

The Choice

1. Warm up: How do you feel about this week's election?
2. On Sunday we wrapped up our sermon series on "Life's Three Greatest Temptations." Right before launching his public ministry, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness praying, thinking, and making sure he was ready. Realizing this was the last best opportunity to stop Jesus before he got started, Satan challenged him with three great temptations. Today we're focused on the third. Let's re-read Matthew 4:1-11, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. The third great temptation is described in verses 8-10. It begins with Satan giving Jesus a vision of all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. When you think of the splendor of the world, what comes to mind?
 - b. Although we might tend to think of all the dazzling natural wonders of the world, that's not where Satan was directing Jesus' attention. He focused Jesus on "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor." In other words, all the manmade wonders of the world that symbolize wealth, power, prestige, and beauty. What kinds of things would you guess Satan showed Jesus?
3. In this third temptation, Satan was promising that Jesus could become greater than Caesar himself – that Jesus could rule the world and, thus, control all the world's wealth and power. This temptation was a direct effort to undermine the purpose for which Jesus had been sent to earth. Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God, which is all about the greater good and helping others. But now Satan was, in effect, saying, "Jesus, why would you build a kingdom for God and others, with all the sacrifice and suffering that will entail, when with a little help from me, you could build a kingdom for yourself?"
 - a. Jesus came to earth on a mission for God. He summarizes that mission in Luke 4:18, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." In what ways was this vision contrary to Jesus' narrow self-interests? In other words, what would Jesus have to sacrifice in order to pursue the mission stated in Luke 4:18?
 - b. What kinds of personal benefits might Jesus have reaped if he had been willing to abandon his Messianic mission for a self-directed life?
 - c. How much inner turmoil do you think this third temptation caused Jesus? Do you think it was a hard temptation for him to resist? Why or why not?
4. Every single one of us faces this third great temptation in our own lives in our own unique ways. We're not Jesus. We're not nearly as gifted and powerful as he was. But, like Jesus, each of us has been sent here on a divine mission. None of us has been put

here to be the Messiah, but we have been put here to further the work of the Messiah – to help others, to oppose the oppressors, to liberate captives, to share the Gospel, to heal people, and to turn the world upside down with the goodness of God. Just like Jesus, each of us has been put here to help build the kingdom of God, not the Kingdom of Me. So Satan whispers to us, “Forget all this talk about how you were born to be a child of God. Forget all this talk about building God’s Kingdom. That path is going to entail a lot of sacrifice and hardship. Forget about the greater good. Let’s make this about you!”

- a. Jeff stated two very different ways of seeing life. Option 1 – I am an independent free agent entitled to do what I please with my life. Option 2 – I am a spirit being sent here on a divine mission to serve the greater good. At this moment in your life, which of these two options feels ascendant for you? Explain your answer.
- b. What are the pros and cons of Option 1 for you?
- c. What are the pros and cons of Option 2 for you?
- d. As you look back over the past week, can you identify a time when you (in some way large or small) made a choice contrary to your narrow self-interest because of your calling to serve the greater good? What happened? How did that feel?
- e. Now think big picture. As you look back over your life, think of one of the most important decisions you had to make. Looking back, do you feel you made that decision in a way that served the greater good or in a way that served your narrow self-interest? What happened? How did that feel?
- f. Think of a conflict you’ve experienced with someone. Looking back, do you feel you navigated that conflict on the basis of gut-level self-protection and self-interest or in a way consistent with the call of God on your life?
- g. What does it mean to live a “missional life?” How would you explain that concept to people? Do you feel you’re living a missional life? Why or why not?
- h. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre said, “You can’t know what to do unless you know what story you’re part of.” What do you think he means? What story do you see yourself as being part of? In other words, what’s the meta-narrative of your life?
- i. Jesus said, “Those who want to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it.” Mark 8:35. What does that mean?
- j. Look at the summary of the Three Greatest Temptations on p. 3. We’re all susceptible to all three. But which of the three is most challenging to you?

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." ' ⁷Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." ' '

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Life's Three Greatest Temptations

Matthew 4:1-11

1. The temptation to get so focused on our material wants and needs that we neglect our inner spirit and end up starving the eternal part of us.
2. The temptation to make our faith contingent on God blessing, protecting, and keeping us from all harm.
3. The temptation to devote my life to my narrow self-interests (the Kingdom of Me), instead the greater good (the Kingdom of God).