

## Temptations are Lies in Disguise

In the days of the Civil war, it was illegal to trade in cotton; but many opportunistic types tried to buy cotton in the South, run it through Union lines, and sell it at great profit in the North. One of these entrepreneurs approached a Mississippi steamboat captain and offered him \$100 if he would run his cotton up the river for him. The captain declined, reminding him that it was illegal.

“I’ll give you \$500,” said the man. “No,” answered the captain. “How about \$1000?” “No,” the captain replied. “I’ll give you \$3000 to run that cotton.” At that, the captain drew his pistol, and pointing at the man, said “Get off this boat. You’re coming to close to my price.”

That’s often how temptation works. Some things the devil dangles in front of you are just not worth trying. They’re stupid things you can easily pass on (with the help of God, of course).

But then there are temptations that our Enemy custom designs just for you. He fashions something that is deeply attractive to you; something that seems to offer excitement, fulfillment, power, control, or pleasure right this instant. He places it right in front of you. It’s there for the taking. How do you usually respond when that happens?

You and I need to know that when we believe the lies of the devil and choose to sin, we are choosing evil. We are choosing death. I’m guessing you wouldn’t think that drinking a bottle of poison is a good idea, yet when you indulge yourself in sinful behavior, that’s exactly what you’re doing to your heart and soul. Worse yet, as a Christian, when you give in to temptation and deliberately choose to sin, the net effect is that you’re saying the death of Jesus on the cross was no big deal. Ever thought of it that way?

Now, the Bible tells us that Jesus was tempted, and that is huge for us to notice. As a man, He was targeted by Satan, just like we are. Just like you and me, he had choices to make every single day and the wrong choice, just one, would destroy everything. We know how we respond to a custom-made temptation; the question is, how did Jesus respond?

The way Jesus responded begins with this truth: every temptation that the devil serves up is a lie. Every temptation that the devil serves up is a lie. Jesus called Satan “the father of lies,” because deception is his specialty. You see that in the temptations he dangles before Jesus. He tries to cause Jesus to doubt his own identity as the Son of God. Satan acts as if he has authority over creation and the kingdoms of the world. He tries to distort and manipulate God’s Word, (which was the way he caused Eve to stumble back in the Garden, asking the question, “Did God really say...?”) The devil’s temptations are all lies! He did it to Jesus and he does it to you.

In Southern Mexico lies a location called the Cave of the Lighted House. As you make your way to the cave you walk through a lush rain forest. The cave is fed by 20 underground springs, beautiful watercourses which teem with tiny fish. The cave itself is home to spectacular rock formations and beautiful ponds. The environment is inviting. Yet accept the invitation and you’ll

soon be dead, because the Cave of the Lighted House is filled with sulfur--poisonous gas. That's temptation. Satan presents something to you as inviting, exciting, attractive, and life-giving. But it is a lie. In reality, it's poisonous and toxic. Once you walk into the cave, it's too late. You're not just "getting away with something." You're not just "being naughty." You're choosing death of body and spirit. When you are being tempted, you are being lied to, and no one is going to laugh at you harder than Satan when he gets you to walk into the cave of sin. If he gets you to go in there, he has played you for a fool. You bought it, and now you've got to pay for it—with your life.

Thanks be to God that you have Someone who loves you and values you so much that He would come alongside you and say to you: "I know that you bought the devil's lies and you've got to pay for it with your life. But let me. Let me pay for it with my life. My life for yours. I want you to stay with me." That's what Jesus has done for you, for me, and for everyone. That's why he allowed himself to be brutally beaten and nailed to a cross—to make the payment that would erase your sins. And that's why we see him resisting temptation perfectly—his sacrifice on the cross had to be perfect, and it was. He had to respond to temptation perfectly, because you and I could never do that. He did, and the majesty of the gospel is that it counts for you. Your account has been credited as "paid in full" in Jesus name. In order to enjoy the benefits of this gift, all you need do is trust that Jesus has, in fact, made this payment on your behalf. Then forgiveness and new life is yours.

Part of that new life in Jesus is a new perspective on temptation and sin. The Holy Spirit will work to change the way you think and feel about walking into that Cave. In Paul's letter to Titus, he writes, "...the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age..." (2: 11—12) A self-controlled, upright and godly life is something that a Christian will want to pursue if he or she truly understands the gift of grace they have received in Jesus. The Christian will look to Jesus first for forgiveness and restoration and then for direction and guidance. And Jesus has a great lesson for you about resisting temptation when you examine the way he did it. In each case in today's gospel—when the devil tempts Jesus, Jesus responds with words from Holy Scripture. He is able to draw on his knowledge of Holy Scripture to combat the lies of the devil and stand for what is true. Forgive me for stating the obvious, but this is one critical reason all of us need to get into God's Word and study God's Word and know what it says—for the purpose of discerning the devil's tempting lies and saying no to them! The stronger we are in the knowledge of God's Word, the more conscious we will be of sin's high price. The stronger we are in the knowledge of God's Word, the better we will be at living in the pattern of repentance and faith. And the stronger we are in the knowledge of God's Word, the more plugged in we will be to the power of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to make godly choices in the heat of the moment.

There is a space between the moment something happens and how we respond. Maybe we ought to work to make that space larger so that we can choose better responses. Trusting in Jesus and animated by His Spirit, we can choose to not continue in a conversation that is engaged in gossip; we can choose not to let our temper out of the stall; we can choose to not stab someone in the back; we can choose to not lie or fudge to truth. We really can say no to the devil's lies. Holy Scripture says so.

One last detail: Matthew tells us that after Jesus went through this ordeal, angels came and tended to Him. Even Jesus needed to be ministered to after going through a difficult time. He received the service of angels to strengthen Him for the road ahead. That's what we are doing here today. We get beat up out there. We need to be ministered to. We need to come together so that God can give us His gifts through His messengers. We need to stand and sing "with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven" so that we remember whose side we are on...and Who is on our side.

Never forget this fact: the devil did not succeed. He failed. His lies did not prevent Jesus from being the spotless Lamb of God. His lies could not keep the Son of God in His tomb. His lies will not stop Jesus from returning to the world He saved. And his lies cannot separate you from His love. Jesus will always share His victory and His truth with you. Amen.