

It was a custom known as *“battle by champion.”* Two opposing armies would send out their best warrior to fight each other – like David and Goliath in our first reading.

We have a ringside seat for today’s *“battle by champion.”* We have the ultimate battle of Good vs. Evil. In one corner the demons have their champion: Satan, the enemy of both God and humans. If he can derail the ministry of Jesus Christ, Jesus would be the loser and all humans would be lost forever in hell. **Go Big or Go Home!**

In the other corner is humanity’s only hope ... Jesus Christ. He is both God and human. If he can derail Satan’s diabolical plan, Jesus would be the winner and all humans, who believe, would be saved forever in heaven. **Go Big or Go Home!**

How did we get here? I thought God made everything perfect in six 24-hour days. Things are far from perfect now, and back at Jesus’ time too.

During creation’s week God the Father Almighty, was the maker of all that is seen and unseen, as we confess in the Nicene Creed. Angels would have been part of that unseen group. They were sinless. They had a free will. They were to serve God and people ... the crown of God’s creation. Some of those angels exercised their free will and rebelled against God. The penalty? Permanent expulsion from heaven. The fallen angels and their leader, Satan, were sentenced to a place of their own ... hell.

Since misery always loves company, Satan took a **Go Big or Go Home** approach to having God’s perfect people – Adam and Eve join him.

Step 1: The Big Wedge. In the Garden of Eden, Satan asked: *“Did God really say that you shouldn’t eat from the tree in the middle of the garden?”* Of course, he did. His goal is to have them doubt their Creator’s care for them, driving a wedge between them and God.

Step 2: The Big Lie. In the Garden, first Satan asked: *“Did God really say you’re going to die if you eat fruit from the tree?”* Yes, God did say that. That’s not a lie. And then he told them: *“You’re not going to die.”* Yes, they would die. That’s the lie.

Step 3: The Big Finish. In the Garden, Satan asked: *“Whose life is it, yours or God’s? Who’s in charge here?”* Satan applies pressure, pushing them to defiance. It worked. Adam and Eve deliberately disobeyed God and they crashed and burned.

Let’s move from the Garden to the desert, where Satan targets God’s Son. Jesus hadn’t even dried off from his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River when the devil came out swinging. His tactics with Jesus? Same as Adam and Eve. If it’s not broke, don’t fix it.

Step 1: The Big Wedge. In the desert, Satan says: **“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”** Of course he is and of course he could. Satan’s goal is to have him doubt his Father’s care for him, driving a wedge between him and his Father.

Step 2: The Big Lie. On a high place, Satan says: **“I will give you all their authority and splendor of the kingdoms of the world; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.”** Not one, but two lies! It’s not Satan’s. It’s not Satan’s to give either.

Step 3: The Big Finish: At the top of the temple, Satan says: **“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”** Satan applies all kinds of pressure, even using Scripture. You’ve got your Father’s promise that he’ll take care of you. He’s pushing him for an act of defiance.

Go Big or Go Home! The Big Wedge! The Big Lie! The Big Finish! He used them on Adam and Eve.

He used them on Jesus. He's used them on you and me, and he'll continue to use them on us.

In your life as a Christian, you've had plenty of personal bouts with Satan's temptation. Have you encountered **The Big Wedge**? Have you doubted God's care, or questioned his goodness by asking

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- *Why don't I have better opportunities for things like other people? God isn't being fair to me.*
- *Why all the sickness and sadness in my family? God must be angry with me.*
- *How will we ever get through the next problem? My heart hurts from worrying so much. God must not care.*

Yes, we have! **The Big Wedge** works!

What about **The Big Lie**? Satan hasn't directly said to you: *"Follow me and I'll give you all the authority and splendor in the world."* But in subtle ways you'll hear people say they want to make lots of money and have lots of nice things. The things money can buy – that's not the problem. It's what we do with them that can consume us and rob God of the respect and the response due him when it comes to using them to serve him and others.

Maybe his attack comes from another direction. We comment on how busy we are and don't have enough time. Are the days shorter? Have we been the wise with our daily allotment of 24-hours? Priorities push some things in, while squeezing other things out.

Again, we'd have to confess: "Yes, **The Big Lie** works!"

And what about **The Big Finish**? Have you said to yourself lately: *"I know this isn't good for me." "I shouldn't have said that." "I should have done something else."*

Is our only response to, *"Why did you do that?"* an embarrassed, *"I don't know?"* Whether it was weakness or defiance, we decided: *"I'm going to do it anyway. Never mind what God says."*

The Big Finish works, too!

Before we get dejected, we need to review Jesus' second temptation. It's at a high vantage point. The whole OT hangs on this. It's here that Satan invitingly tempts Jesus: *"Take the easy way, not the road of suffering, death and crucifixion."*

Thank You Jesus! You didn't! Otherwise, there would have been no antidote for our defiant behavior. Otherwise, our separation from God would be permanent, as in hell. Thank You Jesus! You didn't give in. We've been restored to God in the only way possible, by your painful yet perfect path in life, and your death on the cross.

Fellow believers, here are two insights as we fight our daily battles.

One Jesus had a weapon to resist Satan's temptation – the Bible – and he knew how to use it. We have in our homes Satan's kryptonite. Do we need to mention that to use this powerful weapon against temptations we need to learn it? If we've memorized passages, we can take Satan's kryptonite with us wherever we go.

Two something you may not have noticed. Jesus wasn't alone. Luke says: **Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.** We're not alone. The Spirit leads us not only through Word and Sacrament. But he also makes sure we're not alone by giving us Spirit-filled spouses, parents and children, family and friends, teachers and pastors. These are the people God places in our lives to cheer us on from the side lines, or even climb into the ring with us so we can **Go Big and Go Home** to heaven!