

Hebrews 4:15 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

The Continental Army had a problem during the Revolutionary War. They knew they could not beat the British in open warfare on a regular battlefield. The British army was too big and too well trained. They were only a small group of men banded together from the 13 colonies and could never hope to stand up against the massive British force. Their only hope was to engage in the skirmish tactics they had learned from the Indians which had helped the French during the French and Indian war. Skirmish tactics were minutemen hiding in wait and firing from cover. They were brief encounters that at times lasted only minutes before they turned and fled. These skirmishes serve to harass the British, delay their movement, disrupt a planned attack and weaken their morale. These skirmish tactics played a major part in leading the Continental Army to a rousing defeat of the British in the Revolutionary War.

The devil is pretty smart. He knows that if he tries to go against God and his people in an all-out frontal attack he wouldn't have a chance. He prefers to operate with skirmishes—brief encounters that catch his enemy off-guard and serve to weaken their resolve and morale over time. These skirmishes are only little battles which he may or may not win. But they are small parts of the larger war which the devil is intent on winning. Only winning for the devil looks like this: destroying someone's soul as he separates them from God to spend their eternity with him in hell. The consequences are that big! The skirmishes themselves may not seem like major things but add them all together and they serve the devil's purpose of wearing down God's people until he can finally separate them from God when they are weak. This reminds us of how important every battle, every skirmish is in this war for our soul. As we consider the Son of God going forth to war, we seek God's comfort from the skirmishes which we have lost and also his strength to keep fighting as these battles continue.

Every general who is serious about success enters each battle with a plan. He knows his own strengths and weaknesses. He has his tactics and contingencies all planned. But most importantly he knows his enemy. Satan is no different. He is not as powerful as God, but he is a skillful, ruthless enemy bent on your destruction and he knows you. He knows your weak spots and vulnerabilities. He has probed your front lines and knows the areas where you are strong and alert and also the areas which are soft and unguarded. He doesn't come right out with a full frontal attack. He prefers skirmishes—little brief encounters where he seeks to undermine your trust and confidence in God and soften you up. It can be as simple as whispering in your ear, "Are you sure?" Just that little question seeks to cast doubt in your minds about God's Word and his goodness. Then he adds, "Does God really have your goodness and best interest in heart by asking that of you?" These subtle, little skirmishes just chip away at your spiritual armor little by little. It may be as simple as him placing something in front of you to distract you just a little bit to take your focus off of God and right back at you. He might seek to lead you to base your identity on you to make everything about you to take your focus off of your identity as God's children. This can lead to pride on the one hand or worry or anxiety on the other. Either you start to think you don't need God because you're doing so well yourself, or you start to question God's presence and doubt his love because things aren't going as well as you thought. It's when you start to weaken and waver that he attacks in more pointed skirmish by seducing you with lusts of the flesh. He does this by offering you the promise of something much bigger or better or more fun and fulfilling. He enlists the help of ungodly people around you or the attitudes of the world around you to slowly but surely chip away and weaken you.

These are the daily battles that you and I fight. Even if we are successful in standing firm against temptation during these skirmishes they start to wear you down after awhile. We become tired and exhausted in this fight because it is continual and daily. Even battle hardened soldiers need some R & R time away from the front lines from time to time. Your senses get dulled. Your alertness falls. You become susceptible to attack and can much more easily fall. And this has happened to all of us...much more often than what we would want to have to admit. We can stand up to the same temptation day after day, yet in one moment of weakness we crack and fall and find ourselves buried in a pile of grief and shame. Try as hard as we may and even though we do everything we can not to, we find ourselves breaking down and giving in to temptation and Satan wins. This is exhausting and frustrating. Satan wants us damned and separated from God and by ourselves there is absolutely nothing we can do to stop this no matter how hard we try.

So, what beautiful words our text shares with us: *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.* Jesus fought the same skirmishes with the devil day after day yet won every one of them. Oh, the devil tried his best to get Jesus to fall. With Jesus, the situation was even more dire. The devil didn't need to get him to deny his heavenly Father. He only needed him to fall once. Just one time doubting his Father's love; just one time acting selfishly for his own glory; just one time going against the law of God would have been all the devil needed to ruin Jesus' work and damn all humankind. When Jesus' went out into the desert to be tempted by the devil, he was hungry and weak and tired after fasting for 40 days. The devil's first attack took advantage of this by tempting him to use his power selfishly to provide for himself. Jesus held firm and resisted the words of Satan by depending on the Word of God, "*Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" When that didn't work, Satan tried to distort God's word by getting Jesus to jump off the temple mount and test God's protection. Jesus again turned away from that temptation using God's Word, "*Do not put the Lord your God to the test.*" Finally, Satan tried to manipulate Jesus to place the world's wealth before God and again,

Jesus stood firm using God's Word, "*Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.*" Jesus won every skirmish with the devil. There wasn't one skirmish he faltered in. He stayed strong, calm, determined and loving through every one. He remained obedient to his heavenly Father. He faced every single temptation and skirmish you and I have to face...with one major exception. He was perfect. He did this without sin.

We needed a perfect someone who would be our hero, our substitute, our stand-in; who could qualify to take our place at the justice bar of God. Jesus is that person. He did it all for us. He kept God's law perfectly and offered his perfectly obedient life as a sacrifice on Calvary's cross for your sins and mine. Through faith, we are covered, clothed and hidden completely under the garment of Jesus' perfect life. His victory is ours so that we can stand forgiven and holy before God.

That warrior is with us as we continue our daily battles against the devil. He doesn't leave us alone to face temptation and the trials of our enemy. He promises to be faithful and not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. He also promises a way out from every temptation. How awesome to know when we are hurting, Jesus knows exactly what we feel like. He's been there...in our shoes...in every way. When we have problems, we know he has experienced the same. He hears the words of our hearts when we come to him in prayer and he can relate because he's been there too. The one who has perfectly fought every skirmish stands firm with us as we fight our daily battles to strengthen us and guide us and help us to stay on the narrow path that leads to eternal life.

Like the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War, we could never stand up to a bigger, stronger enemy by ourselves. The Son of God went forward to do war on your behalf and has won the victory and given that to you through faith. I pray that he continues to go with you every day as you fight skirmish after skirmish to aid you and strengthen you. Amen.