



JESUS: Sovereign

Matthew 4:1-11

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It is my understanding that you have been in a sermon series, “Jesus: Man, Myth, or Legend” and today, we are focused on Jesus as Sovereign. How appropriate to look at Jesus in this way on this day, a day on our liturgical calendar called Christ the King Day. This Sunday marks the end of our liturgical year and the end of the season of Pentecost, as next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of our liturgical year. How appropriate is it then, for us to be talking about Jesus as Sovereign? To end the liturgical year talking about Christ as King? Well, think about it, where does Advent take us - to see the newborn King!

I know it may feel awkward to do so, since we most often ascribe Sovereignty to God, more so than to Jesus, but Jesus said it himself, “I and my father are one” (John 10:30). So, let us go back to our gospel lesson found in Matthew 4.

No doubt this text is one that is familiar to many. I don’t know about you, but I have heard many a sermon and attended many a bible study on this passage that in some bibles titles this text as, *The Temptation of Jesus*. The focus of all the sermons and texts I heard was always the temptations themselves and the interpretation of them, so that a parallel could be made between the temptations that Jesus faced and those we faced, so we might learn from Jesus how we should respond to temptation. From that perspective, this text would qualify as a perfect example of What Would Jesus Do?

And I will readily admit that preaching from familiar passages of scripture is harder than preaching from unfamiliar ones. Here’s why - because we are human, the minute we hear something familiar our brain says, “oh, I know that scripture” and so immediately we stop paying attention. You can almost hear the clicking of the brains turning off when reading familiar passages of scripture. The challenge then becomes, how do we allow revelatory nature of the text to inspire us again. How do we embrace the revelation of the Word, which means every time we read it we should see or hear something new, and allow that newness to inspire us to live better lives as Christians and as Disciples of Jesus Christ? That is my challenge and you can tell me later how I did!

In verse three of this passage the tempter says, “If you are the Son of God...” The devil doesn’t even know it, but he’s already played his hand. See, why would the devil say, “if you are...” if the devil didn’t think Jesus was. The devil wanted Jesus to prove who He was, not convince Him. See, when I was in College, Go Hokies!, I had nickname, so if anyone says to me to they know me from college and I didn’t recognize them, the first think I would ask is, what was my nickname. But I wouldn’t if I didn’t expect you to know it. I am looking for that person to prove

they knew me at Virginia Tech, not to convince me, I have already been convinced and have given them the benefit of the doubt, because they said they knew me.

The devil knew exactly who Jesus was, so he did not need convincing, instead he wanted Jesus to prove it. And so, to provoke Jesus to prove it, he tempts Jesus three times. Three times the tempter gives Jesus a task, and three times, Jesus responds in word and not in action. Three times Jesus recites scripture but does nothing.

When you go back and read this passage of scripture you will notice that this passage in chapter 4 comes right on the heels of Jesus being baptized at the end of chapter 3, where Jesus publicly assumes His rightful place in the Trinity. It is there that God the Father speaks, God the Son is baptized, and God the Holy Spirit descends. Jesus, in that moment of baptism, is filled with the Holy Spirit and with power from on high, and then enters the wilderness to be tempted.

But let us be clear, the Jesus that goes into the wilderness is not Mary and Joseph's boy. This is Jesus, the Son of God, Jesus, the sovereign, Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Colossians 1: 15-19 reminds of this when it says,

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

And because Jesus is Sovereign, Jesus could have done anything He wanted to the tempter, even in his humanly weakened state, but instead Jesus quotes scripture but does nothing. But that's not what people with power are supposed to do. Those who have power are supposed to let others know they have power by wielding the power. And it really is no consequence if the wielding is helpful or hurtful. Letting others see how powerful someone is how they become known as powerful. So why does Jesus, who is all powerful and the right hand of God do nothing? Jesus quotes scripture but He does not act. But let's be honest, wouldn't you like to see Jesus go all Avengers on the tempter, like The Hulk did on Loki in the first Avengers.

Jesus speaks because Jesus' power is not in his actions, it was in understanding His purpose and mission. What purpose and mission, you ask? Simply put, the salvation of the world. John 3: 17 says *"so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have everlasting life"* (NRSV). If Jesus let the tempter deter him from His purpose and mission, then the world would be lost. By choosing to do nothing in the moment, so that Jesus could do everything for eternity, now that's power! That's what a Sovereign Jesus does. As sovereign Jesus doesn't get distracted and stuck on making it all out Him. Instead He stays focused on His purpose and mission, which is all about the world.

So, what then can we take away from this new lens into this text? I am so glad you asked. Let me answer by asking you, are we the church, on purpose and mission, or have we gotten

distracted by ourselves and forgotten not only our purpose but our mission? Are our missional actions in the world today evidence of how we want to be in the world, or of how the world needs us to be? How about us as Christians and disciples? Are we focused on God's purpose for our lives, or have we chosen to carve our own purpose because it's more interesting and fun? Is our mission to save the world or save the church? Have we been wielding our own power to get what we want, or wielding the power of the Holy Spirit to do what God wants? Can we reflect and be honest and say, maybe we have gotten distracted? Do we need to go back to the scriptures and be reminded again of our God given purpose and mission?

But here's the good news, Jesus is Sovereign. Jesus did love us so much that He gave His very life for us. He did promise that we too, would have the power of the Holy Spirit so that we could do what God calls us to do, in this present age, to fulfill God's purpose and mission. Now when you go back and read this passage of scripture, see the temptations of Jesus as not just a model for how to respond when we are tempted or distracted. But also see them as a model for how not to respond. Let us be reminded that our work here is not done. Jesus is still waiting for the church to get rid of its spots and wrinkles, so He can return for those whom He loves. Jesus is Sovereign and all powerful. And Jesus is love, and Jesus is joy and Jesus is hope and Jesus is peace. If you don't believe me, I encourage you to come back the next four Sundays and prepare to meet the newborn King.