

We are in this penitential season of Lent and we are called to reflect upon our sins, but what a joy it is to begin that season with A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, remembering that even though we are sinners, Christ guards and protects us. Now, one thing we have to do though, whenever we sing A Mighty Fortress, is do not stop at the end of verse one. There's a lot of times where you hear A Mighty Fortress and they end at verse one. And we think, "He's got the might of the world, he's the" ... Let's see. "On earth, there is no equal." And we think, "Well, that's God, right?"

No. What he's talking about is Satan here. On earth, Satan has no equal. And he doesn't. That's why when he tempts Jesus, he has the authority to do it. When he says, "Look, if you bow down to me, I promise you, I will give you all the kingdoms of this world," he wasn't lying there. He was going to give him all the kingdoms for a season. Christ would have ruled and there would have been peace in the land and the entire world for that lifetime. But after that, it would have gone back to the same old, same old: sin and evil and death.

And so yes, Satan has authority in this world, but only in this world and only so far as God allows. And Jesus did not contradict Satan in saying that he could and he did have authority. But what he did say is, "Your authority is pointless compared to the word of God," because Satan was trying to do to Jesus what he did to Eve.

Now, I'm going to do something very dangerous here. I'm going to say something different than what Martin Luther said. So just bear with me for a second. I'm having a moment here. Luther once said that Satan was a master of a thousand tricks. But as I look at it, I think that Satan is only the master of one trick, but he does it very well and in multiple ways. The trick that Satan has, the only trick that Satan has is the very one that he spoke to Eve about: "Did God really say?" That's his trick. When we want to do something bad, when we want to tell a lie because it'll save our skin or whatever, what Satan is really whispering in the background is, "Did God really say you can't protect yourself by sinning, or is it okay in this instant?"

That's in essence what's going through our mind, because ultimately, ultimately everything, every sin that we commit, every act that we do is a result of rebellion against God, period, end of story. It is an offense against commandment number one: "You should have no other gods but me." So whenever we want to steal something because we want it, we're basically saying, "God, I know what your rules says. However, I need it this time." And we're putting ourselves in the place of God. Or, "God, I really, really, really like or covet X, Y, and Z," whatever it might be. "And that's okay because I'm just coveting. I'm not actually acting upon it." Well, God says, "Don't covet."

What is coveting?" It's saying, "God, I don't trust you to take care of me. I don't think you've given me enough. I don't think you've given me the right stuff. I really need that to truly be happy." And in essence, we're saying, "God, you are not really God, or you made a mistake." Which we're in good company when we say that, because let's face it, when God came to Adam and Eve ... Well, before we get there, let's go back to Satan. Satan is talking through the serpent to Eve. Now, Eve doesn't see any problem with the serpent talking. That seems a little weird to you and me. However, let's think about the timeframe that we're talking about. Adam and Eve, newly created, a couple of days old. They're in this wonderful garden where God has given them these marvelous things, and now a serpent comes and talks to them. "Oh, this is wonderful. God gave us another creature that can talk. How cool is that?"

I think that's kind of the concept, because quite frankly, they weren't in the Garden of Eden that long. Let's be honest, they were not in the Garden of Eden that long. God said, "Go forth and prosper and multiply, and bear children." They were naked in the garden. Bearing children was not going to be problematic. And there's no children by the time they rebel against God and eat the fruit. So it happened really fast.

So they're new to the garden. A serpent is talking to them, going, "Oh, cool. Serpent talks." The serpent says, "Did God really say?" And Eve, Eve seems to be doing the right thing. She does. "No, no. God said we can eat all that fruit, but we can't eat of that fruit, nor can we touch it unless we die."

Now, it makes logical sense; if you don't touch the thing, you're not going to eat the thing. That makes reasonable sense, but is that what God said? No, she added words to God. They were meant for good, but she still was not listening only to God. She was adding her own ideas into God's word. And whenever we add our own ideas into the word of God, we're in essence saying, "Did God really say?" Even if it's for good or even if it sounds for good, we have changed the word of God. And when we change the word of God, it leads to rebellion. Always. Always. So Satan deceives Eve. And Adam, of course, he's just standing there watching the whole thing going on and saying, "Now, I wonder what's going to happen next." He failed in his responsibility because God told him don't eat and he's watching Eve pick the fruit and eat and he's going, "Huh," rather than going to God and saying, "You know what, Eve, before we eat the fruit, let's go check with God first." No, he didn't do that. He just let it happen.

So when God comes to confront mankind, he goes to Adam first, say, "Adam, what were you doing? What was going on? I told you, and you were supposed to tell Eve and you just let it happen. What was going on?" And Adam, being a good standup man, he says, "The woman that you gave me." He's blaming God: "God, if

you hadn't given me this woman, everything would have been right." Now, that's dangerous in a marriage. Trust me. That is very dangerous in a marriage if you start talking like that.

But the first thing that we did once we rebelled against God was to blame God for doing it wrong. Now, let's just imagine; we have fallen short of the glory of God. Death came into the world because of sin. But it's not just that we commit sin. It's not that just that Adam and Eve committed sin. It was that they became sinners, and we are sinners. Our very nature has been corrupted by the rebellion against God. So hypothetically, if you could control your behavior and follow the word of God completely, just hypothetically ... I mean, it's a stretch, but hypothetically, let's say you could act right; that wouldn't be enough.

So let's hypothetically say you can control your tongue, which is an even greater stretch. Because I mean, think about that. When you get hurt and you feel like you need to say a few things, for whatever reason it helps, you're saying, "God, I need to swear in this moment because it hurts. It's okay." We make caveats to the word of God. But let's just say hypothetically again, you can control your words, your tongue. Of course, scripture tells us it's pretty much impossible, but let's say you can control your actions. You can control your words. Now you've got your thoughts to deal with. Now, if I tell you, "Do not think about bananas," what's the first thing you think of?

Bananas.

Bananas. When we tell you not to think about something, you're going to think about it. So just telling us, "Don't think about sin," is not enough. We can't do it. But hypothetically, let's say we can all say, "Okay, I'm not going to think about sin. I'm only going to think about holy things." Hypothetically, we've been able to control our actions. We've been able to control our words. We've even been able to control our thoughts. It's still not enough, because we are by nature sinful, sinners. It is in our DNA, our spiritual DNA.

And even if we could act right, we still cannot change who we are. We have inherited sin as we have inherited our hair color, our eye color, our skin color, and everything else. We've inherited sin also. And there is absolutely nothing we can do about it. And yet, scripture tells us that through one man, all were made righteous. That one man, of course, being Jesus Christ, but he was true man and true God. And so he had to be man so that he could live the righteousness for us, for us, and he could die in our place, because mankind had to suffer the death as the guilt of sin.

But God, in his graciousness, provided a hope and a promise. From the very beginning, he spoke to Adam and Eve. He gave them all the curses. You're going

to have pain and childbirth. You're going to toil all your days, and it's going to be the sweat of your brow. There's going to be enmity between husband and wife and man and women and between the animals and humans and between us and God. There's going to be enmity and strife. But someday he will crush the head of the serpent. Someday, Satan will be defeated.

And it is foreshadowed in the very last sentence of the Old Testament reading: "And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin and clothed them." As I asked in the Bible study class, where did he get the skins from? Where did those skins come from? God sacrificed an animal, shed the blood of an animal to cover, literally cover the guilt and the sin of Adam and Eve, foreshadowing the last sacrifice that God himself would make, of his son. And he doesn't cover our physical nakedness. He covers our spiritual nakedness with his blood. And he gives us peace, forgiveness, and righteousness. Through that one man, we are saved because not only did he speak the word of God, truly, he is the word of God. And only the word of God can fulfill what God demands.

So whenever Satan comes to us and says, "Did God really say," go to the word of God. Go to the scriptures. He has promised that you are his children. The most vicious question that Satan has, "Did God really say that you're saved? Did God really say that you're forgiven? I mean, come on. You keep repeating the same sin over and over and over again. Are you really saved? Did God really promise?" And for that, you go to his word again.

This baptism now saves you. You are baptized. You are a child of God. You have the name of Jesus upon you. You have the word of God dwelling with you richly. That is his promise. That is your certainty. And that is your hope. And that is the only way. That is the only way that you can be confident of your salvation, because what God really did say, "All who believe and are baptized will be saved." Period. End of story. We are his beloved children.

And in this penitential season, as we dwell upon how far we have fallen away from being his good children, let us always hold fast to the promises that we are restored and redeemed and strengthened and nurtured in our baptism, in our reception of his body and blood, in our confession and absolution, and in the word of God. Let it dwell in you richly. May his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.