

The Valiant One Fights for Us.

Text: Psalm 91:15, 16, 1

Suggested Hymns:

67, 181, 341, 839, 163

1) He Makes Our Battle His Very Own

2) He Wins the Battle for Us

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is based on the Introit for today, Psalm 91:15, 16, & 1, ¹⁵ *He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.* ¹⁶ *With long life I will satisfy him, And show him My salvation.*”

... He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Latin word for this Sunday is called *Invocavit*. It means “I call.” This is where we get the word *Invocation* from. The beginning of our Worship Service every Sunday begins with the *Invocation*.

The ferocious temptations confronting our Lord are recorded in the Gospel for today.¹

If we have not lulled ourselves into slumber, we discover that His temptations are ours. When we are tempted we are to call on the name of the Lord.

Even though Jesus was tempted for us, it is not yet the most important item. What is even more important is that He wins! He wins, not only for Himself, but chiefly for us. His victory is ours. What is true of Him is true of us because He is for us. What is said of Him is said of us because He is for us.

However, the victory which has already been completed by Jesus Christ still continues in us as conflict. We share His victory, and therefore, for the

meanwhile, we share the struggle. The struggle itself is testimony that the victory is being worked.

Our very life is grounded in the fact that Jesus who valiantly fought the conflict won it; and He even now fights for us as we are still engaged in the struggle.

Our theme is *The Valiant One Fights for Us*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Valiant One Fights for Us He Makes Our Battle His Very Own

According to the account in Matthew chapter 3, which immediately precedes today's Gospel, the Son of God has just been baptised. By His Baptism and the accompanying supernatural manifestations Jesus had been formally and publicly inaugurated into His ministry as the Messiah, and consequently He is immediately led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. God's time has come. It is full.²

In our Epistle we heard, "*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*"³ Now the grace of God pours forth in full measure for sinners. Man, who by his sin had received the verdict of death and had been expelled from the Garden of Eden, is now being pursued and found by God's own Son.

Jesus Christ is sent from the Father. He is born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who are under the Law. He who heard His Father say at the Baptism, "*You are My beloved Son,*" is now committed to the way of the cross, to give us His life under the curse.

This then is His conflict: to trust God His Father as He walks the way of the cross. And set against Him in battle is every human desire to save life. Satan and the world prod Jesus to choose His own course. He is commissioned to give His life, bearing the Law's death sentence against sinners. Set in array against Him was every urging of Satan and the world to save His life.

To Prove You Have God's Favour

In the first temptation look how our Saviour identifies Himself with us: He is hungry. During the forty days He has been tempted. He ate nothing.⁴ Is this

a fitting way of life for God's Son? He is hungry. Is this a fitting condition for One about whom God said, "*You are My beloved Son?*"

He knows human hunger and human anxiety about food. But He also knows the deeper temptation: is this the way of life for one whom God loves? Are these things, hunger and anxiety, marks of Heaven's favour? Perhaps it is not enough to believe God's Word? Perhaps you must demonstrate that you have God's favour? To prove it! Turn the stones into bread. Use the power to save Your own life!

Here Jesus suffers the tug on human beings to prove God's favour upon their lives, and thus to preserve their lives by the satisfaction of the creature needs. He is suffering and bearing our fundamental conflict. Valiantly He fights for us.

It is interesting to note the contrast between the temptation of Adam in the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Christ in the desert. In both cases Satan used something to eat in his efforts to awaken distrust in God. He succeeded in Eden, a land of plenty, where there was no unsatisfied hunger.

But he failed in the barren wilderness when Jesus was extremely hungry. The temptations and sufferings that Jesus endured throughout His earthly life were greatly magnified versions of the trials we endure. Yet He never faltered, though we keep on falling into sin. He then willingly suffered the punishment we deserved for all our failures, and He gave us the credit and the blessings for all His successes. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. With His stripes we are healed. He died so that we may live.

Be Successful!

In the third temptation our Lord is confronted with that whole struggle in human life that hinges on the word "success." He is God's Son; God has said so. He is King; there is no doubt about His destiny. Well, what good is God's Son without worship, and the King without a kingdom? Would not failure be the greatest shame of all and a disgrace for the name of His Father?

What is the value of learning obedience through suffering if this leads to death?⁵ What can come of the kingdom when the King is put to death? By men's standards the way of the cross is highly unsuccessful. And yet it is God's way. So the conflict rages.

In the second temptation Satan is quick to urge Jesus to make the leap to success, to capitalise on the religious aspirations of the people, and to prove the divine favour with a Bible verse. In this manner the ends which God seeks will be accomplished. There is no need to doubt! But the means, that is, the cross, will be skirted. Here our Lord valiantly fights our conflict.

Be Powerful!

Like the third temptation the most daring of all is the temptation to fall in love with power. Satan makes an open bid for Jesus to worship raw power — power derived from the denial of God and based upon a lie. This is a daring and demonic bid, a proposal from Satan which contains a thinly veiled threat. Hidden just beneath the surface is Satan's threat: If you do not serve me, the powers of this world will be unleashed against you. Our Lord resists valiantly, even to the death.

Remember: This Is Our Battle, for He Fights for Us

The battle we see in today's Gospel is ours because it is His battle for us. Like Christ, the church is under pressure from within and without to be the church different from God's own creation.

It is so risky to trust God's Word about His favour. It appears to be much more secure nestled in the bread of this life, to prove its favour under God by statistics, programs, and successes. The church is led to feel that if she avoids the hungers and anxieties of sinners, she will appear strong and healthy to the world. And the advantage of such an appearance of strength is that it avoids the cross.

The foolishness of trusting God, the shame of bearing patiently the burdens, disgraces, sorrows, and pains of the world, the threat of losing life by the threats of others — these make the cross offensive. It is much more glorious and glamorous to have power by a leap of glory.

This is true especially when one can find a Bible verse to prove God's favour upon that bold, religious way that skirts the cross. Prominence is better than humility; prestige is better than service; getting is better than giving; rights and proof are better than charity and love. This is how the pressures run.

And the threat is real. If we become too identified with sinners in their needs, our decency is questioned. If we become too identified with people in their misery, our status may be threatened and our programs wrecked.

Thus we are pressured to conform to the times, to roll with the tide of men's religious aspirations, to seek our point of security in the satisfactions of our own needs, to seize our hour of influence, our status of success in ways that avoid the cross.

If this means shaving down the Law to avoid men's displeasure, skirting the use of the sacraments to curry popular favour, or qualifying the Gospel with conditional phrases to satisfy a religious morality, we shrug our shoulders and justify ourselves with some mumbo-jumbo about getting along in the world in order to do more good for God's kingdom.

These are real conflicts. They cannot be avoided. And the Son of God makes these our conflicts His very own. He Himself fights them.

2. Jesus Christ Wins the Battle for Us

The really glad thing that we have to proclaim to each other today is that Jesus Christ not only fights the conflicts that are ours, but He wins the battle. Jesus is involved in no "make-believe" manhood. His is no "play-like" war. His is the life-and-death conflict. Life itself and death itself are involved from beginning to end.

God's Verdicts Fulfilled

Our Lord Jesus is God's own grace and truth⁶ come to us fully in the flesh. He opens God's heart to us so that in Him we see God's will toward us people. God's will to deliver us, to save sinners, by laying our iniquity on His Son is fully disclosed in the terrible and wonderful act of the cross. Here is the terror of God's judgement putting to death all sinners under the condemnation of His Law. Here is the full death verdict against us all.

But far greater, in this act of His Son on the cross, God Himself overcomes sin and death and wrath. For in His Son God gives to us a tightness with Himself that spells life forever. God raised up His Son from the dead in order to bring us a new life in which righteousness dwells.

God's final verdict on us in the death of His Son is that we live. Here, in the cross, is the love of God, full and splendidly gracious: the faithful love of God that makes a new relationship of peace between men and Himself; the unflinching love of God that goes out to the scattered and orphaned of the world to restore them to Himself as beloved sons; the sacrificing love of God that He gives Himself to bear away our sins, and to restore us to eternal life with Himself. This is the great and final verdict of the cross: *"You are My beloved sons, with whom I am well pleased."*

To Believe This Is the Conflict

Who can believe this work of God? Is not this the very heart of the conflict? Who can stake his whole life on this verdict of God and, letting go of his life day by day, live that God may use him to serve his neighbour?

And when our life is used in this way, thus taken away from us as we live in our family, work, and community, is it not precisely then that we are tempted to "prove" that we possess God's favour? We call upon ourselves: our power, our insurance and assurance, our religion and decency, even our sin and lust, anything that will satisfy our relentless drive to save ourselves. And if we cannot deliver ourselves absolutely, we will at least hold to as much of our lives as we can.

Even This Conflict Is Won by Him

Even this battle, to live by faith, the very core of the battle, the Lord, our Valiant One, wins for us. He trusts God. Even when the religious people around Him accuse Him of blasphemy, of being in league with the devil, of being "beside" Himself, even then He trusts God. In the bitterest hour of death itself He trusts God and calls upon God. *"My God, My God,"* He says in His forsakenness.

The crowds said, *"He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God."*⁷ *"Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe."*⁸ But He trusted God and stayed — for us. He did not have to save His own life because He trusted God, the faithful Creator. He spent His life saving us. He stayed on the cross because He trusted God. To trust God means to live in love; to trust God means He gives up His life for His neighbours.

Jesus Christ Makes the Words of Our Text True for Us

Now we can see that the words of today's Introit, which we prayed in today's worship, are literally true and have been fulfilled: "*He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.* ¹⁶ *With long life I will satisfy him, And show him My salvation.*"

Because of God's work for us in Jesus Christ, these words are true for you and about you. This is the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ, won for us. This is the victory He still wins for us who trust Him, for this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.

God Calls Us to Share This Victory

Now notice how this conquering God entices us to trust Him and thus to share in Christ's victory: "*He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*"

God calls us to the place of life, a place to live. It is God's secret place, the place where He hides His church. The power of life is in this place, for it is the place of His redeeming favour in Jesus Christ. The world does not know this power, and neither does the church know it by her own power.

It is God's secret place, that is, the place which is revealed in the cross of His Son, revealed to faith. Here God feeds His church on food which He Himself has prepared. This is the mystery, the secret, of God's love: He makes us into a new creation and thus gives the very life of His Son to those who trust Him as Lord and Deliverer. The old is put to death with Christ and buried with Him. A new relationship is created, a new fellowship is brought forth and raised from the dead to live with Christ.

The Shadow of Deliverance

Hence the text calls this place the "*shadow of the Almighty.*" All around the "shaded" area is the piercing scrutiny of God's judgement against sin, the burning heat of God's wrath.

To step out from under the "shadow" of God's delivering favour is to fall again under wrath. This secret place is the existence by faith in which mercy conquers wrath. Here, precisely here, is where we live by faith. And the life we live is the eternal life, God's very own given to us.

Jesus Christ alone is that Man who trusted God to the full. God did hear Him and raise Him from the dead. *“He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; ... I will deliver him and honor him.”* And Jesus Christ is God’s gift to you. Therefore God’s words to you are truly for you, to be trusted by you. Thus you are to share Christ’s victory.

The Presence of Christ’s Cross in Our Lives

God plants this cross in us today. That is to say, God brings this Gospel of His forgiveness and favour to us through Jesus Christ in words we can understand and use. We hear these words; we sing them to each other so that the life we live might indeed be that life of Christ’s death and resurrection.

We are called to eat and drink that Gospel in Holy Communion. All the enemies which seek to lead us to trust ourselves as sufficient of ourselves, all the lures which draw us to lead our lives to our own ends, these all are put into His death.

By the forgiveness of sins God Himself raises us up with Jesus to live a new life, the existence of trusting God our Father because of what He has done through His Son. Thus through these words of the Gospel God makes us sharers of His work in Christ.

Just as surely as the war constantly goes on within us and among us, even so more surely does Christ’s valiant victory go on. He leads us to trust Him and therefore to abandon ourselves to Him in carefree thankfulness.

He leads us to lay aside the self-worship of worry so that we can give up our lives in our work as we call upon Him. He guides us to love our neighbour so that we are free to serve our neighbour at our own expense because God has shown us His salvation.

He leads us into contentment so that the words of Psalm 23 can be prayed by faith: *“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.”* The victory is that we trust Him; we don’t have to turn these words into a lie by our ceaseless restlessness to desire what we don’t have. All the longings of our desires are met in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection for us: *“¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him.”*

To live in the “*secret place of the Most High*” and “*under the shadow of the Almighty*” is to live right where the Gospel of Jesus Christ lives in the mouth, eyes, and ears and hearts of His people.

It is to live by faith where we eat and drink this Gospel in the sure hope of that Day when He shall manifest Himself and the victory will be disclosed. With this Gospel, let us bestow upon each other and the world, God’s strength and wisdom, His riches and honour, and the victory of eternal life itself. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 4:1-11

² Gal. 4:4

³ 2 Corinthians 6:2

⁴ Luke 4:2

⁵ Heb. 5:8

⁶ John 1:14

⁷ Luke 23:35

⁸ Mark 15:32