

Have you ever tried to do something yourself, but in the end, it didn't work out well? You should have depended on someone else to do it. Maybe that has happened to you with a home improvement project – you did some painting yourself, or some plumbing yourself, you finished up, and now, there are some things wrong with what you did. “Good enough,” you might say. But someone else with higher standards probably wouldn't like it. But you did it yourself. You didn't want to depend on someone else.

Isn't that how it is with life? When you look back on your life, you might say to yourself, “Good enough!” But there are some flaws there, aren't there. You can look back on some different moments you've had in your life and see the mistakes you've made, the temptations you've fallen into. “Good enough,” you might say. But someone else with higher standards probably would say, “No, your life has not been good enough.” And we know who that someone else is, don't we. That someone else is God. At the end of our lives, we stand before him, and he is the one that judges you. How good of a job have you done with your life? God has some pretty high standards as he determines how well you've done. Do you know what his standard is? It's perfection. “Have you kept my commandments perfectly? Have you resisted temptation perfectly?” “Good enough” just doesn't cut it. This isn't some home improvement project. We're in trouble.

That's why Jesus Christ came. Most of the time, we think of Jesus as our substitute in his death. He died on the cross for us. And that's true. But we often forget that Jesus also came as our substitute in his life. Since you and I can't please God with perfect lives, Jesus came to do that in our place. Jesus is your Savior, not just by dying on the cross for your sins, but also by living a perfect life in your place, and giving you the credit.

And that's especially true when it comes to temptation. Have you ever fallen into a temptation? Today, let's look at how Jesus, our substitute, did what you and I could never do – he perfectly resisted temptation and defeated the Devil, and he did that, for you and me. Let's look at: Victory Over Temptation.

Jesus is traveling alone today. He has been led out into a desert area by the Holy Spirit. He had gone 40 days without food. Now I'm not a big eater, but if I skip breakfast and then lunch, well, you'd better not get in my way when supper rolls around. Jesus had gone over a month without eating. Our reading says how the Holy Spirit led Jesus out into the desert where there was no food. God the Father wanted Jesus to trust that even though he was going to be in the desert for 40 days without food, God would take care of his Son.

And this temptation seems so innocent. “Tell this stone to become bread!” The devil almost acts like Jesus' buddy, Jesus' caregiver here. He says, “oh, you poor thing, Jesus. Did your Daddy lead you out into this desert with no food? Well, good thing you can take care of yourself. Good thing you can make this stone turn into bread...that is, if you ARE God.”

What this sin boiled down to was really a lack of trust in the heavenly Father. The devil wanted Jesus to say, “you know devil, you're right! I've been waiting over a month for my Father to take care of me, and look where that has gotten me! Starved and weak! This is ridiculous. It's time for me to take care of myself, so...Zap! Stone, become bread, and it's chow time! The devil wanted Jesus to doubt his father's ability to take care of him.

You know how he works. It seems that Americans are living a lot longer than

they used to live. Your retirement income might not be enough to take care of you if you live into your 90's. What is going to happen to you. Will you be like one of those people on with a sign begging for a handout? Or look at your health. It is not getting any better. That bad leg, that breathing problem, that cancer is not going away. Looks like trusting in your Heavenly Father is something you can't count on.

Look at how Jesus resists this temptation. He doesn't use his powers as the Son of God, and vaporize the Devil. He could have done that. But remember, Jesus was being our substitute. And as our substitute, he has to fight temptation as every human being would fight temptation. He has to use the Word of God. And that's he did: "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" In other words, "I'm not basing what I do on my stomach. Man doesn't live on bread alone. There are other things I'm basing my life on, Satan. I'm basing my life on every word that comes from the mouth of God. My Heavenly Father put me here in this desert to fast, and I'm going to honor that. I'm going to trust him, and his words and his promises." Jesus doesn't try to reason with the Devil. He doesn't check to see what the rest of the world is doing. He doesn't base what he does on his feelings of hunger. Instead he fights off the Devil with God's Word. In the life of Jesus, this is victory number one. And remember, he does this as our substitute. He wins for us the victory.

Satan follows the procedure if you don't succeed try, try again. He now takes Jesus to the top of temple. The second weapon Satan tried to use against Jesus was a reckless trust in his Father. Jesus had told the devil that the Father was going to provide everything for him, and so Satan quotes a Psalm. However, when he quotes a psalm, he misquotes it. Satan says, the Bible says, "He shall give his angels charge over you and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." However, Satan leaves out the words, "In all your ways." "Jesus, you say you trust your Father...well, let him prove it! Throw yourself off the Temple building and see if He really is going to protect you with his angels.

While God promises that he is going to keep us protected, no where in the Bible does it say that we can recklessly expose ourselves to danger and expect the Lord to bail us out of trouble. The devil says: Eat whatever you want! Junk food won't hurt you. Eat as much as you want! Exercise, you've got to be kidding. That's painful. Go ahead and smoke a cigarette! It relaxes you. You won't get lung cancer! Some people smoke all their lives! Have a drink. Not just one or two, but get tanked. It takes away your problems. Drive recklessly! Spend your money recklessly! Don't be concerned about your family and marriage! Don't put the Lord your God to the test! Don't put yourself in a dangerous situation and expect the Lord to protect you!

Notice how Jesus once again resists this temptation. Jesus answered him, "It is also written..." Jesus wasn't going to let the Devil take one passage out of the Bible and twist it. "It's also written," Jesus says, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." In other words, "Satan, I'm not going to fall for your trick. I'm not going to believe one part of the Bible, and ignore the rest. Yes, God is love. Yes, everything will work out for something good. Yes, God will take care of me. But the Bible also says, "Don't test God." Don't be reckless. Be careful with your life. No, I'm not going to jump off of this building." Once again, Jesus resists the Devil, not by relying on his own strength, but by relying on the Word of God. And remember, Jesus doing this as our substitute. Here we see him once again winning for us a victory.

Satan reached into his bag of tricks and pulled out one more temptation. Somehow in one instant, he showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. He used a bold-faced lie, it's almost comical, when the devil said that he owned all the world, and he could give the world to anyone he wanted. "So Jesus, why would you go through all that rejection? You don't have to be arrested! You don't have to be mocked! You don't have to suffer the beatings of the rod and the crucifixion. Jesus, I'm here to help! I've got a way that's much easier than your Father's. Just bow down to me, and it's all yours."

Doesn't the Devil tempt you this way too? Bow down to me, the Devil says, and you'll be happy. Instead of worshiping God, worship money. Instead of striving to be pure in your life, be immoral. Then you'll be happy. Disrespect authority. Gossip about other people. Never read the Bible. Live like an unbeliever, and you'll find happiness in your life. Do what I say, the Devil says.

What does Jesus use to ward off this temptation from the Devil? He uses the Word of God, doesn't he? Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan. For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Jesus wasn't going to fall for that temptation. He would bow down to, and serve only his Heavenly Father. Even if that meant dying on a cross. Even if that meant sacrificing his life, shedding his blood, dying a terrible death. I will not take the "easy way out" and follow you, Satan. Away from me! And so, the Bible tells us, Satan left him, and angels came and attended Jesus. Very likely, the angels from heaven provided Jesus with food, and restored him back to health and full physical strength.

Why did Jesus need to face the Devil this way? Many people read this account and say, "Well, Jesus is teaching us how to fight temptation and win." And there is some truth to that – in this account we learn some valuable lessons about how Satan tempts us. Sometimes he appeals to our physical needs, just as he appealed to Jesus' hunger. Sometimes the Devil quotes from one part of Scripture, and ignores the rest, as we see here. And sometimes the Devil just lies, promising us that our lives will be better and happier if we would just do what he says. You can learn a lot about how the Devil works from studying this part of the Bible.

But that's not the primary reason why Jesus had to face Satan in the desert. You see, for there to be any hope for the human race, someone had to perfectly defeat temptation. From the time of Adam and Eve, until today, no one has ever successfully resisted all temptation in his or her life. We've all fallen short. Someone needed to come, and to stand in that desert face to face with Satan, and defeat temptation for us. And that's what Jesus did. Jesus was crippled with hunger, and armed only with the Bible. Satan hit Jesus with his best shots. But here we see Jesus defeating him, and winning for us the victory.

If you ever fallen into a temptation in your life, then be comforted in knowing that Jesus has stood in your place, and has defeated the Devil for you. And after defeating the Devil, Jesus lifts you up and takes you to his Heavenly Father, and says, "Here, accept this person. I defeated the Devil for him." And so God the Father accepts you for Jesus' sake, because of what He has done for you.

If you're looking for strength to resist temptation, then look to Jesus. Follow his example, and rely on the Word. And remember that this same Jesus who defeated the Devil, will give you the strength you need to stand up to every temptation he sends your way. Amen.