

The first words of the devil are recorded in Genesis. “*Did God really say?*” His temptation worked to perfection. Man fell into sin and was cast out of paradise into the wilderness. The cherub, with his flaming sword, guarding the entrance.

And thus, the second Adam must also leave Paradise and be tempted by the devil out in the wilderness. The same wilderness into which the first Adam was thrown. Our wilderness, in which you and I live and are daily are tempted by the evil one.

And it’s inevitable that the Tempter’s first words to Jesus were also, “*Did God really say?*” It worked with the first Adam. How could it fail with the second? And so, to Jesus the devil says, “*Did God really say that you are His beloved Son? If this is what you think He said, then command these stones to become bread.*”

Jesus, the second Adam, is hungry. He is famished, in fact, eating nothing for forty days. But He will not yield to His hunger. “*It is written,*” He replies, “*man shall not live by bread alone.*” He will do no miracle for His own benefit. He will not turn stones into bread to prove His identity. Just forty days prior, at His baptism, the Father from heaven declared, “*You are My beloved Son.*” And what God has spoken, He has spoken.

“*Did God really say?*” are the Tempter’s words to you. He is not deterred by Jesus. He goes after you. “*Did God really say that you are His son or daughter?*” The devil mocks Holy Baptism. He makes light of it. He turns it into your work for God rather than God’s work for you and in you. Yes, God did say, when you were baptized, the same thing He said when Jesus was baptized. You are God’s child. This is your identity from that day onward. And what God has spoken, He has spoken.

But still, the devil is not deterred. Come on, if you really are God’s beloved son or daughter, prove it. Prove it by how you live. The devil knows your sinful life. He sees everything that you do. He hears everything you say. If you really are God’s child, then why are you such a sinner? Turn your stones into bread; your sinful deeds into holy ones, if you really are God’s child, that is.

You know the doubts that are there within you. You know the logic behind the devil’s temptation. Maybe he’s right. If I really am God’s child, why do I sin so much? Why do I keep falling into the same sin over and over? Maybe I’m not who I think I am. Maybe my baptism is not what God says it is.

You and I live in the wilderness of this world. And not only do we face the temptations of the evil one, we do battle every day with ourselves. The Old Adam in us rises up each day to attack us; to lead us into sin, into doubt, despair, and finally unbelief. You and I have a hard enough time in our struggle with him. How can we, out in this wilderness, fend off the evil foe as well?

Friend, you are not called to do one-on-one combat with the devil. You are to resist him. You are to flee the roaring lion, not engage him in battle. When temptations come, there is a place of refuge for you. An oasis in the midst of your wilderness. The oasis of your baptism.

Jesus performed no miracle for Himself. But He did for you. The miracle of your baptism. In those sacred waters He made you a dear child of God. He washed away your sin. And He gave you His Holy Spirit so that the evil one cannot defeat you, so that your Old Adam cannot overcome and gain the victory over you.

In our wilderness of temptation, too often we ignore the oasis placed here for us. We forget our baptism into Christ. When tempted, we do not run to it and hide there within the holy wounds of Jesus. We try to engage the enemy by ourselves. This is why Christians fall away. They see Jesus as example, not so much as Savior. But no, you will fall into temptation, and I will fall, if Jesus merely shows us how to live, how to overcome the devil and our Old Adam.

Jesus did not argue with the devil. He merely restated the Word of God precisely, accurately, and in its context. Where the first Adam failed, the second did not. Jesus passed the test. And He did it for you because we also fail daily. And then He went to the cross to pay the price, the awful price of our unholy living.

And so, in Jesus you have passed the test. In Jesus, your unholy stones are purified by His blood. And in Jesus, you have a place of refuge; the place your baptism is for you every day, and your place here at His Table of grace.

“Did God really say?” Yes, He did. You are His baptized child in Christ Jesus. You are forgiven of all your sins. And there is nothing the devil can do to undo what God has done for you. Jesus defeated him. And He defeated him for you. This is God’s good news to you. And what God has spoken, He has spoken. Amen.