

Today, we hear Luke's version of the temptation of Jesus. As we begin today, I want to share a story with you about two pastors who became good friends in seminary. One of them whose name is Steve developed a terminal cancer which led to a very painful death and he left behind a wife and children.

During the final year of his life, Steve talked to his friend about the struggles he was having and how Satan appeared to him. The way Steve described it, Satan offered him a deal: life and health for his soul. If Steve would pledge an allegiance to Satan then Steve would have a long, healthy life. If not, Steve would die soon. Steve told his friend that it was not an easy decision. He wanted to live so that he could be with his family, but in the end, he decided to decline the offer.

What would you do if you faced a similar choice? If the devil was to tempt you right now with something in this world that you want more than anything, would you trade your soul for it?

We are tempted all of the time and through each temptation that we face, the devil is trying to get us to turn our backs on God. He is trying to get us to give up on God and go in a different direction. No human escapes temptation. Every person who has ever lived has been tempted, including Jesus.

Jesus was tempted shortly after his baptism, when God publicly declared Jesus to be HIS son. Satan appeared to Jesus and repeatedly tested him with a series of temptations. Through every temptation, the devil was trying to get Jesus to doubt and deny he was the actual Son of God. He kept telling Jesus, "If you are the Son of God" do this or that.

The first temptation that Luke shares with us has to do with self-satisfaction and is found in verses 3 & 4. Satan said: "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Satan was trying to get Jesus to give in to self-satisfaction. Jesus was hungry and bread sounded good.

Like many temptations, there is a difference between the surface and what lies underneath. On the surface it sounded like a simple suggestion for Jesus to use his powers to change a rock into a loaf of bread to eat, but, there was more to it than that.

Satan wanted Jesus to use his powers for himself rather than for others. He wanted Jesus to become a materialist who would provide for his own wants and needs. Satan tempted Jesus to say that his physical needs were greater and more important than his spiritual needs.

In a similar way, we are tempted to use our resources for our own benefit. In fact, we often convince ourselves that we will be satisfied and happy when we get what we want. It is because we live in a materialistic society, many of us pursue this temptation with a passion.

When he was tempted, Jesus said: "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone." He never denied his hunger but insisted that he would not use his power for his personal benefit and refused to make materialism most important. Life's meaning and satisfaction is not based on what we eat, what we wear, where we live or what we own. We are first and foremost spiritual beings where our life and meaning comes from God, not from things.

After Jesus shut Satan down, he moved to temptation number 2. We read, "The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.'"

This second temptation was far more tempting. It was an opportunity to answer the greatest human criticism of God. For centuries right up until today, believers and unbelievers alike have said, "If there really is a good God, why is there so much evil and suffering in this world?" I often say they are a part of life but don't usually say why. The truth is that sin and Satan have brought unbelievable evil and pain to our world.

With this temptation, Jesus had an awesome opportunity to make a difference in the world. Satan offered Jesus the rule of the world. He could immediately stop all injustice, eliminate all poverty, and outlaw all sin, pain and suffering. It would be a wonderful and unselfish thing to do and the world would be a beautiful place to live.

However this great opportunity came with a very high price. In order to become king of the world, Jesus was first required to worship Satan. In other words, if Jesus acknowledged the absolute superiority of Satan then he could fix the world.

But what would happen to us if Jesus would have given up on God's mission for him and instead taken Satan's offer? Once we die, we would be going to hell because in order for us to even have the opportunity to enter heaven, Jesus had to die. In response to this temptation, Jesus said, "It is written: worship the Lord your God and serve him only." Jesus insisted that there is only one God. To give allegiance to Satan is a guaranteed path to worse sin and eventual destruction.

Jesus resisted the temptation to compromise his mission and so Satan tried a third time by tempting Jesus with popularity. When I first read that some interpret this temptation as popularity, I didn't understand it. But once I read their argument, it made sense.

Satan took Jesus to the highest point in Jerusalem; the top of the temple. Satan invited Jesus to stand on the edge until a crowd gathered to see what was going to happen and at just the right moment Jesus could jump and free fall toward the crowd below. As the people gasped with expectation of his crushing death, angels would come and catch him at the last second. Then Jesus would stand on his feet for everyone to see and they would be amazed by what they had just seen. Jesus would instantly become the most popular man in Jerusalem. Everyone would want to meet him, touch him and follow him. The whole population would have declared him to be the Messiah from heaven.

There would be no hassles from his religious critics. No threats from Roman authorities. Everyone would admire and love him. What would you do for popularity? If you could have a guaranteed stunt that would make you the most popular and sought after person in America, would you do it?

This same old temptations still works on many of us today. Those who believe in God and totally trust him respond with Jesus and say: I know God loves me. I know God cares for me. And then we put our trust in the Spirit of God who will help us when we face temptations in our own life knowing that when we do give in to temptation, God still forgives.