

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’^[b]”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

*“‘He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”*

⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matthew 4:1-11)

One Little Word Fells Him

How many times have I tried to stand against him? How many times have I stepped into that ring? How many times have I thought I was doing well only to fail? How many times have I promised that this time was the last? I’ve lost count of how often I’ve promised next time would be different. I’m better than this, aren’t I? I know better than this, don’t I? You’ve been there too. Since of the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve vs. the Serpent, it has been a battle. Since Adam and Eve, it has been a losing one.

Then the devil sees him in the wilderness. Another one with flesh and blood who would try to resist. Another one he was sure would lose. Why shouldn’t he think that? Since Adam and Eve every flesh and blood human had. Jesus barely has that baptismal water drying off of him when the Spirit leads him into the wilderness to battle, to be tempted by the devil. 40 days and 40 nights go by without food; to no one’s surprise Jesus is hungry. The devil sees his chance: **“If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”**

You know how tempting this is. No, not the ability to transform stone into bread. It’s the temptation that comes whenever we are suffering and things just aren’t going well or the way we want. It’s the temptation when life is just annoying or

frustrating. It's what you face when you are sure things could, should be different. "If you are a child of God, why do you suffer like that?" Why isn't life better? Why does God allow you to be tempted by *that*? Why do you have so much trouble with *that* sin? It's embarrassing. It's gross. It makes you feel like you are less than everyone else. Why does God give you that sickness? Why can't you be better off and have nicer things? Why does your family cause you so much pain and keep you up at night? Why don't you have the life that you know would be good and better for you? The devil wants you to believe that God isn't doing a good enough job of taking care of you. He wants you to think God is, in some way, holding back from you. No, I can't make bread out of stones. But too easily I listen to the devil's lies that I need to take things into my hands if you want to have the love, care, life, have the things that you need for life.

Then we see Jesus on the high point of the temple in Jerusalem. This too is a temptation all too familiar for us. The devil may not tempt you to jump off a high building. At the same time, he does tempt us to twist God's Word and promises to fit our own personal agendas. He does tempt you to take truths out of context to ease a conscience that knows what you are doing is wrong and against God's will. It's so tempting to pick and choose what parts of God's Word you will listen to as if it's a buffet line or potluck that you leave behind those things you don't like. It's true that God sends his angels to protect you. Too often we put the Lord to the test as we stand at the edge of temptation, in that situation that we know will make it difficult for us. We put the Lord to the test when we pray for good health, then neglect to take care of our bodies. We pray that he saves souls, but then neglect speaking, inviting, and encouraging regular use of Word and Sacrament. Too often we dive head-first into the sin as we put God to the test and abuse his forgiveness as we return it another time. We say, "I know I should _____" to make some change. But the time never seems to work out, things just aren't where you would like, and we trap ourselves in that vicious cycle.

The devil of course wouldn't be done there on the temple. This time he takes Jesus to a high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world. All Jesus has to do is bow down and worship the devil and it will all belong to Jesus.

God forgive me for how often I have fallen for this one. What the devil promises Jesus is one we want to so much: it's a shortcut. We don't want all the riches and kingdoms of the world. We want just a little more. A little extra. We want the comfort, convenience, and control all without the cost. We want the paradise on earth. It's the temptation that being a follower of Jesus shouldn't be that hard or ask too much from you. It's the temptation to simply stop resisting; my will be done because this is what I want. This is what I want for my children. This is what

I want for my family. Instead of fearing God, we have more fear of missing out on *something*. Instead of loving God above all things, we love the little things, the important things, the good things too much. We tell ourselves we are trusting God, but we find ourselves trusting more what we know, what we see, the facts and numbers we can count.

How many times have we faced these and similar temptations? It does no good to try and count it. Truthfully every temptation you might face can be categorized into one of these three situations. When we go against God and fall into sin, it's because we are fearing, loving, trusting something more than He. And the devil knows it. He's been at this for thousands of years and in his entire history there's only been one he hasn't defeated. All he needs is a crack to slither his serpent head into and the rest of his body follows. Either he will work to lead you to think that you do not need God or he will lead you to the darkness of depression and despair that God could never want someone like you.

But the one defeat is what makes the entire difference. **“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous”** (Romans 5:19). For us fights this valiant one who God himself elected. He's our champion who fights in our place. How he fares in this battle determines what happens for you. He's tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he was without sin. He only will fear, love, and trust God above all things. The Father's will is his will. There really wasn't any chance for that liar the devil. It doesn't make the temptation any less difficult. It doesn't make what Jesus faces in that wilderness any less real. Quite the opposite. He couldn't lose. He couldn't once fall. The fate of all mankind rests on him. But man does not live on bread alone. Man lives on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Jesus knows the words that God has spoken. He knows his Father never lies or deceives. He knows he is God's child; therefore, his Father will take care of him. So, he trusts the Father and leaves it in his hands.

God does send his angels to take care of and protect his people. But when the devil twists God's Word Jesus is the truth who sets us free from the devil's lies. Jesus knows he's a holy God. He's a just God. All of His Word is to be taken seriously and used properly. Jesus will not put the Lord your God to the test.

And when Jesus is taken to that high mountain how tempting that had to have been. He could avoid the suffering. He could avoid the rejection of mankind and being forsaken by his Father. He could have it all! But that's not why he came. He doesn't come to set up a paradise on earth with an earthly kingdom. He came to do his Father's work and follow his will. So, he fears, loves, trusts God above all

things. God's will be done. "Get away from me, Satan!" That's all it took. One little word and that enemy Satan is defeated and leaves Jesus.

Of course, the devil wasn't done. He would continue to battle against Jesus as he lived on this earth. He would masquerade as a friend who was trying to help. He would use people who were supposed to support him turn around and try to kill him. He would use the leaders of the people who should have known better but hated Jesus. But every time Jesus defeated the devil all the way to the cross because this was his Father's will which meant that it's what he wanted to do too.

Then he who had no sin, became sin for us. That sin that separated you from your God has been taken away. In its place, you receive Jesus' obedience, perfect life, innocence before God. It's credited to you so the broken relationship is fixed, you are right with God, and have peace with the Almighty.

As Jesus suffers for sins he claims to be his own, as he endures the fires of hell and the punishment we deserve, Satan must have felt like he had won. Jesus looks so defeated with blood pouring down the cross and God's righteous fist pushing down on him. Satan did it; he struck Jesus' heel. But it is finished. With his rising from the grave Jesus shows the serpent Satan's head is crushed. Satan does not control you or your life. Jesus has destroyed the devil's work. Where I have failed too often and more than I can count, Jesus prevailed for me. What you are missing by nature, Jesus is whole and makes you holy washing you with his blood. This battle he fights and the victory he wins on that cross is not for himself. It's all for you. And with his rising from the dead, we know this is most certainly true: we are more than conquerors though faith in Jesus.

The devil can question all he wants. As long as we live in this world he will attack with his many temptations. But he's a liar. He's your enemy. Always has been, always will be. And he's already been defeated. His head is already crushed. And so, we step back onto that plain to resist sin and the devil with Jesus by our side. We dare not try and fight this battle on our own. So, we pray that he leads us not into temptation but delivers us from the evil one. And that's what he does. He leads us to the Word where we are assured the victory is already won in Jesus and arms us against those fiery arrows of temptation. He leads us back to our Baptisms to remind us of who we are. You are baptized. You are God's child. And nothing, not even the devil, can separate you from his love. He leads you to the Lord's Supper where he forgives our sins again and strengthens us to fight with the promise that when we resist the devil, he will flee from you. All it takes is one little word to fell him. Amen.