.