

+ Luke 4:1-13 + A Time for Giving Up Materialism + 1st Sunday in Lent + 17 February 2013 +

Wouldn't it be nice if superheroes were real? Every time you get into trouble, the superhero swoops in and saves the day. An asteroid threatens the earth and the superhero deflects it back into space. A violent villain threatens a city and the superhero defeats him. A loved one is trapped in a burning building. The superhero not only puts out the fire, but also rescues your loved one without a scratch. It would be nice if superheroes were real.

...But have you ever noticed that every superhero has a fatal flaw that could ruin him or her forever? Superman comes into contact with kryptonite from his home planet and he becomes a mere mortal. Spiderman can't always get away. Ironman's armored suit can be damaged, and Batman holds deep, dark secrets. Villains always try to use these flaws to destroy their superhero enemies, but good always seems to win out. Sometimes it takes an earth-shaking showdown or some crisis that threatens to destroy the world, but in the end, the superhero almost always saves the day.

You and I actually have a superhero of sorts. He has super powers, but usually chooses to keep them hidden. He doesn't have titanium alloy body armor or a bulletproof shield. In fact, he allows himself to be quite vulnerable—enduring hunger and thirst and pain and suffering, but he does have a weapon more powerful than that of any other superhero—the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. That sword cuts and kills, yet heals and brings to life. With that Word, Jesus proves himself to be the greatest superhero of all as he takes on his archenemy Satan.

While Jesus walked this earth, Satan was always looking for the one fatal flaw that could bring down the Son of God. After all, the devil has been horribly successful in exploiting the fatal flaws of every other human being going all the way back to our first parents. **“Did God really say...?”** (Genesis 3:1) Page through Holy Scripture and you'll notice that every hero of faith failed or fell when Satan took advantage of his or her fatal weakness, whether it was Abraham's cowardice, David's lust, Peter's overconfidence, or Thomas's doubt. So when the Son of God arrived as an infant to destroy Satan's power forever, Satan did everything he could to find a flaw.

It wasn't long before Satan had his opportunity to take a crack at Jesus. About three years before the final showdown, the Holy Spirit led Jesus out into the desolate wilderness of Judea to test him. **“...For forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days...”** Luke doesn't tell us how Satan tempted Jesus during those forty days, but Jesus fended off every attack. Whatever kind of temptation it was, after forty days Satan thought he finally had an opening. You see, Jesus had eaten **“nothing during those days, and...he was hungry.”**

Could this be the fatal flaw? Could Satan get Jesus to doubt God's fatherly care and ability to provide for him in a moment of weakness? After all, Jesus had been all alone for those forty days and he was very hungry. Could Satan get Jesus to misuse his divine power to feed his face? Could he get Jesus to focus on his own wants and make Jesus think they were needs? Satan knew he had to try, because nothing else was working.

“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” All Jesus had to do was say the word and that round stone on the ground would become a plump loaf of bread. Satan wanted Jesus to think that after all those days of struggle and hunger, he could finally do a little something for himself. To make it a little more tempting, Satan challenged Jesus with an **“if”**, “...if you're the Son of God”, “...if you're God's chosen Savior”.

Would Jesus give in to selfish desire? Would he actually doubt his heavenly Father's care and ability to provide? Would he foolishly try to prove Satan wrong? For any typical human being weary and hungry after forty days without eating, that temptation would probably be too much. After all, it's a sin that often causes you and I to fall without anywhere near that much struggle. When a problem or difficulty arises in your life, how often don't you selfishly jump at the quick fix that will make you feel better for a little while, but never actually fixes the problem? How often don't you and I live and act as if God is either incapable of helping or won't? How often don't we fail to see that God can transform even the worst trouble into blessing?

So what did Jesus do? Our Superhero saw this subtle attack for what it really was—an attempt to get him to doubt God's fatherly care. In a moment Jesus had the sword of the Spirit fending off the attack. **“It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”** (Matthew 4:4) Rather than focus on the short-term bread fix, Jesus focused on the One who provides that bread. Selfishly satisfying his earthly needs would not only express doubt in God's ability to provide, but would completely ruin Jesus' mission to save us. Instead Jesus won. Satan failed.

Satan ramped up the attack and took Jesus to the top of a high mountain. There he **“showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world”**. There Satan took that selfish bread temptation to a whole new level when he promised power over all the kingdoms of the earth. **“I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.”** Oh, think of what Jesus could do if he had all that power and wealth!

Because doubt didn't work, Satan hoped that materialism—love of the world, love for wealth and possessions and power—would cause Jesus to fall. Yes, Jesus was the Son of God. He was the Ruler of all things, but at that moment, Jesus was in a pretty rough spot. He was traveling the long, hard road from cradle to cross. He would endure suffering and poverty and hardship and rejection. Pain and grief waited for him along with three sharp spikes, a crown of thorns, and a heavy, wooden cross. Satan offered him comfort and glory and power and ease.

Jesus could have it all! He could rule the world, but there was a catch. Again, Satan threw out one of those tricky **"ifs"**, except this time it wasn't a challenge to Jesus. Instead it was a single string attached to Satan's promise. All Jesus had to do was worship Satan and it could all be his.

This particular temptation is one of Satan's favorites among 21st century Americans. Love money? Who doesn't want more money? Who doesn't enjoy a little power? Who doesn't love getting new stuff or a little glory?

You and I live in a culture of discontent. You're not supposed to be content with anything, whether that's the money you earn, the job you have, the cars and toys you buy, the clothes you wear, the technology you use, the place you live, or the people you're with. When commercials and ads and sales promise the world, if you just sign the dotted line, it sounds awfully similar to what Satan promised Jesus, doesn't it? While there's nothing wrong with money or possessions, there is something inherently wrong with loving those things that rob you of contentment and leave you thirsting for that next new-stuff fix. After a while, we soon find ourselves replacing God with earthly things like money and stuff. Soon that ill-placed love loses eternity with God.

So how does the Son of God respond? Does he stumble into the depths of materialistic love for stuff like you and me? No. Jesus knew that Satan's promises were simply empty lies, because Jesus has been and always be the Lord of heaven and earth who possesses all things. So Jesus pulled out the sword of the Spirit once again. ***"It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*** As great as wealth and power and stuff might be, they are never worth sacrificing your eternal soul at Satan's altar so you can get more of them. Only one Being in the entire universe deserves our worship and honor and praise—the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and only God can provide true, lasting contentment for your soul. Again Jesus won. Satan failed.

Satan made one more attempt to find Jesus' fatal flaw. He took Jesus up to the top of the highest point of the temple overlooking a 400 foot drop to the Kidron Valley below. Maybe if he twisted God's Word this time, he could get Jesus to fall...literally. ***"If you are the Son of God...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.'"*** What a glorious, public proof Jesus could make if he were able to miraculously fly down from the top of the temple! Everyone would know he was the Son of God, but in reality, Jesus would be testing God in an unnecessary and dangerous way.

One more time the Son of God unleashed the sword of the Spirit. ***"It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*** Once again Satan failed and he would keep on failing, even as he slinked off to wait for ***"an opportune time"*** to make Jesus fall. This episode was just the first battle in a war that would end in a final showdown between Christ and Satan at the cross. Even as the Son of God bowed his head in death, Satan still failed, because by his death, Jesus could claim the ultimate victory over Satan and sin. His empty tomb three days later proved his victory to be complete.

Although he couldn't defeat Jesus, Satan still attacks you and me with wave after wave of sin. Those temptations he sent against Jesus sound awfully familiar to you and me. Yet with Jesus' victory in the wilderness and his final victory on the cross you can put off the attitudes and actions of your sinful nature. You don't need to hold onto that nasty, awful pile of materialism and greed, but instead leave it at the cross completely confident that Jesus frees you from that sin and removes your guilt forever.

That, my friends, is a real superhero. Unlike the superheroes of the movies and comics, Jesus has no fatal flaw. Satan could never find it and never will, because it's just not there. Jesus was tempted, but never sinned. Now Jesus helps you to see money and possessions as gifts from God's hand of grace—gifts you put into his service. He changes your life and how you view what God gives you. In the meantime, Jesus keeps fighting the materialism that plagues you every day. This Lent leave those deadly sins at the cross and find forgiveness and rescue in your Hero of heroes—Jesus Christ! Amen.