

Matthew 4:1-11

FULLY COVERED

The legendary ancient Greek warrior, Achilles, was said to have been almost invincible. In Homer's classic story about the siege of the city of Troy, *The Iliad*, Achilles starred as the greatest warrior among the combined Greek forces which had come together to fight to take the beautiful Helen back to her husband. But, Achilles had one weakness. The legend is that when he was a baby, Achilles' mother was told to immerse him in the River Styx to give him invincibility. However, when she did so, she held him by his heel, and that heel never went under the water. The legend is that Achilles was killed by an arrow shot to his vulnerable heel, the one weak part of his body. This even gives us the name of one of our body parts, our Achilles tendon, and the term 'Achilles heel' is still used today to refer to something about a person or in their life in which they are particularly vulnerable, their weak spot.

In Australia we have a story similar to Achilles in Ned Kelly. Ned is probably best known as the bushranger who wore armour, but he and his gang only wore armour once, and that was at their last stand at Glenrowan, when Ned was captured and the rest of the gang killed in a shoot out with the police. With the gang holed up in a hotel, during the night Ned had managed to get out and sneak through the police surrounding them. In the early morning light, the police saw a strange figure coming from behind them. As it called out and started shooting at them, they realised who it was. With their bullets ricocheting off the armour on Ned's head and chest, they discovered that his arms and legs were uncovered. When the order was given to shoot at his arms and legs, the infamous bushranger was quickly brought down and captured.

We are most vulnerable at our weakest points. A clever enemy will find and exploit those points. Satan is a very clever enemy.

This first Sunday in Lent always begins with the account of the temptation of Jesus. In the Gospels this comes, importantly, right after Jesus' baptism. In His baptism Jesus is prepared for His ministry by hearing the voice of affirmation from the Father, 'This is my Son, and I am pleased with Him'. As a further part of His preparation for ministry in the next three years, we are told here; 'The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert, so

that the devil could test him.’ (v. 1) In the Bible, the wilderness or desert was often a place of testing and preparation. We can think of events like the Israelites being in the desert for 40 years after they left Egypt, but, unlike Jesus, they failed most of the tests they went through.

While Jesus’ identity and mission was affirmed in His baptism, it is here up against temptation that it is tested and strengthened. And the three temptations Jesus faces here are directly attacking His Achilles heel, His weak spots. Firstly, after going 40 days without food, the devil calls Jesus to turn the stones into bread, ‘come on, you are God’s Son, you can do it’. The temptation is to use what God has given Jesus to fulfill His own needs, not to carry out His call. The second temptation is to put God to the test by throwing Himself off a high point knowing the angels will save Him. It has an echo of the mocking words said to Jesus on the cross, ‘if you are God’s Son, come down from there’. It’s the temptation to use His power for Himself, not for others. And finally, Satan promises Jesus power over all the world if He will bow down and worship Satan. Jesus would later in fact be lifted up in glory over all Creation, but by taking the way of the cross. It’s the temptation to put Himself before everyone else.

There is a lot in this account. It confirms for us who Jesus is as the obedient Son of God. It shows us that Jesus is both divine, He could do these things, and human, the temptations are very real for Him. It’s important to note also that this isn’t the only time Jesus is tempted; like us He faced similar temptations to put Himself first, to take the easy way, right up to His death. A couple of things which bind these temptations together: Firstly, both here and elsewhere, the devil is trying to cross out the cross. He knows that Jesus was sent to die and rise again so we could be saved. He knows the price had to be paid for our sin. So, he tries again and again to stop Jesus taking that path; Jesus even once accuses Peter of being Satan when he tries to get Jesus to take another way. And secondly, what happens here with Jesus shows us that a big part of temptation is to leave God out of human reckoning, to act as if He does not exist. If we think about our first Bible reading today, Adam and Eve falling to temptation, we can see this also. The devil promised them that ‘they will be like God’, that is, they could please themselves and take God out of the equation. It was a temptation which was too strong for them to resist, as it often is for us also.

We all face temptations in our lives (probably a bit of an understatement). Some can be relatively harmless, only affecting ourselves, like whether or not to have one more chocolate biscuit. They can then move

right up to those temptations which can severely affect our relationships with other people, and with God. They can be about whether or not we are satisfied with what we have, and how much we trust God to provide for us in His way, not ours. They can be about if we are willing to treat others in the same way God treats us, and we want others to treat us. Temptations are often about putting ourselves first, above all else, again, taking God out of it. And temptations can be based on wishes and desires which aren't bad in themselves, but which we allow to go too far. When King David saw Bathsheba bathing on a rooftop, he started by admiring a beautiful woman, but in continuing to look at her he became obsessed with her, so that his actions led to her husband being killed, and David's relationships with his family, supporters, and God being severely damaged. Another Israelite King, Ahab, saw a vineyard he liked and made an offer to buy it from Naboth, the man who owned it. The owner refused the offer, and so far nothing wrong there from anyone. But Ahab in his obsession chucked a sulky tantrum more fitting for a toddler than a king, which led to Naboth being killed so the king could take over the vineyard. Not hard to work out the Achilles heel for both of those kings.

What parts of us aren't covered? What are our Achilles heels; there's a good chance you will have more than one? One important step in facing and withstanding temptation is knowing this straight up. Is it impatience with other people? Is it being offended easily, and holding on to that, so that forgiveness and moving forward is difficult? Is it looking at what is around us, at what others have compared to what we have, and never being satisfied with what we have? Is it being sure and set in our ways so that we are not able to listen to and take on what others are suggesting? Is it allowing ourselves to be drawn into situations which attack and water down our beliefs? Is it finding the people, activities, things that God has given us in our lives so enticing that they draw us away from time spent with Him, worship of Him, and living out His love and grace in the world?

Temptations are there as very much a part of our lives. When we can be open and honest with ourselves about the areas in which we are weakest, we can then try to avoid those situations; try to avoid those people, change our mindset, stop watching, listening to, or reading those things, focus more on what we have than what we don't, make a deliberate effort to spend time with God to keep ourselves close to Him. In facing His temptations Jesus kept using the Bible against the devil to show the path He knew He should be taking. It's very easy for us to justify the things we do, to rationalise why it doesn't really matter that I behave like this, or say that, or think this way. But in God's Word we are given the way that we can both know God's love, and live out

and share God's love. Like Jesus, one of the temptations we have is to stay true to the call we have to trust God, live as His people, and share His love. Like Jesus, a major piece of the armour God has given us in doing this is the Bible and the teachings of His love and call for us there.

It's easy to talk about, but not always so easy to do, is it? We know that unlike Jesus we often fall to our temptations. Sometimes it might be in the big ways, but it is often in the small ways; the grudge we hold on to, the love and care we fail to share, the gossip we spread, the selfishness which causes us to only worry about ourselves, the teachings of God we water down. We have our Achilles heels, the parts of our lives which we, quite too happily really, leave uncovered. Not only does Jesus help us now in facing our temptations, but because He stayed strong, both here and at other times, in taking the road right up to the cross He has also won God's forgiveness for us. Where we are weak, He is strong. His forgiveness means that even when we fail, we can continue to try again. He ensures that we are fully covered, that in the love God shows to us through Jesus the devil cannot ultimately get to us. Knowing that is our greatest strength as we do our best to follow and serve God in all we think, say, and do.

Like Achilles we have our weak spots. Like Ned Kelly, our armour leaves some parts of our body uncovered. But in the strength Jesus showed throughout His life in resisting temptation, and the death and resurrection this led to, by His love we are now fully covered. God help us to know our weak spots, to try to cover come them, to ask for forgiveness when we fail in these ways. God also help us to always know that the new life won for us in Jesus is now and always ours also. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFELCTION

- When it comes to following God and showing and sharing His love in your life, what are your Achilles' heels/weak spots? Be honest with yourself about this.
- If there anything you can do in response to the struggles you face in falling to temptation in these areas? Perhaps: Pray about them laying them before God, change some of the routines of your life, deliberately change your mindset in this area, read what the Bible says about these things, talk to someone else if that will help you, something else?
- We know that we will and do fall to temptation; sadly, we can't defeat the devil by ourselves. How does God help us in facing and overcoming our temptations? (hint: Jesus gives us good example of one way in our reading)
- Ultimately, in God's love for us in Jesus, our weaknesses and our failing are covered over in Jesus' death and resurrection for us. How does knowing this help us in facing and overcoming the temptations which are a part of our lives?

Pray: thank God that Jesus stayed strong and obedient when He was tempted to leave the way of the cross. Ask for God's strength to overcome the temptations we face in our lives.

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