

One of the things about temptation is that it looks good...worthy even. If you could easily see an end result of pain, misery, and destruction, it wouldn't really be all that tempting, right?

I mean, what if Jesus could turn a stone to bread. Besides feeding himself, he could feed lots of hungry people. Stones are plentiful in the rocky terrain of Judea. He wouldn't need hardly anything to feed thousands.

Wait a minute, that's sounding a little familiar. Oh yeah, he did feed thousands with two little fish and five loaves of bread.

And what if Jesus did rule the world. Wouldn't that be great?

Oh wait...we do after all proclaim Jesus as King of Kings.

And what if Jesus could defy death...oh...wait.

Jesus does indeed end up with the things the devil promised, but not on the devil's terms. He did it in obedience to God.

Does that matter?

If the end result is something good – maybe even what God ultimately wants, does it matter how we get there? Those are the words temptation speaks to Jesus here. They're the words temptation speaks to us.

If you've ever concluded about any particular solution that the ends justify the means, that's what the devil is trying to convince Jesus of.

It's also what happened at the very beginning. The serpent in the garden – that early representative of the same being who confronted Jesus – tempted Eve and Adam with a similar choice. If they ate from the fruit of the tree their eyes would be opened and they would know good and evil. What could be wrong with that? It sounds pretty good, right.

Well, that serpent in the garden spelled it out. You will be like God, he told them. And that's where the problem lies.

Luke's version of Jesus' genealogy goes back to "Adam, son of God." But Adam failed to be the faithful son of God.

Now, perhaps the devil thinks he can tempt this son of God the same way. If you are the son of God, then these things should be yours.

But Jesus did not give in. Jesus succeeds where Adam and Eve failed.

Jesus is presented with the temptation to prove that he's God. But the price is selling out to the same force that Adam and Eve did. And regardless of potential ends, that makes all the difference.

Once allegiance is made to Satan, the result is going to be the return of chaos. When humans yield to the temptation to be their own gods, what happens?

Let's say your allegiance is to Satan and you have the power of God. You have the power to turn stones to food. When allegiance to Satan is at the heart of our actions, it's the same as saying our own self-interest is at the heart of our actions. We've chosen not to trust God to provide and instead we want to rely only on our own power...to be our own gods.

What I predict would happen is that those who have the power to turn stones to bread would store up a lot of stones. They might become fearful that the stones would run out and they would be stingy with turning stones to bread for other people.

Why do I predict that? Because it's more or less what has happened from the beginning. Too many powerful people have put their own desire for power and wealth at the center of what they do. When we have that, we end up with a world where some have great wealth while others barely survive...or just plain don't survive.

That kind of power kills more often than it saves. We don't need that kind of savior.

And if someone who is a ruler of a kingdom sees themselves as god, what is the result? Well, the gospels tell us pretty clearly.

We get the brutality of the Caesars, and the Pilates, and the Herods.

By whatever name, we get a myriad of other brutal rulers throughout history – rulers who have yielded to the temptation to be like God...only with the devil behind them.

The specific ruler is less important than their allegiance. And if their allegiance is mostly to themselves, which is essentially what Satan offers, it's going to be the opposite of the kind of kingdom Jesus is really about.

Then the devil tries to get Jesus to jump and prove that God will rescue him. While we know that God will raise Jesus from the dead, doing it here on Satan's terms would not save the world.

You could have it all, Satan promises Jesus...just like he promised Adam and Eve.

But Jesus said, no, this all belongs to God and it's God's to rule.

Jesus ultimately will rule at God's right hand, but it will be on God's terms, not the devil's. And it will be a rule that is completely different from the one we get with the devil's deal. We have enough of that already.

Satan is not ready to give up, though. He just needs to wait for a more opportune time. Remember that Satan is very skilled at finding our weak spots...or catching us at a moment of weakness. Here in the wilderness, Jesus is hungry and alone. He was a prime target. Yet he remained faithful.

An even more opportune time will come later in the story. Some might say the opportune time came when Satan entered Judas Iscariot. But that's only the beginning.

The most potent opportune time was when Jesus was hanging on the cross, suffering, dying.

The crowd standing below said, if he is the Messiah, why doesn't he save himself? One of the rebels hanging on a cross next to him said the same – if you are God's son, save yourself....and us too.

But Jesus didn't yield then either. Jesus won. And in his resurrection, he did defy death...and the devil. But he did it on God's terms.

So what does that mean for us?

These are typical human temptations. We are often tempted by the desire for a quick easy fix. We are too often seduced by the possibility of having power of our own.

We are seduced by those who have power and we think they will save us. But they end up being false gods...gods too often backed by the forces of evil and not God.

Jesus resisted those temptations and shows us that his allegiance will be only to God and to his mission to bring in God's kingdom. He will be a real savior and not one propped up by the false promises of the devil.

Jesus paves the true way for us to follow...to follow him into the kind of rule God's kingdom will offer.

But following Jesus is not the easy way. Satan offers easy quick fixes. He offers a path to glory for ourselves. He offers prosperity. But the price is a world that operates pretty much the way it has been for thousands of years.

Jesus offers instead the often painful path to transformation...of us and the world. Jesus offers us death and resurrection...death of our addiction to our own ego and self-interest. He offers

us a new life...a new life grounded in the kind of kingdom God intends. A world where peace reigns, where all are fed, and where death is defeated in small ways...and at the end in a big way.

The path Satan offers can look oh so good. And the path Jesus offers can be hard...and sometimes lonely.

But, here's the real promise. Because Jesus remained faithful, and because human unfaithfulness was nailed to the cross with Jesus, we do have the power to follow his path. We too have the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to sustain us on that path, however tempting the other path might look.