

Mark 1:12 Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. 13 And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him. (NKJV)

Last week we saw Mark's powerful introduction of Christ. He showed us that the validity of Christ was verified by 5 sources.

Now Mark doesn't waste any time. He moves ahead to Christ's temptation in the wilderness.

Before we go on, I'd like to point out that Mark spends very little ink on this event. Matthew and Luke go into a lot more detail. We will look at what they have to say to gain more understanding of this event. But a question should come into our minds right off the bat. Why did Mark say so little about this event?

When we read this, we have to remember that there is some **interpretation** involved in breaking passages into verses or paragraphs. Luke lumped the baptism of Christ and the temptation of Christ in a continuous flow, as if one was directly related to the other. I think that Mark wants us to understand that Jesus began his public ministry when He was baptized by John the Baptist. Immediately his life came front and center into the battle of spiritual forces. You can almost imagine the announcement at a boxing ring. The baptism of Christ and the Father's pronouncement from heaven is like saying, "In this corner, being the Son of God and well pleasing to His Father and filled with the Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ". And what was to follow shows who was in the other corner. It is as if John's baptism of Christ was the bell to begin the fight.

What follows is immediate action. I think that is how we are to understand it from the pen of Mark. The fight is on. The Devil will throw everything he has at this formidable opponent. And we will watch our champion, Jesus Christ, vanquish all the threats and overcome the enemy of our souls. Mark sets the scene for the rest of the story.

Now, let's look at what Mark says, and as time allows we will add in what Matthew and Luke say.

Mark 1:12 Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness.

Immediately- You almost get the idea Mark was an attention deficit kind of guy. He doesn't burden us with all the details. He is, for the most part, giving us the big picture. And it is fast moving. Mark uses the word immediately often.

Then Mark says the Spirit **drove** Christ into the wilderness. The other writers say Jesus was led by the Spirit. The word used by Matt and Luke means to lead up or to bring to a higher place. So the word seems to define more the **direction** that Christ was going led by the Holy Spirit. He was going up. Mark's word gives a different perspective on the same event. The word Mark uses means to drive out. It is used of Jesus driving out the sellers at the temple. It is also used of Jesus

casting out demons. The word Mark used treats this more like an expulsion than a leading. Given the context we can understand this better.

John the Baptist preached a good distance from the populace, but it was reachable by the traveler. Given the masses that travelled to see John, there were likely some stops on the way where they could get food and water. It was in the wilderness. But evidently not completely secluded so that the seekers could reach him with great effort. But look at where Christ was led. He was led into a place where it was only Him and the wild beasts. The wilderness he went into included no people. The Spirit led Christ to a place outside of the human society, outside the reaches of civilization. He was driven out of the company of humans to be tested by the devil.

Compare that to the ministry of John the Baptist. John the Baptist was preaching about **repenting of sin** and **preparing for Christ**. He was telling people what changes were needed. But **Jesus** came to do a job that was more formidable than John's. He came **to do business with evil in all its forms**. He came to take away the victory of death and the grave. It was as if **John was taking people as far as they could go** as humans exhibiting repentance, the hatred and mistrust of sin. The turning from it. But Christ was expelled further. He was going to a place **to do battle with the devil himself**. He was going to take away Devil's power. He was going to strike a death blow to the Devil's grip over God's people. I think this is what we are to understand by Mark's choice of words.

Now look at this again. No human was ever **better** at following the Holy Spirit's leading than Christ. That is a very safe assumption. So we can learn some things about the **Holy Spirit's leading** from this example.

There is a lot of religious hubbub out there about how following the Holy Spirit will lead us into health, wealth and everything positive. In fact, we find ourselves often praying for escape from difficult situations or help with difficult problems. And that is as it should be. We should cast our cares and anxieties upon Christ because He truly cares for us better than anyone else.

But what we learn from Christ's example is important.

What did the Holy Spirit lead Christ to?

The Spirit led Christ to

Complete isolation- Christ had no humans to lean on while going through this test. The Spirit also led Christ to 40 days of self deprivation- By going without food Christ was taking himself to the very borders of human weakness.

The Spirit also led Christ to the Temptation by the devil in the most major areas of human weakness. The temptation of the devil was going straight to the heart of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. That is what the bible describes as the three sources of temptation from within us.

Now think about this. It was God's will for this to happen to Christ. This wasn't an accident. This didn't happen to Christ by chance. God fully intended that this was the path that Christ would need to take. He was following the Holy Spirit's leading and this is where the Holy Spirit led.

Now we might wonder why? Why would God have done that to Christ? Why would he take him to the very edge of human weakness and then have the most powerful temptations of human existence presented to him in such a compelling way? I think we are given the answer to this:

Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession.

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (NKJV)

Christ's temptation was ultimately for our benefit. There is no surprise there. Really. What did Christ have to gain by being tempted? Was His success ever in question? Did he not know He would succeed? What did he gain personally by His success? Both He and His Father knew what the outcome would be. So Christ did not **become** something better by going through this turmoil. But His benefit to us increased dramatically.

We know 2 things because of his temptations that we would not have known otherwise.

1- He was truly without sin.

If Christ did not go through this, we might think that it all came easy to Christ. He was protected from real life. He had a cakewalk in his sandals. He just had a couple of years of hard times but he never dealt with real temptation. So this undoes the thought we may have that would say, "while he didn't sin, if He was in my shoes I'll bet he would fail. If he was in my situation, I'll bet He would succumb."

But once we see his interaction with the devil, we now know there was something fundamentally different with Christ. He truly did not have a sin nature. He had a weak flesh, but there was nothing in him that would bear bad fruit. The tree was fundamentally and thoroughly good. He was given appeals to the flesh that probably **none of us** could bear, they were powerful appeals. And his flesh would have strongly desired them. But there was no sin nature in Him. He had power over sin and sin did not have power over Him.

If ever a man was going to sin, he would have sinned here. In fact, this is the substance of all our sin wrapped into a three temptation sandwich. But Christ did not sin. Because He was without sin. It is not only that he did not commit the sins. He did not have sin in Him.

2- Through Christ's temptation we learned that He can truly sympathize with us. He truly knows how we feel. He knows what we go through.

Have you ever dealt with a Christian who is deciding to commit themselves to doing a wrong thing? What is one of the most common things that they say? **"But you don't know what it feels like."**

Because of Christ's temptation Christ can say, that is hogwash. I am your Savior and Lord. And I know exactly what it feels like. His temptation and his successful outcome takes away all of our excuses. If we have Christ in us, we **too** can say no to sin. We are no longer overcome by its power. The flesh may be weak but the Spirit of Resurrection living in us has great power.

And the beautiful thing, along with this fact, is the fact of what Christ went through gives us incentive to come to the throne of Christ and ask for mercy and grace.

And we are asking for it because it is something we need. And we are to come in the time of need. When we are tempted, we come to Him for grace to overcome.

If we fail, we come for mercy and grace for forgiveness and restoration. And we can do this because we know that Christ went through temptation.

So that is at least two of the reasons why Christ was led by the Spirit into one of the most difficult challenges of His life.

Now, what does that teach us?

Remember what we learned at church camp about Peter, and how God fully **intended** that Peter would be sifted. It was **God's will** that Peter would face the limitations of Peter. It was **God's will** that Peter would face this temptation and see himself for what he truly was. The Christian walk by the power of Peter had to end and the Christian walk by the power of Christ had to begin.

Well we can expect that the Holy Spirit will sometimes lead us in the same ways. The Spirit will sometimes lead us to very difficult circumstances. We are tempted to think that these circumstances have somehow eluded God's attention. But that cannot be. We are there for a purpose. Now we will not always know why. In Christ's case we are told. But in ours we often cannot know.

And what do we do when we reach the end of our understanding? We ask the question, "Why God?" And often we are given no answer. It is at that point we have a choice. We will gravitate in one of two directions. We will trust God and distrust self. Or we will trust self and mistrust God. "Why" is usually the question that comes before that fork in the road.

The right direction is to trust the character of God. The right direction is to, as Proverbs 3:5 says, **Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil.** (NKJV)

I think that often our **inability to understand** is a **greater test** than the **difficult circumstances we find ourselves in**. I think **if we understood**, if God **would share with us exactly why** he permitted some evil to befall us, if we **understood** why he did not heal an illness or protect from some harm, if He **would tell us** exactly how this situation was going to bear some great and necessary fruit for His kingdom, if we **understood all that**, I think we would have an easier time in our trials. But God does not often reveal those things while we are under trial.

What He **will reveal**, however, during those times are **His promises**. He will reveal what men of God wrote about Him and believed about Him. He will reveal that He is loving and kind. He will reveal that He has a purpose for our suffering and that none of it will be in vain. He will reveal that all things work out for the good of believers. And then we come back to the point, **will we trust Him?**

Make no mistake. When our thinking takes us in the direction that allows our challenges to God's character take ground, when we start thinking that we have a right to demand answers of God, when we think, if He does not immediately **snap to and produce answers for us** we will have a right to conclude wrong things, when we choose to enter any number of funks acting like our God really does not love us. When we go down that road, that is not some kind of honorable human honesty. It is choosing to trust flesh over God. It is choosing to disbelieve God's Word and to distrust God's character. There is nothing good about this.

Now I am not saying we **do not** or **should not** grieve. We will and should have any number of deep feelings for the consequences of all kinds of sin. They are sad, even devastating emotionally. But when the circumstances start to be used as evidence against God, there is nothing good to come out of that. It is a dog that doesn't hunt.

So I've said all that to say, sometimes the Holy Spirit leads us to a difficult job that needs done. Sometimes the Holy Spirit leads us to a place that is necessary **for** us, but not desirable **to** us. Sometimes it is God's will for us to face the evil in us-head on. When that happens we don't need to throw up our hands and say, I have lost God. We don't have to second guess our relationship with Christ. We don't have to think all is lost.

We can remember Christ and we can remember Peter. We can know that, yeah, though he leads me through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For his rod and his staff, they comfort me. We **aren't good sheep**, but we **have a good shepherd**. We can trust His **character** in taking care of us and His **purpose** in directing us.

Going on to verse 13 in our text

13 And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him. (NKJV)

The only thing that Mark tells us that Matt or Luke do not is that Christ was with the wild beasts. As I mentioned before, I think that is to paint the picture of just how isolated the wilderness was that Christ was expelled to.

It is important to note as well that the verb tense used in the phrase, “the angels ministered to Him” means that they were ministering to Christ the whole time.

And we find in our next passage that the Devil was also tempting Christ the whole time. We are only given three instances, but that is not all that Christ faced. He probably faced the worst spiritual boot camp in those 40 days that any human ever experienced. So much so that he needed angels in his corner after the bell rung at the end of every round.

Now let’s take a look at the details revealed by Matthew and Luke.

Luke 4:1 Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

Luke fills us in on something the others don’t tell us. The whole time Jesus was in the wilderness He was being tempted. So what that means is from the time Christ left His baptism until Satan left Him Christ was being tempted. Can you imagine what that would be like? We have some pity for Peter. It would have been hard to be sitting by the fire and questioned about his allegiances’ to Christ. Then we think of Job and horrible test that he faced. But all that is nothing compared to what Christ faced. He had 40 days of just Him and the devil. Can you imagine what a barrage of attacks Christ must have faced? Day after day of the Devil’s trickery. Do we still think Christ doesn’t know how it feels to be tempted? Some people make the point that after 40 days of fasting your health is teetering on the edge. You are not far from dying when you go that long without food. That was one serious fast. So when he reached the end of it he would have been frightfully hungry, dangerously hungry.

3 And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

Jesus was hungry. He actually **needed** food at this point. So all the devil is tempting Christ to do is to **use his resources to meet his own needs**. Somehow Christ knew that this was against what God had in store for Christ. So rather than use His power apart from the will and intention of His Father, Christ submitted. Isn’t this a place that we would be tempted to say, but God, you don’t know how I feel. You don’t know how powerfully I need that thing. But Christ did not do that. Christ trusted the character and plan of His Father. He trusted God to meet the need.

How often do we fail at this point? We become fixated on our own want, our own need, our own desperation, and we choose to meet it using a plan of our own making without consulting God or God's word. In fact, sometimes we go exactly against God's word to do so.

4 But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, '*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*' "

There is the heart of the matter. Submitting to God's word is where true life is. Staying physically alive is not the highest priority. Obeying God and living forever is the highest priority. And we can never allow our flesh to tell us otherwise.

There is a saying that God gives His best to those who leave the choosing to Him. I think there is a lot of truth in that. We should test and see that the Lord is good. Where are you tempted by your desperation to meet your need by picking a path that is not according to God's Word? You would do well to allow Christ's words to control you. The bread you are trying to get is not nearly as important as eternal life.

5 Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 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. 7 Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."

Compare what the **devil is offering Christ** against what **His Father had sent Him to do**. Christ knew this. He knew that if obeyed His Father he was going to suffer at the hands of these people. Imagine knowing that if you said the word, you would actually immediately have power over all those people.

And if you don't think the devil has some power to give, consider a story I just heard. When Stalin was living and ruling Russia someone painted a picture of him. It made him look larger and more robust than he really was. He was actually a short man and was self conscious of that fact. So he had this painter repaint all of the portraits that were previously painted of him and he had all the previous paintings destroyed and all the previous painters killed. The devil obviously has some pick in those who sit in seats of power. He is a dog on a short leash. God is still in control. But when the devil chooses, he prefers those who are like him. Now Christ is being offered a much easier path than what His Father offered Him. Don't think that this was not a temptation.

Also notice that what the devil offers is very seductive. It is often much more pleasurable in the short run than what God offers. Sex is probably the most glaring example. The devil offers it when you want it with whoever you want it. It

requires no commitment. He acts like God is holding out on us. But God offers sexual fulfillment only in a cocoon of security and safety.

Just one look at the consequences in our society and you can see the intentions of both parties. We are continually tempted with life choices that are easier than what God has for us. But the long term result is always bad. We do well to follow Christ's example here and pick the path God has for us, no matter how difficult it may be.

8 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.*' "

Again, Jesus does not allow what **appeals to his flesh** to have priority over his relationship to His Father. He knows that God has spoken and He knows what God has said. That is all that Christ allows to enter into his consideration. We are wisest to act in a way that when the devil starts talking, we start searching scripture for the appropriate comeback. That is how Christ dealt with temptation. We are always wise to follow His example. And we are so very wise when what God says is the **ONLY** thing that we will allow to have the microphone in our mind. We then can say, like Christ, get behind me Satan, and he will because he has no sway over us when we are obeying scripture.

9 Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, (probably 450 feet) and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. 10 For it is written: '*He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,*' 11 "and, '*In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.*' "

Have you ever stood anywhere where the drop was 450 feet? It is frightening. Well that's where Christ was.

And what does the devil do? He starts quoting scripture. It is clear that scripture is the only thing that Christ responds to. So the Devil changes his tactic. He hopes to quote scripture in a way to get Christ to disobey God.

We need to learn from this. Pay attention. The Holy Spirit and those who minister God's truth are not the only ones who know and use scripture. The devil himself is a master of scripture. And many of God's enemies know it better than His friends do. So just because someone quotes scripture does not make them a lover of the same. And a critic is not the same thing as an expert.

The devil in this instance takes a precious verse about how Christ can **trust** His Father, a verse given for that purpose, and He twists it to try to use it to get Christ

to **test** His Father, to essentially make His Father do a miraculous feat to keep Christ from being destroyed.

That is what the devil will do for us too. He will use scriptures that are meant to encourage us and he will try to get us to use them against God. He will have us accusing God of not delivering on the goods He has promised instead of praising Him for all He has done for us. He will get us to rewrite scripture **with flesh as the focal point** and **God as the errand boy**. The devil has not changed.

So how do we fight that?

12 And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.' "

Jesus responds by knowing scripture better than His adversary and using it as it is intended. He quotes the very reason why the Devil's temptation would be outright rebellion. It would not be a good thing. It would be an awful thing.

Obviously the application to us is that we must know what God says. We need to include it in our lives on a regular basis. If we don't like to read, then get it on CD and listen to it. In this society we have no excuse for not knowing what the Bible says.

13 Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.

We need to know this about our enemy. He does not quit. We need to remind ourselves every day we get up that **we have an enemy**. And that enemy wants to destroy us. That is what he and his minions live for. And they are there every day looking for opportunities to bring you down. It is much like with Christ. They look for an opportune time. So don't put your spiritual guard down. We can't afford it. We need to continually be putting on the armor of God. We need to have Gods word running in our mind. We need to be in communion in our minds with God. We need to be fellowshiping with God's people. And while we are out in the world, we must understand the nature of that kingdom and be alert to its dangers.

For Christ that opportune time would not come for an attack on Christ's falling into sin. It came when Judas determined that Christ was not fulfilling Judas's needs. Christ wasn't living up to his expectations. Judas had the right to expect some things from Christ that Christ was not living up to. So all bets were off. Judas felt he could do whatever he felt strongly about doing. And that was the devil's opportunity.

I doubt that the Devil realized what killing Christ would accomplish for man's redemption. I would guess his hatred of Christ blinded him to that fact. But God used the devil's hatred to accomplish the greatest good for mankind that has ever

been accomplished. Isn't that like God. There is no outfiguring Him. We do well to remember that when we are asking the question, "why".

At this point in the story Matthew and Mark tell us something that Luke does not. He says- **Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.**

Luke continues:14 Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. 15 And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. (NKJV)

Look at the dues Christ paid to minister to us. Look at the cost He paid to show that He is the perfect minister to us imperfect people. He did it **for us**. He had no need to do it for Himself or for His Father. It was so we would read this and know, **He is worthy to receive honor and glory**. It is so we will run **to Him** as the answer to our temptation, trusting Him to know what the answer is because he felt the problem as intensely as we do. He knows what it is like.

Is there any area of your life where you are saying, God I must keep doing this thing I know to be wrong? I cannot give it up. You don't know what this feels like to even think about giving it up? You know what? He proved He does know. And he shows us that we really have no excuse.

Will we trust Him? He is worthy.