

Series: Mark — Summer 2020 Series

Title: “Fighting Temptation”

Text: Mark 1:12-13

Date: June 7, 2020

Verse 12

In verse twelve, Mark transitions to talk about the temptation of Jesus. This same event is also recorded in Matthew 4:1-11. In our text, Mark says, “Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness.” The word translated “immediately” is the same action-oriented word that Mark used back in verse ten. It means “at once.” Our author used it strategically in order to tie our current event to our previous one (verses 9-11).¹ He meant to demonstrate the relationship between the baptism of Jesus and the temptation of Jesus. Through both happenings, our Lord accomplished a great work on our behalf. He demonstrated that His ministry was focused on dealing a deathblow to sin.

Interestingly, “the Spirit” instigated Jesus’ encounter with temptation. The same Spirit that descended upon Him at His baptism (Mark 1:10) now led Him into the desert to be tempted by Satan. It may seem strange that the Spirit would be behind our Lord’s temptation. Could one person of the Trinity coax another to sin? Such is hardly the case. The Spirit initiated our Lord’s temptation because He knew the event would be a means of proving Jesus’ sinlessness.

In both the baptism and temptation of Jesus, the Third Person of the Trinity presented Jesus as the sinless Son of God who would serve as a substitute for sin. In descending upon Him at His baptism, the Spirit anointed Jesus for His Messianic Ministry. In isolating Jesus in the wilderness, the Spirit tested His worthiness to be an atoning sacrifice. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness so that Jesus could show His power over sin. By triumphing over temptation, our Lord proved that He was a sufficient means of salvation for sinners.

The word translated “drove” in our text is a strong word in the original language. It is a compound word (ekballō) that literally means “to throw out.” It will later be used in Mark’s Gospel to speak of Jesus casting out demons (Mark 1:34 and 39). It could be translated “to thrust out”² or “to drive out.”³ The Spirit took such drastic action because of the important implications behind Jesus’ temptation. It was of utmost necessity that He do battle with the Devil. He was not called to live a life of moral ease. He had to stare down Satan and sin. If He hadn’t have done so, He wouldn’t have been an efficacious sacrifice for us. Our Lord was thrown out into the wilderness so that He could overcome Satan and sin, proving Himself to be a viable substitute for sinful humanity. The author of Hebrews has said, “Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in

¹ Lane, 59.

² Edwards, 39.

³ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 68.

matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:17-18).

The “wilderness” was regarded as a place of testing for God’s people. According to the Torah, it was the locale where the Lord tried the obedience of His children. Deuteronomy 8:2 said, “Remember that the Lord your God led you on the entire journey these forty years in the wilderness, so that he might humble you and test you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.” Before Israel could enter their inheritance and enjoy Canaan, they had to be proved. In similar fashion, Jesus had to be tested in regard to sin before He could vanquish our sin. We can only enjoy the spoils of our figurative Canaan (Hebrews 4:1-10) because Jesus overcame on our behalf in the wilderness.

Mark’s message reminds us that Jesus is our means of overcoming sin. Because He was victorious over temptation, we can be victorious too. Paul recognized this reality. When he felt the weight of indwelling sin, he cried, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25). The author of Hebrews had a similar perspective. He proclaimed, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Get the meaning of Jesus’ wilderness temptation. He overcame sin on your behalf. Because of what He has done, you can overcome sin. You don’t have to live in bondage to a bad attitude. Your upbringing and conditioning doesn’t have to define you. Addiction doesn’t have to destroy your life. That secret sin that seems to have your number can be eliminated. You can change. By learning how to rely on Jesus for supernatural empowerment, you can overcome. To give up and accept defeat is to say that Jesus isn’t enough. Trust in what He has done on your behalf and learn how to draw life and power from Him!

Verse 13

Mark dives into more detail concerning Jesus’ temptation in verse thirteen. He says, “He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels were serving him” (Mark 1:13). Notice the locale and duration of time associated with Jesus’ temptation. In our commentary on Mark 1:12, we’ve already seen that the wilderness was associated with testing and proving. It is important to note that the duration of “forty days” had similar meaning. It was associated with the ministries of Moses and Elijah. All good Jews in Jesus’ day would have been aware of the way in which the wilderness was used to prove the seminal prophets of Israel (Deuteronomy 9:9-11 and 1 Kings 19:8).

The word translated “tempt” depicts “an actual solicitation to evil.”⁴ However, it can also include the idea of testing. One has said the act involves one “being probed and proved, often through hardship and adversity, in order to determine the extent of one’s worthiness to be entrusted with, or the degree of one’s loyalty or devotion, a given commission and its constraints.”⁵ Jesus’ jaunt into the desert was intended to prove his value as our sin substitute.

While in the wilderness, Jesus was directly tempted by “Satan.” The name is one that is used throughout Scripture of Lucifer, the fallen angel who hijacked God’s original intent for humanity (Isaiah 14 and Genesis 3:1-7). The title literally means “adversary.” It is a fitting moniker for the one who positions himself as the archenemy of both God and man. Peter describe our adversary, saying, “Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Satan is always busy trying to deceive humankind (2 Corinthians 4:4) and aiming to defame the righteous character of our God (Job 1:6-2:10).

Matthew’s Gospel likewise contains an account of Jesus’ temptation. His recounting of the episode is found in Matthew 4:1-11. In one sense, he provides more detail. He chronicles the way in which Jesus was enticed in regard to three different areas. Satan tempted our Lord in regard to fleshly desires (Matthew 4:3), egotistical desires (Matthew 4:6), and materialistic desires (Matthew 4:9). Each of these three broad categories form the basis of Satan’s age-old strategy. Since the beginning of time, he has sought to ensnare humans in regard to what John called “the lust of the flesh,” “the pride of life,” and “the lust of the eye” (1 John 2:16). He used such tactics in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:5-6), and he’s used them throughout human history. It is for this reason that the ancient kings of Israel were forbidden to accumulate extra wives, attain numerous horses, and obsess over gold (Deuteronomy 17:16-17).

Thousands of years later, our enemy’s schemes are still the same. He knows that men and women are suckers for pleasure, pride, and possessions. He is still using his old, worn-out tricks. He wants to steal your heart away from God, so he continually dangles the carrot of materialism, beckoning you to live for cars, cash, homes, and hobbies. He wants to blind you to spiritual realities, so he coaxes you to live for your reputation, the applaud of people, and the opinions of man. He wants to rob God of your praise, so he tries to convince you that forbidden pleasures related to food, sex, and rest are worthy of your affections. Be wise to the enemy’s tactics. When you recognize his bait and traps for what they are, you will be well on your way to overcoming temptation.

Mark includes a detail concerning Jesus’ temptation that is not recorded in Matthew’s account. He mentions how our Lord “was with the wild animals.” At night in the ancient Near East, wolves, boars, hyenas, jackals, and leopards were known to fill the wilderness around Judea.⁶ Mark’s mention of these animals evokes memories of Daniel’s

⁴ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 68.

⁵ Kuruvilla, 23.

⁶ Robertson, 255-256.

night-long stay in the lions' den (Daniel 6:1-24). Our Lord stayed in the desert for over a month and He was miraculously unharmed by ravenous carnivores! Why does Mark include this tidbit of information? It is important to note that such animals were flesh-devouring. They gained their hunger for meat at the fall. Killer animals are a result of the curse. In Jewish tradition, they were viewed as being a consequence of original sin.

What did Jesus accomplish by hanging out with wild animals during His wilderness temptation? The prophets give us a clue. They regularly foretold that the Messiah's work would reverse this particular aspect of the fall (Isaiah 11:6-9 and 35:9; Ezekiel 34:25; Hosea 2:18). Isaiah prophesied regarding Messiah's kingdom: "There will be no lion there, and no vicious beast will go up on it; they will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk on it" (Isaiah 11:9). By hanging out with the most dreaded of all animals, Jesus insinuated that He had come to make all things new. He proved that He had the power to reverse the effects of the curse.

Along with his mention of wild animals, Mark also speaks of how "the angels were serving" Jesus. Matthew makes mention of this same reality (Matthew 4:11). After forty days without food, and after an intense battle with Satan, Jesus undoubtedly needed some help. The human part of His nature needed food and assistance. Perhaps He was on the brink of blacking out. Quite likely, the angels of God supernaturally provided food to sustain Him. The original language of the text contains an imperfect tense verb, indicating that the angels ministered to Jesus for an extended period of time.⁷

If Christians want to overcome temptation, they must look to Jesus for strength. By setting their faith on Him, they can overcome. Satan's allurements and enticements are stronger when we don't have our eyes fixed on who Jesus is, what He has done, and how He is going to make all things new. When our perspective is fixed upon Him, His Spirit supernaturally empowers us to stand our ground against Satan's snares. If you want to have victory over a sin or a shortcoming, learn how to set your heart more and more upon Jesus.

⁷ Edwards, 42.