

Matthew 4:1-11

Is there any debate about who are the champions? In fact, the “sporting world” is calling the New England Patriots a dynasty. Super Bowl champions in three of the last four years. I wonder how the game would have turned out, however, if last Sunday, it would have been played with the people of Boston against the people of Philadelphia? All the people of both cities; every man, woman, and child gathering together against each other. One city against another, competing. That would have been quite a game. Probably more of a brawl than a game. Where could you find an arena big enough? Think of all the refs you would need. You’d likely need the police, even the National Guard.

So instead of a competition between all the people, each city had a champion fight for them. New England selected a team of men. They called them the Patriots. Philadelphia selected a team of men. They called them the Eagles. And these two teams competed. But it was understood that the city whose team won was the victor. And so last week, while the streets of Philadelphia were quiet, Boston was having a parade. Their champion, the men they selected to compete in their place, were cheered by all the people of the city.

That’s what a champion is—one who fights for another. Yes, a champion can also mean “a valiant fighter,” and “one who wins a competition.” And in the case of the Patriots, all three definitions apply.

You remember Goliath. He was a champion. 1 Samuel says he was the Philistine’s champion. He fought for the Philistines. He was their team. When he won, they won. And he always won. Ten feet tall of might and muscle. The Philistines had it made. He was their man, their warrior. No one could defeat him. And so, when the Philistines came against God’s people, the Israelites knew the game was over. “Send out your champion against ours,” came the cry. “Pick anyone you want. If he defeats Goliath, you win. But if Goliath wins, you are defeated.”

You know what happened. Young David is selected as Israel’s champion. He will fight for God’s people. The two men will compete, and the winner takes all. One battle to decide everything. And David wins. The Philistines are defeated, because their champion lost the battle.

That’s how we need to look at our Gospel in Matthew 4. Two champions are fighting. Satan against Jesus. The champion of hell verses our Champion, the One who fights for God’s people. Not David resurrected, but David’s Son, the Promised Seed; He whom God selected to fight for us.

Can’t we fight our own battles? No. We tried once and we failed. And our man was in perfect form. He was rested. He was strong. He was even without sin. In the Garden, Adam championed the entire human race, but he lost. He had no chance, he was completely outmatched. The devil was much too clever, too strong.

And because Adam lost, we all lost. Because of Adam’s sin, death came to all men. But God would not give us up. He demanded a “rematch.” 4,000 years later it happens. And the devil is ready for it. Like Goliath, he’s strong. He’s experienced. He’s ready to fight.

And our Champion? He's weak. He's hungry. He hasn't eaten in 40 days. He's not experienced. He's just starting His ministry.

Satan attacks. "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." He knows how to fight. He's not hell's champion for nothing. He defeated our first parents easily with this same temptation. "Why not eat the fruit on this tree?" They were not in a desert. There was plenty of food around for them to eat. They were not starving. And yet, Adam and Eve fell. "Go ahead and eat" the devil said. And they did.

And so to Jesus he says, "Go ahead and eat." And He was starving. There was no food for His body anywhere around Him. But our Champion did not fall. "It is written," He said, "man does not live on bread alone but on every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Jesus did not come to our world to dine on food. He came to be the Food that we dine on. He came, not to be served, but to serve.

The devil attacks again. "Throw yourself down from here, for God said He will not let you strike your foot against a stone." That, too, is what he said in the Garden. "Go ahead and eat of the fruit, for when you eat of it you will not die." They did not resist and they fell into sin and death. And so to Jesus he says, "you will not die, throw yourself down." But our Champion did not fall for Satan's lie. "It is written," He said, "do not put God to the test."

Satan tries again. Showing Him all the glory of the world, he says, "All this I will give you if you fall down and worship me." This lie had also worked well with our first parents. "When you eat of the fruit, you will be like God." They ate and they fell.

And so to Jesus he says, "If you worship me, you will live as a god. All the glory of the earth will be yours." But our Champion would not give in. "It is written," He said, "worship the Lord God and serve Him only."

And so the devil left Him. Goliath had fallen once again. David's Son and David's Lord sunk the "stone" of God's Word into Satan's head, and he fell. And as David then ran to the giant and with his own sword, cut off his head, killing him, so Jesus would run to Calvary's hill and using the devil's own sword, death itself, He would cut off Satan's head. For as Jesus hung there, dying, the head of the Serpent was crushed.

Jesus is your Champion. In life and in death, He is your Champion. He fought for you and He died for you. During the time of Napoleon a young father was drafted into the French army. Because of the young age of this man's children, a friend volunteered to go in his place. The substitution was made and sometime later the replacement was killed in battle. Through a clerical error, the young father was drafted a second time. "You can't take me," he told the surprised officers. "I'm dead. I died on the battlefield." The officers argued that they could see him standing right in front of them, but he insisted that they check the lists of the deceased to find confirmation of his death. Sure enough, the man's name appeared there, with the name of his substitute written beside it.

Not satisfied with this explanation, the officer contested the case until finally it went to the emperor himself. After examining the evidence, Napoleon said, "Through a substitute, this

man has not only fought, but has died in his country's service. No one can die more than once. The law has no claim on him."

Jesus fought for you and He died for you. Satan is defeated, not by your strength—Jesus as your Champion did battle for you and won. And so, you won. His victorious life and death, and life again is yours.

How is Satan tempting you? To hold a grudge against your neighbor? To argue with your spouse? To live in sexual sin? To doubt that God could ever forgive you? Can you overcome his temptations? No. We're not even as strong as Adam, and he easily fell.

But do not fear. Jesus, not Adam, is your Champion, and He already won. In the desert, at the cross, He defeated Satan for you. He drained the poison from his fangs. His head has been cut off.

In Christ you have won. He whom God selected to be your Champion will never leave you nor forsake you. He who has forgiven you empowers you to forgive others. He who made you His Bride in Holy Baptism gives healing to your marriage. He who kept Himself free from sin enables you to resist sexual temptation. He who took away your sin gives you faith to believe that God sees you as His holy child.

Listen to Luther's hymn, the first two verses. I'm going to read it from the Lutheran Worship hymnal.

A mighty fortress is our God, A sword and shield victorious;
He breaks the cruel oppressors rod and wins salvation glorious.
The old satanic foe has sworn to work us woe,
With craft and dreadful might, he arms himself to fight.
On earth he has no equal.

No strength of ours can match his might. We would be lost, rejected.
But now a Champion comes to fight, whom God Himself elected.
You ask who this may be? The Lord of Hosts is He,
Christ Jesus, Mighty Lord, God's only Son, adored.
He holds the field victorious. Amen.