

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 6 November

Children's Talk: To Gain the Whole World

What would make it nice to be the king of a great kingdom?

Jesus was given this chance to be the king not just of one kingdom, but of all the kingdoms of the world:

Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." (Luke 4:5-7)

What was the problem? The Problem is that it was the devil offering the Lord the kingdoms, and he would only do it if the Lord worshipped him. The Lord of course did not worship the devil:

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (Luke 4:8)

To make that choice the Lord had to give up all those kingdoms that He could have ruled over.

That must have been hard. It is hard when we realize we could be in charge or have things the way we want, but to get it we would have to do something wrong. It may even seem worth it, but it never is. It is always worth it to do the right things.

Tempted in the Wilderness, Part 2: Twisting the Truth

A sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn
6 November, 2022

We are in the midst of a series on temptations, the spiritual battles that we face. We are using the Lord's three temptations in the wilderness as our guide. Last week we looked at the temptation to turn stones into bread, which represented the temptation to give up on what is truly important in life for the sake of mere pleasure. This week we turn to the second of the Lord's temptation: the temptation to worship Satan in exchange for power and glory. This temptation speaks to the times in our lives when we are inclined to bend or twist the rules to meet our own needs.

The Devil tried to entice Jesus with a view of all the kingdoms of the world and the promise that he could deliver them into Jesus' hands:

Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." (Luke 4:5-7)

There are really two things that the devil is promising here: both the authority over and the glory from the kingdoms of the world. This promise taps into our innate love for the things of the world. We all have some desire to have worldly influence and likewise to enjoy the delight of having material things.

Now we don't have the world laid out at our feet free for the taking as Jesus did; but there is a corresponding desire within us that can grasp for worldly things and craves worldly authority over things. We see it in the mind-set that says, "If only I were in charge..." Wouldn't the world be a much better place if all the rules bent towards our will? The speed limit would be the speed that we needed to drive that day; work would start at the exact time when we want to get up; what counts as "polite" would perfectly match our particular personality; the cost of living would of

course be in line with the lifestyle we wanted and our salary would permit. And so on and so forth. Life would be simple yet comfortable; if only it all accorded with our rules and way of doing things.

Of course, at the end of the day what we mean by “the world” is “other people.” If only other people would abide by our rules. This is especially where we see how the love of worldly things conflicts with a love for the neighbour, which it inevitably will do. The Teachings of the New Church lay out this conflict as being at the heart of the love of the world:

Love of the world reigns with a person however, that is, a person is immersed in love of the world, when in what he thinks and does he looks for and is intent only on making gain, with no concern at all about whether it may do harm to the neighbour or to the public. (*Secrets of Heaven* §7373)

It's not that love of the world is in itself a bad thing; it's what it costs that makes it bad. We see this in the case of Jesus' temptation: in order to theoretically receive all that worldly power, the cost was simply to worship the devil. The same offer is on the table, or appears to be, for us: simply listen to the voice of hell, disregard the well-being of our neighbours, and we too would have an immense amount of authority over worldly things.

At some point this desire rises above just wanting to be in charge of how the world works on a material level and becomes a desire to be in charge of how the world works spiritually. This is where at last we come to the idea of twisting the truth. We could think of the truth as simply being the rules of the Lord's Kingdom. But what would become of the truth if we were given authority over the Lord's Kingdom? What truths, or rules, would we put in place? This stage is when we start trying to bend the rules to fit with what we want for ourselves, and especially when we feel entitled to do things our own way. Doing the right thing is hard, so maybe I don't actually have to do the right thing; the Lord does want me to be happy after all. Or we justify our

bad behaviour: I know for a fact that they aren't the nicest person, so it's alright if I am not nice to them. We want to take the truth to make it fit with how we want things to go.

As in all of His temptations Jesus responded to the Devil with a quote from the Word, as well as a stern rebuke:

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (Luke 4:8)

We are servants to the Lord. We do not get to make the rules. We are not the ones who get to decide when to be kind and when not to. We do not get to decide when the truth applies and when it does not. We are not the ones who get to decide when evil is justified. We are here to serve the Lord. That means letting Him be king. We let the Lord be king in our lives when we persevere in doing what is right, even when it seems that it will not bring us any gain. When we struggle it is so hard to be content with the Lord's leadership: we think we could do a much better job.

Jesus told a parable that shows an uncomfortable attitude, one that is not pleasant, I think to most of us who have been raised to be individualistic and independent. It has to do with the attitudes of servants towards their master:

And which of you, having a servant ploughing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, "Come at once and sit down to eat"? But will he not rather say to him, "Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and minister to me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink"? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do." (Luke 17:7-10)

The attitude shown by the servants appears demeaning here, and puts the master in an arrogant light. But the message still holds true: we are to serve the Lord. We do not earn the right to lay off the rules for a while because we've been doing so much

that is good, nor do we get to make our own rules as a reward for keeping the Lord's. The Lord sets the rules, period.

This point of view does not mean we must be perfect at all times. Far from it; the Lord is intimately aware of our failings and shortcomings. Rather it removes the excuses and justifications that stem from a sense of entitlement to break the Lord's rules. I know that when I have been trying my best, and am struggling, and I see someone getting away with less than ideal conduct, I lower my standards to be just above theirs; as if somehow I am entitled to do the bare minimum as long as I maintain some kind of superiority. The Lord's standards are not, however, relative. They are not relative to how well others are keeping them, nor are they relative to how well we have been doing them of late.

If we struggle with this attitude we might find comfort in the fact that all of the Lord's rules exist because He loves us. It is actually a real joy that He is in charge, that we are not, and that we have the chance to serve Him. We don't have to figure out what all the rules should be. The Lord takes up that burden. Imagine the person contemplating stealing: the weighing up of all the options, the justifications placed against the downsides, the pros and cons, the desire fighting against his conscience, is horribly stressful. Imagine that same man, faced with the opportunity to steal, simply rejecting it out of hand and moving on. When we let the Lord be in charge life is much simpler.

In addition, serving the Lord is the source of joy. We are blessed with the opportunity to make a difference for other people, to actually make their lives better, to touch them in ways that bring gratitude and delight. Service to the Lord is not a chore to be finished and forgotten. It is in itself a privilege. It is better to be a servant in the house of the Lord than a king over a kingdom of selfish love (cf. Psalm 84:10).

At the end of the day the idea that we could gain the world if only we served hell is in itself false, a mere hollow illusion. The authority, influence, peace of mind, contentment, and so on that we look for in worldly things cannot be found in the world. These can only be found in the Lord's kingdom, and they are found when we live according to His spiritual laws. In short the devil's offer was a scam: he had no authority to offer the kingdoms of the worlds. They belonged to God already, at least to the extent that there was anything worthwhile in them. As we turn our lives over to the Lord this reality can come to the fore; and the worldly things we seek will be placed in His service, as they were intended from creation. This is the fulfilment of a prophecy that the kingdoms of the world would one day again become the Lord's; which is explained in the Teachings of the New Church:

And there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of the world are become our Lord's and His Christ's and He shall reign for ages of ages, signifies celebrations by the angels, because heaven and the church are become the Lord's, as they were from the beginning. (*Apocalypse Revealed* §520)

We can do our part by worshipping the Lord our God, and serving only Him.

Amen.