

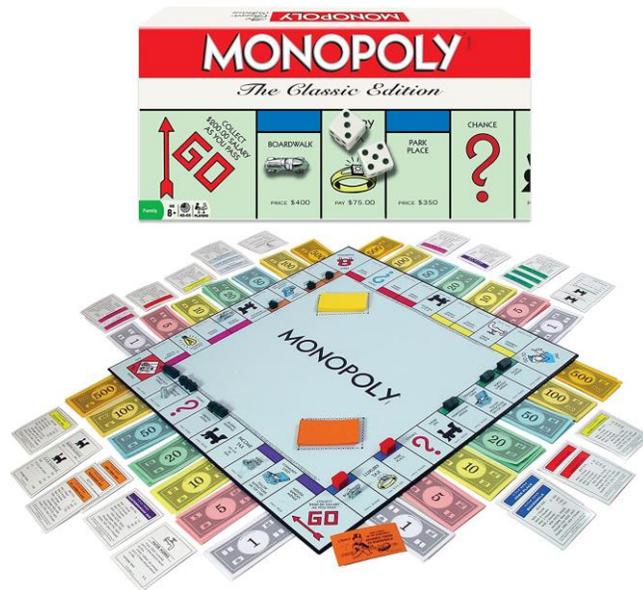
## Lenten Series: “Don’t Deal With the Devil”

Matt 4:1-11

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There’s a really fun board game that we like to play at home called Monopoly. (Just to let you know, I used to have a real estate license and I also have a degree in Business, which is kind of my way of saying: *“I’m really good at this game!”*)

Monopoly is a really fun game to play and those of you who have played it before know what I mean, but if you haven’t played it before, the goal of the game is to move around the board and to buy up properties so you can build houses and hotels on them so when other people land on your property - they have to pay you rent. It’s a great capitalist game and has caused quite a few heated arguments in my family, and so sad to say, we don’t play it as often as we did before.

Well for those of you who play the game, I’d like to share my strategy. I try to buy as much property as I can as early as I can, and it doesn’t matter what color they are. Because the sooner you own property - the sooner you can build houses and that’s how you win the game. I don’t know anyone who has ever won who didn’t own property, houses or hotels, so the buy up as many properties as soon as the game begins. (Aren’t you glad you’re reading this - to get monopoly tips today?)

Well, let's pretend that at the start of the game - before anyone rolled the dice, let's pretend that I offered you all the property cards. And not just the property cards, but all the houses and hotels too. And not just the houses and hotels, but also all the cash that was in the bank?

What if I offered to you all the things I just mentioned even before the game started? Well, you would be the "Master of the Game" and guaranteed the winner and no one would be able to challenge you.

This is exactly what Jesus was offered in our Bible passage for today.

All the property cards. All the real estate. All the houses and hotels, as well as all the money in the bank, if only He would do just one thing, which is what we're going to look at.

The third Temptation. Matt. 4:1-11.
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*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.*

*The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered: "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

*Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"*

*Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended to him.*

A few observations about the third temptation.

The third temptation that Jesus faced when He came out of the desert wilderness, was the offer of *“all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor”* if only He would bend His knee to the devil and worship him.

The devil was offering Jesus all the property cards,  
*Boardwalk and Park Place all the way down to Baltic Ave and Mediterranean Ave,*

The devil was offering Jesus all the railroads,  
*Reading Railroad, Pennsylvania, B & O and Shortline*

as well as all the utilities;  
*Waterworks and Electric Co.*

In other words, the devil was offering Jesus the power to control the board, only for Jesus - this wasn't a board game, it was the temptation to rule the world.

The Location.

Matt. 4:8 tells us that the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world.

In Luke's gospel, it's worded a little bit differently. In Luke 4:5 it says  
*“The devil led [Jesus] up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, “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.”*

Neither gospel Matt or Luke tells us the exact location, but from that vantage point - they were able to see all the kingdoms of the world.

All the snow-capped mountains - as far as the eye could see.  
All the lakes and rivers below - teeming with fish and wildlife.

The forests of Lebanon which produced the best lumber,  
the fields of Babylon that yielded the finest silk,

the storehouses of Egypt - the trade routes along the Mediterranean Sea,  
and then there was the capital of Rome and the throne of Caesar.

All authority! All dominions! And all the riches of the world - the devil was offering to Jesus, if He would do just one thing and that was to bend the knee to the devil.

Of all the temptations that the devil presented to Jesus, it was the third one that was probably the hardest one to refuse, because this would have changed the game, at least from a human perspective.

The third temptation was very different than the first two temptations.

If you recall from previous weeks, we said that the first temptation (which was turning stones into bread) had to do with a “physical hunger.” The fact that Jesus hadn’t had anything to eat for the past 40 days only made it worse, but to that temptation Jesus responded with a quote from the book of Deuteronomy:

*“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”*

The second temptation which we looked at last week, had to do with jumping off the temple and asking God to rescue Him and the way we talked about the second temptation was that this was about a “social hunger.” To do something “spectacular”, in front of the world watching below - and the fact that Jesus hadn’t had any social contact with the rest of the world for 40 days, well that would have been an amazing way to come back from a “social fast.” But again Jesus replied with a quote from the book of Deuteronomy:

*“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”*

In both of those temptations, what stands out about them is that the devil presented them both by starting with the words: *“If you are the Son of God.”*

*If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.*

*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.*

In other words, the devil tempted Jesus to “prove” He was the Son of God by performing a little miracle but here in the third temptation, the devil didn’t use that phrase. In fact, in the third temptation, the devil made no mention of God anywhere in the temptation.

Listen to the third temptation again.

*“Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. All this I will give you, he said, “If you will bow down and worship me.”*

The devil doesn't mention God anywhere in the temptation.

He doesn't mention the part about being the “Son of God.” He doesn't mention anything about Jesus' relationship with God. It's almost as if the third temptation, has nothing to do with God, as if the devil is trying to get Jesus to forget all about their relationship.

THAT'S WHAT THIS TEMPTATION IS ABOUT. It's about leaving God out of the conversation and taking God out of the story.

Now, the traditional understanding of the third temptation is that it was about wealth and riches and power. (And it was.)

This was very different than the first two temptations because in the third temptation, the devil was actually offering something “tangible” and putting it – in front of Jesus.

But underneath the surface of this temptation, there was something else going on: what the devil was trying to do was to take God out of the picture and to get Jesus to forget about God by offering this shiny distraction.

*The New Jersey Lottery.*

Back when I was a seminary student (this was in the early 90's,) there was this one time when the prize money for the New Jersey lottery grew to an obscene amount! It was in the 100's of millions of dollars and because no one picked the right numbers, it kept growing each week.

So there was this time when everyone had Lotto fever! People stood in long lines, and waited hours just to buy a ticket, co-workers were pooling their money to increase their odds and families were spending their rent money in the hopes of winning big! It was on the news. It was on the radio. Everyone was talking about it.

Anyways, one night at the dining hall while all of this was going on, a group of us “poor starving seminarians” sat down for evening dinner. And at the dinner table after someone offered up a prayer, one of my colleagues started talking about the lottery and told us the current prize amount, then just for fun, he asked everyone at the table, *“If you won the lottery, how would you spend the money?”*

First off, I have to confess that it was a strange thing for seminarians to be talking about at dinner - we should have been talking theology or discussing doctrines, but seminarians are people too and this was harmless dinner conversation.

So one by one, my classmates started to share what they would do if they won. One person said he would pay off all his student debts and then he buy a house for his parents as well as houses for every member of his family.

Another person said she would go on vacation and travel the world over, visiting every country and experiencing every culture.

A few more chimed in and said they would buy mansions and yachts, airplanes and islands, some were even philanthropic and said they would build hospitals, school and libraries and set up scholarship too.

There was all kinds of responses at the table with what we would do if we won the lottery, from the practical - like paying off student debts, to the flamboyant - like buying an entire island.

But If I recall... what I don't remember anyone saying what they would do if they won the lottery was, **finishing their studies, graduating from seminary, passing our ordination exams, getting called to a church, and preaching the Gospel!**

Now you know why I don't play the lottery! It's not because I think it's a waste of money, but rather I'm afraid of actually winning, because if I won the lottery- you'd never see me ever again!

The devil's temptation.
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That's what was behind the temptation that the devil presented to Jesus.

It was the temptation to establish a different kind of kingdom than the one God wanted to establish. It was the temptation to pay off a different kind of debt – a debt that was owed to Caesar and not the one we owed to God.

But underneath this temptation, what the devil was really trying to do was, he was trying to distract Jesus to look away from God and be so engrossed with all the things He could do with unlimited resources, that He would forget about His divine purpose, that He would walk away from the plans that God had for Him, and ultimately to choose a different path than the one that led to the Cross.

In other words, to erase God out of the picture and to take God out of the story.

Jesus' response.
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So how did Jesus respond? He said in Matt 4:10,

*“Away from me, Satan! “For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”*

Jesus quoted another passage from the book of Deuteronomy and it was a reference to when Aaron and the Israelites made a golden calf and worshiped it instead of God.

The Israelites spiritually replaced God with an idol and started to worship it instead, and they put their trust in a golden statue instead of trusting in God. They even said to themselves, *“These are your god’s, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”*

Then they bowed to the golden calf and they started to worship the golden calf, trading allegiance and loyalty to something else other than God.

But Jesus resisted where the Israelites could not and by saying to the devil:

*“Worship the Lord your God and serve him only,”* that was Jesus' way of putting the focus back on God and bringing God back into the story.

Back when Abby was still in Elementary School, we signed her up to play Soccer AYSO. (Did you know that AYSO started in Torrance, CA back in 1964?)

Anyways, we signed her up for soccer just like many of her friends and it was a whole lot of fun! She had practices on weekdays after school then she had games on Saturday mornings at Columbia Park.

For a few years that was the schedule and as a “soccer dad”, I tried to go to all the practices as well as all the games. In fact, I would record every game and we would watch them as soon as we got home. Of course, with me pointing out every little detail and how she could have played better.

Well, towards the end of her last season, one of the soccer coaches from another team approached me and my wife to talk about our daughter. Turns out that - that coach was the coach of a “select team” made up of the best players and he wanted Abby to join the team!

So now I was thinking - maybe Abby has a future in soccer! Maybe this is her destiny her purpose in life - forget being a doctor! Maybe she’s supposed to play soccer and join the American Team and go on to the Olympics and win the gold medal!

So the coach told us what it would take to join this very elite “select team.” There would be long hours of practice held on weekdays after school. Then there would be travelling to other cities where the games would be played. And if we were really good, we could play in tournaments that were even “out of state!”

Well all of this sounded great and we were ready to sign her up, but when we asked what days that the games were played, the coach told us they would on Sundays.

So there was our little dilemma. We were excited about the possibility of our daughter joining a “select team,” but the idea of travelling on Sundays would have been a conflict. So my wife and I decided we could try to work something out, and told the coach we’ll think about it.

Well, later that day when we all got home, we sat down with Abby to tell her about the invitation and you should have seen her - she was so excited to be asked to be a part of this “select team.”

But when we told her that the game were played on Sundays, this is what she said: *“But I have church on Sundays. I can’t miss church!”* and for that reason alone, she turned down the invitation.

So now I have to settle for a daughter who wants to be a doctor.  
Could you believe a 10 year old - saying what she said?

Friends, as you go into this 4<sup>th</sup> week in the Season of Lent, keep God in the conversation and keep the story on God. Don’t let the distractions of the world drown out the voice of God. Don’t let the noise of the world keep you from hearing the voice of God and no matter what the devil dangles before you - keep your eyes and your focus always on Jesus!