

What's Power For?

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There's this classic question geeks like me enjoy asking. It goes something like this. If you could have one superpower, which superpower would you choose? Have you ever been asked that question? If not, what superpower would you choose? Would you choose to fly like Superman? Or, to regeneratively heal like Wolverine? Or, to telepathically talk with the fish of the sea like Aquaman? (I know that my wife would choose to shoot webs and swing all over the city of Chicago like Spiderman. She even has dreams about it.)

But, friends, what would you choose? Or, perhaps the better question is this—How would you use your superpower? What would you use it for?

In today's passage of Scripture, the Lord sends Jesus out into the wilderness, and the devil comes calling after Jesus has fasted and prayed for a long, long time. He proceeds to tempt Jesus three times. And, at the center of all these temptations, at the heart of all Satan's testing, is one very important question—What's power for? What is its purpose? What should it be used for?

Let's read the text together and, then, we'll pray together.

Luke 4:1-13

4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

³ The devil said...“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”

⁵ The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷ If you worship me, it will all be yours.”

⁸ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord...and serve him only.’”

⁹The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you carefully;
¹¹ they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

¹² Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

¹³ When the devil had finished . . . tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Well, we have three temptations, and these temptations spawn three questions about power and what it’s for. So, we’re going to follow these as an outline today. (1st) Will you use your power for your own pleasure? (2nd) Will you use your power for your own self-preservation? (3rd) Will you use your power for your own glory? These are the questions before Jesus. Let’s see what his answers teach us.

1. Will you use power for your pleasure (v. 3)?

My wife, Natalie, had this conviction (while we were still living in Harrisburg) to have our family eat just like a family in a developing area of the world would eat for one full week. We would then donate the money which we didn’t spend on food to a charity that fed impoverished families. It was a good and an honorable exercise. So, she went out with only a small amount of money and purchased what she needed in order to make beans and tortillas for every meal over one week, only seven days. Not forty days—*just seven days!* Not no-food—*just one kind of food!*

We started strong on a Monday. Beans and tortillas is a pretty darn tasty meal. By the time we got to Friday at dinner, Silas—who was four-years-old at the time—broke down in tears when Natalie served beans and tortillas. There was no pleasure when mealtime rolled around. We were at our end. We all had had enough of beans and tortillas. So, I took the whole family to *Five Guys* that evening. It tasted so good. I told everybody they could order whatever they wanted—milkshakes, French fries, and double bacon cheeseburgers. Our wilderness wanderings were over in an instant. *I could take us out for a feast, so I did!* It was way too tempting for me not to do so. I mean, we all wanted it just as badly as Silas did.

Friends, here's Jesus after a forty day fast. Simply imagine how hungry he is. He is the Son of God. He is God in human flesh. Jesus has divine power to utilize. Forget *Five Guys*! He can have whatever he wants. So, Satan tempts him.

If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread (v. 3).

What would you do if you were Jesus? I can tell you precisely what you'd do. You'd create a *Lost Larson* loaf of the finest bread with some hand-churned butter as well as a platter of artisan cheese and meat. That's what you and I would both do. We'd cave to the temptation to seek our own pleasure—to satisfy our own hunger. It's what Israel did on its wilderness wanderings. It's what my family did after days of beans and tortillas. This is what sinful human beings do. We cave-in when faced with temptations. That's who we are...*on our own*.

Why was Jesus fasting? Have you ever asked yourself that question?

The answer is God. He gave up eating food to feast on his heavenly Father—to meditate upon the Lord's sacred word and to depend upon his righteous strength. He put his own will aside to take-up the will of God. Jesus put his own desires aside in order to give himself to his Father's desires.

Satan wants to derail that. The devil wants Jesus to elevate his own appetites. He wants him to forget the desires of God. Jesus, however, won't cave-in as we do. He stands up to Satan's temptation. He quotes Deuteronomy.

It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone" (v. 4).

Friends, Jesus obviously believes this. Jesus obviously trusts that God wants what's best for him—that the Lord's desires for him are better than his own desires for himself. If he didn't, he would have had his bread. He would have had his meal. He would have given himself over to his appetites and his desires. Yet, he did not. Rather, Jesus gives himself over to God's will and to God's desires.

In our culture and in our time, we often worship our appetites and our desires. If we're down, we search for something to entertain us—something to lift our spirits or, at least, numb our pain. But, the Bible tells us this is a futile exercise in idolatry. Scripture tells us that such things can never satisfy us. Friends, do you believe that? Or, do you keep searching for life in lifeless things? What are you using your energy and power to obtain? What's your power for? Is it for money or sex or food or travel? Or, is your power for God?

C. S. Lewis has the wonderful observation about our desires and about God. Lewis doesn't believe that the Lord thinks we desire too much but far, far too little. Here's what he says.

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.¹

Friends, don't lack desire. Here (in this Scripture passage) Jesus is our model. Seek first God's kingdom and will and desire for you, and you'll not lack for pleasure or joy or satisfaction. Trust Christ alone for these things. Amen.

Well, let's move to the devil's next temptation.

2. Will you use power for your self-preservation (vv. 5-7)?

You know, you should find it strange that the devil offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world. When you read the second temptation, you should think that that's odd. Like, isn't Jesus God-incarnate? Doesn't he already reign over all these kingdoms of the earth which Satan offers him? *Yes and yes!* Friends, the devil offering Jesus what he already possesses is like me offering to buy Elon Musk a brand-new Tesla if he'll kiss my feet. What's the draw? What's tempting about that?

Well, here's the thing. It's not what Jesus gets that's tempting about this offer; it's how he might get it. That's what's tempting.

During his ministry, Jesus recognizes his kingship and even describes himself as a king. Just think about it with me. James and John ask to be seated at Jesus's side when he comes into his glory (Mark 10:37). This is kingly, throne-room imagery. Before Pontius Pilate, Jesus affirms he's the king of the Jews but that his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). And, throughout the gospels, Jesus allows people to call him "son of David"—a clear reference to his royal lineage (Matthew 15:22). Friends, even as Satan tempts Jesus, he is the King of all these kingdoms.

Yet, ask yourself this: Where does his kingly calling lead? It leads to the cross. It leads to the crucifixion. And, when we remember this, we see the temptation.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*, 26.

“Look at all the kingdoms, Jesus. They can all be yours right here, right now— simply bow-down and worship me. No betrayal. No torture. No dying. No sacrifice. Save yourself Jesus. Isn’t this the easier way?” Can’t you just hear Satan?

In fact, we hear the devil in these kinds of ways all the time. “Just cut corners. It’s just a white lie. You could use that time for yourself. You could take a vacation with that money. Wouldn’t it be convenient to just ignore what the Lord has to say about forgiving or about sex or about sacrifice?” These are the kinds of temptations we face every day; *aren’t they?! And, friends, Jesus shows us that the way we choose to respond is a matter of worship. Again, he quotes Deuteronomy.*

Worship the Lord your God and serve him only (v. 8).

When we cut corners, tell lies, use our time selfishly, are greedy with money, or ignore what the Lord says—we are serving Satan, not Christ. Make no mistake about it. Every decision we make is a decision to worship the Lord or worship Satan. In the immortal words of Bob Dylan—“It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”² And, that service is ultimately a form of worship and praise.

Friends, worship the Lord Jesus and serve him only! Amen.

Well, now we come to Satan’s final temptation.

3. Will you use power for your glory (vv. 9-11)?

Now the answer to this last question may surprise you because the answer is— Yes, Jesus will use his power for his glory. Yet, he won’t do it in the way the devil tempts him to do so. Look at their final exchange.

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you / to guard you carefully; / they will lift you up in their hands, / so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’” (vv. 9-12).

² You can listen to Dylan’s song, “Gotta Serve Somebody” [here](#).

Consider the nature of the devil's temptation. What's the point of the exercise? It's merely about showing off. It's all about bringing attention and glory to Jesus. "Everyone will see how great you are—how valuable you are to the heavenly Father! Nobody will reject or doubt or crucify you then." This is essentially the temptation, to quickly seize the glory Jesus deserves.

Yet, this isn't how glory works in the kingdom of God. It is how it often works with us though; isn't it? Jesus is constantly pressing against this tendency in us over and over again during his earthly ministry. Just think about it.

- How are we taught to give? Should we do it in ways everyone will see? No. Jesus tells us: "[whenever] you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets—as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets—to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full" (Matthew 6:2).
- Or, how are we taught to pray? Are we supposed to make a spectacle of it? No. Jesus says: "...when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. [Rather] when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done [by you] in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:5-6).

Friends, I could go on and on. We could talk of fasting or of doing good works. These are not things we do for our own glory. The divine principle in regard to glory is quite different. We do not obtain it by seeking it for ourselves. True or real glory comes only when we submit ourselves and dedicate ourselves to seeking the pleasure and glory of our God. And, that's precisely what Jesus teaches us and models for us so profoundly. This is the heart of the gospel.

So, Jesus teaches us.

"...the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28).

Friends, Jesus turns his back on Satan's temptations because, above all things, he longs to glorify his Father. And, what his Father seeks is our salvation and praise. So, the Son of God walked with and listened to us and fed us and healed our wounds and died in our place. The eternal Son didn't come to be served but to serve the least and weakest. This is the path to true glory. This is what power is truly for.