

God Himself Is Tempted

Mark 1:12-13

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Introduction:

In his gospel, Mark gets straight to the point.

- In the very first verse, he tells us that he is writing about the beginning of the good news (or the gospel) of Jesus Christ the Son of God.
 - He is telling us right off that Jesus (which means Jehovah saves) is the Messiah (that is what Christ means) who is also the Son of God.
 - He does not present Him so the reader can figure that out as the narrative unfolds—he just puts it straight out.
- And not only that, but in the first eight verses, he teaches us that Jesus, the Son of God, came to baptise us with God the Holy Spirit.
 - He is the one who actually cleanses us from our sin—what is represented by sprinkling with water.
 - Here is God the Son coming to baptise us with God the Holy Spirit!

Last week, Mark showed us how the Son of God began His public ministry.

- Mark had already told us that He is the Christ, the Son of God, so we might have expected Him to enter His public ministry by coming into Jerusalem on a feast day upon a chariot of fire surrounded by seraphim.
 - But instead He comes out into the wilderness—from Nazareth of all places—to be baptised by John!
 - God the Son who came to baptise us with God the Spirit was Himself baptised with water—as if He needed to repent and be cleansed from His sins.
- As I showed you last week, in a way He did need to be cleansed from His sins...
 - Not sins that He had personally committed, but the sins of His people that He came to bear as their mediator.
 - He came to represent the whole church and to have our sin laid to His account so that He might deliver us from it.
 - The cleansing that water baptism represented for Him would be the baptism of His death—the cleansing He accomplished by going to the cross for all His people and suffering for their sins.
 - That is how He would cleanse the whole church as her mediator.
 - The Holy Spirit is the one who would then apply the benefits of Christ's work to each member of His body at their conversion...
 - Water baptism for us represents this cleansing of us by the Holy Spirit by joining us to Christ crucified with all His benefits.
- Last week, we saw that two things happened when Jesus was baptised, now that He was officially associated with us as our Mediator.
 - What would His association with sinners do to His relationship with the Father?
 - First, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit came down upon Him like a dove and went into Him to anoint Him for His ministry...showing that it was by Him that the Holy Spirit was restored to man.

- Second, the Father pronounced with a voice from heaven that even though He was now associated with a sinful people, He was still His Son, He was still beloved, and still pleasing to Him.

What a tremendous encouragement this is for all who are in Christ and what a tremendous encouragement for Him!

- It is our assurance that God accepts Him and all who are in Him.

So what might we expect to happen next?

- He is God's beloved Son in whom the Father is well-pleased, filled with the Spirit of God.
 - Surely now He will come forth in His kingdom of glory!
 - Now He will be honoured and given the throne of David.
 - Now He will be made Lord over all nations so that they bow before Him.
 - Now He will reverse the curse and restore paradise. Surely He will...
 - Was Adam not removed from paradise when he proved unworthy?
 - Shall Christ not be restored to paradise since He is now declared as pleasing to the Father?

But once again, there is a surprise for the reader.

- Instead of being led to a throne, Jesus is led elsewhere.
- Listen as I read to you today's scripture text from Mark 1:12-13.
 - It tells us what happened immediately after He was baptised.

Mark 1:12-13: 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.

May the LORD add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word.

Here we have something striking to consider.

I. Here we have the Son of God Himself sent to the wilderness.

A. The Spirit who anointed Him to serve as Mediator drives Him into the wilderness.

1. The language here indicates that this is not where Jesus would have chosen to go.
 - a. The word *drove* (ἐκβάλλω) is a strong word that literally means *to throw out* or *to cast out* into a place—often with violence and force.
 - Normally it is used to refer to the casting out of demons...
 - b. Probably in the case of Jesus, it means that the Spirit spoke to Him as the LORD speaks to prophets—commanding Him to go there.
 - But it was not a place that one would ordinarily choose to go if it was left up to them.
2. In scripture, the wilderness is a difficult place.
 - a. The Jews did not look at the wilderness as we do.
 - We sometimes think of the wilderness as a place where things are left in a natural state—unspoiled by the hands of man.

- b. But the Jews looked at the wilderness as a place that was cursed and hostile to man—uncultivated, untamed, dangerous.
 - In their history, it was a place where they experienced hunger, thirst, death by venomous serpents, attacks by hostile peoples, and such things.
 - It mentions here that Jesus was with the wild beasts—serpents, lions, wolves, scorpions—perhaps even dinosaurs if we believe the records of history.
 - It was not a pleasant place to spend the night.
 - When God judged a city, the prophets often described the outcome as the city becoming a desolate place inhabited by serpents and jackals.
- B. The wilderness is also a place of testing.
1. It is the place where you learn to trust God to give you what is right for you.
 - a. It is a place where you have no resources—all you have is whatever the LORD provides for you.
 - This is what it means in Deuteronomy 8:3 when it says of the wilderness, **De 8:3: “So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”**
 - A lot of people miss the true meaning of this verse because they do not recognise that when it says “every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD,” it is not just talking about His revealed words of instruction...
 - It is also talking about His decree—what He speaks into existence.
 - What Israel had was whatever God chose to give them—whatever He spoke into existence for them.
 - Of course it is actually the case that that is all that anyone ever has, but when we are not in the wilderness, we have stores of food and we can choose what we want to eat and how much of it.
 - In the wilderness, you are stuck with whatever God decides to give you.
 - It is a hard thing to accept because, you know, we have our wants and our perceived needs.
 - And in the wilderness it is easy for us to start complaining and quarrelling and feeling that God is doing us wrong.
 - b. Of course the truth is, we have a tough time with accepting what God gives us even when we are *not* in the wilderness.
 - We complain about our lot in life—be it our troubles or our unsatisfied longings...
 - Maybe you want a husband or a wife, maybe you feel that you should have more money or more success, maybe you are angry about the way you have been treated... it could be lots of things.
 - We complain in a place of abundance, but there is even more temptation to complain in the wilderness because you are given no choices at all.
 - And often it is His will for you to do without to test you.

- c. It is important to understand that although Jesus was the Son of God, He was God in human flesh.
 - He did not have supernatural powers of His own, but had to do His miracles, as Scripture says, by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - We are told here that even the angels ministered to Him... perhaps they protected Him from wild animals—we don't know just what they did.
 - But in any case Jesus was a man here who was like Israel was in the wilderness—with nothing to eat or drink but what God gave Him.
 - He had to live by whatever came from the mouth of God—whatever God provided for Him.
2. The wilderness is also the place where Satan tempts you.
- Don't forget that in the Greek of the Bible, the word test is the same as the word tempt.
 - That's the reason I am using these words interchangeably.
 - a. In the wilderness Satan tests you to see if you really are committed to God.
 - The great question is, "When God does not give you what you want or what you think He ought to give you, will you still serve Him?"
 - Will you reject Him because you don't like what He has given you?
 - That is what Satan tries his best to get you to do.
 - b. In the parable of the sower, Jesus speaks of three ways of rejecting God...
 - There are those who cannot be bothered to listen to Him at all—they go on their way without ever listening to His Word.
 - Satan likes that the best—just keep them distracted so they never even hear the gospel and all is well.
 - Then there are those who receive the gospel and start to follow the LORD, but then when persecution and hardship come in their service to God, they abandon Him.
 - Satan does all he can to get persons to think that God has mistreated them and that the things that have happened to them were unjust.
 - He sends counsellors and therapists and friends to promote this lie.
 - And the third there are the ones who also receive the gospel and begin following Christ, but then something alluring attracts their eye—and they go after that instead of Christ—they turn to something other than God for blessing and happiness... riches, fashion, achievement, entertainment...
 - It can be a forbidden thing (like an adulterous affair) or it can be a lawful thing...
 - Satan tries to make you think that that thing is something that you do not want to live without... even if you must neglect the will of God to have it.
 - c. Satan is the adversary, and as soon as he sees Christ in the wilderness, He comes with his temptations.
 - The other gospels give us details about these temptations, but Mark does not so I am not going to go into them either.
 - Mark leaves them out on purpose because he has a different focus than on the specifics of Jesus' temptations.

3. For Mark, the focus is that Jesus was driven here after He was baptised.
 - a. Once again, Mark has masterfully placed two events next to each other in a way that gets our attention:
 - Here is the One who has just been told how pleasing He is to the Father and immediately He is cast into the wilderness!
 - Why does God do that with the One in whom He is well pleased?
 - That is the thing that is so striking about it.
 - b. And truly, this forty day wilderness experience is but the beginning of the temptations with which Jesus will be bombarded throughout His life.
 - The struggle will only intensify as He gets closer and closer to the cross.
 - The test is this: Is Jesus willing to do even this for the Father?
 - Adam was unwilling to be deprived even of a piece of fruit when he was filled with all the good things of paradise...
 - Where Christ was willing to go all the way to the cross and being cursed for the Father.

II. The great error that is corrected by our text is that a person's troubles end if they please God.

- A. But clearly, the expression of God's love and favour at Jesus' baptism did not mean that He would not be put into the place of temptation.
 1. It rather meant that He was ready to be tested... to see if His commitment would continue under heavy trials...
 - a. Just as Abraham was tested after he became great in his faith.
 - It was *because* he had come to believe that the Father was to be fully loved and trusted that God then called upon him to offer up Isaac whom he dearly loved.
 - The test came, not because he was weak in faith, but rather because he was strong in faith and so pleased God.
 - b. And so also with Job.
 - Job was tested *because* he was blameless and upright.
 - His whole life testified to his devotion to God.
 - What would he do when faced with the loss of all that was dear to him in this world?
 2. God's declaration at the baptism of Jesus identified Him as one who was now ready to be tested.
 - Now it must be seen just how great His commitment really was.
 - How much does He really value His relationship with God?
 - This was to be the great question that His actions would answer not only in the wilderness, but throughout His whole life... all the way to the cross.
 - The LORD singled Him out, much as He singled Job out, as one who was ready to be put to the test.
- B. Jesus had to constantly dispel the erroneous notion that troubles cease when you please God.

1. He had to correct those who supposed that to be the case with Him.
 - a. The common expectation was that when the Messiah came and was pleasing to God,
 - He would be immediately exalted instead of immediately brought into the wilderness.
 - The Jews struggled with Jesus doing signs showing that He was the Messiah, but not taking what they thought to be His place as the Messiah.
 - Where was the glory?
 - Where was the honour?
 - Where was the dominion over all enemies?
 - All of those things were promised, but not until He had first been tested and had overcome sin and temptation for all of us.
 - b. As Jesus went about, He did not go around announcing to everyone that He was the Messiah.
 - If they had believed that, they would have all been trying to thrust Him upon a throne when it was rather His calling to be tested on a cross.
 - c. Even His own disciples had a terrible time with this.
 - When Peter, speaking for them all, confessed that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God,
 - he immediately reacted in horror at Jesus' declaration that He would be crucified at Jerusalem.
 - To Peter, if Jesus was the Messiah, this could not be so.
 - To Jesus, Peter's thoughts were the voice of Satan himself as shown by His sharp words to Peter,
 - **Mark 8:33: But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."**
 - The great need at this time was not for the Christ of God to establish a powerful visible kingdom in this world...
 - It was for a human being to show that he believed that God was worthy of complete allegiance.
 - To take the pains of Hell as a just punishment for the sins of His people, and to consider God worthy of such service.
 - Jesus was here not to set up a visible throne, but to be tested for the sake of the whole church...
 - His ministry began with forty days in the wilderness and it would be a ministry of testing to the bitter end when He could cry out in victory: "It is finished!"
2. Jesus also had to correct the error that as soon as His followers please God, they will no longer face trouble.
 - a. In His ministry, we see Him correcting those who supposed that by following Him their troubles would end.
 - He warned them that following Him both before and after the cross would mean denying themselves and taking up their own cross.
 - He turned away some potential disciples by making this clear to them.

- b. His own disciples continued to struggle with this notion as well.
 - They had their recurring discussions about who would be the greatest in His kingdom right up to the time of His departure.
 - Jesus responded that greatness in His kingdom involves sacrificial service—service where you pour out your life for God and neighbour.
 - When James and John asked if they could sit on His right and left, Jesus asked if they could be baptised with His baptism...
 - By that He meant, would they be willing to die for Him.
- 3. All through the history of the church, there have been many who suppose that if a man's ways please God, he will enjoy freedom from affliction.
 - Many who do not actually know the Lord in a saving way have stumbled because of affliction—it is has turned them away from service to Christ.
 - But faithful ministers of Christ continue to proclaim that to follow Christ means to deny yourself and take up your cross.

TRANS> But now let us tackle the question...why must it be so?

III. Why must there be suffering both for Jesus and for His true followers?

- A. Because the great lie of man that God is not worthy of our service must be overturned by man.
 - 1. That is the lie that Adam and Eve started when they ate the forbidden fruit.
 - a. Satan tempted them and got them to act on the notion that “if God does not give me whatever I want, I am better off without Him.”
 - This is simply stupid.
 - We are creatures, completely dependent on God for every breath that we take.
 - We cannot even survive without Him.
 - b. But even more than that...
 - Apart from Him, we are self-centred moral wrecks...
 - Shrivelled up souls who become more and more self-absorbed and isolated from God and others in our own self-centered vortex.
 - c. And even more than that, God is worthy to be praised and served.
 - To fail to do that is the greatest moral outrage.
 - An atheist once said to me that atheists can be moral too, and I said no indeed—God is the author of all things and worthy of all praise.
 - To fail to give praise and thanks to Him is reprehensible.
 - He saw the point—hopefully it was a pebble that will stay in his shoe until he repents.
 - We were made to know Him and to praise Him—
 - Not only is it morally reprehensible to neglect this...
 - It is also the case that His grace and love and beauty alone can satisfy our souls.
 - Everything else is vanity—a vapour that disappears on which you cannot anchor your soul.

2. The lie that God is not worthy to be served is overturned by every soul that truly comes to Christ crucified for salvation.
 - a. When you do that, you affirm that God truly is worthy to be served unconditionally.
 - b. Those who would spend eternity in His favour must affirm this truth, and they do that by coming to Christ.
 - c. We perverted the truth about God in the garden...
 - and we continued to pervert it by our own actions... each one of us...
 - Therefore, we must be the ones who set the record straight.
- B. Jesus was given the task of setting the record straight in behalf of the whole church.
1. Adam rejected God in paradise lest he be deprived of the fruit of one tree—that is man... that us all of us...
 2. Jesus Christ served God even though for Him it meant hanging on a tree for us!
 - He knew the value of serving God and that is why He did it.
 - No matter how hard the task might be for His Father, He would do nothing else.
 - He knew the Father's love and goodness, His holiness and perfection.
 - He believed in God's house and knew that there were pleasures there forevermore with which nothing could be compared...
 - Above all that there we will behold God in His glory and perfections.
 3. So by Jesus Christ, you see, a man has overcome!
 - A man—one man—has been tested and that man has been proved.
 - He was sent to the cross for glory of God and did not turn back.
 - By going He affirmed that God was just in this punishment.
 - And it is by faith in Him—by clinging to Him who overcame for all of us—that we are accepted and that we overcome.
 - We are received through His merit.
 - No one else has such merit—only Jesus.
- C. But why must we still suffer in this life if we are received through faith in Jesus?
1. Our suffering is a teaching tool.
 - By our own suffering for the Lord and His kingdom, we learn the value of serving God—and the excellence of our God.
 - Andrew Brunson is a great illustration of this...
 - He was sent to a Turkish prison—for no crime.
 - At first, he took it very hard, but after many months went by, he began to testify that Christ was worthy to suffer anything for.
 - How did he come to that rich knowledge of Christ but through suffering?
 - Now he loves the LORD more than he did before his suffering.
 - He had to see the worth of Christ to keep going—he had to look at His beauty and His goodness and His majesty to convince himself that it was worth it.
 - And the more he looked upon the LORD, the more he saw His glory and beauty and worth.

2. There are so many benefits to our suffering in this world!
 - a. We have fellowship with Christ in His sufferings when we suffer.
 - We look at Christ and how He was willing to suffer—how He knew that God was worthy to suffer for—and that gives us confidence that He knows what He is talking about.
 - He would never have gone to the cross if it were not true.
 - He walks through our sufferings with us, sympathising with us, and assuring us of the Father’s greatness and love, and that it is good to suffer for Him...
 - He also gives us assurance that we will overcome because He has overcome... this is the victory that overcomes the world... our faith.
 - Jesus said, (John 16:33): **In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.**
 - We are with Him in our sufferings and He is with us, encouraging us along.
 - b. Another benefit: We gain assurance that we truly know Him... we assure our hearts before Him.
 - When our lives are not consistent with His word, we can begin to have doubts if we truly know Him in a saving way.
 - But when we are called to suffer for Him and we do suffer for Him, we realise that the Holy Spirit really has brought us to trust in Him.
 - c. Another benefit: We have the privilege of glorifying God when we suffer in our service to Him.
 - 1) We show a watching world that the LORD is worthy to suffer for.
 - Many people in history have come to faith watching Christians suffer for Christ.
 - It forces upon them the reality that He is worth suffering for.
 - 2) We show the persecutors themselves that our God is worth suffering for.
 - They are hoping to turn people off by showing that this is what happens to those who serve God... and punishing us...
 - But what they see instead is that Christ’s disciples are pleased to be counted worthy to suffer for His sake.
 - 3) We show angels, both fallen ones and holy ones, that the LORD is worth suffering for.
 - How the holy angels delight to see us testifying in this way.
 - It gives them great pleasure...
 - But how it frustrates the devil and his own.
 - 4) And we testify to our loved ones that the LORD is worth suffering for.
 - It inspires them and encourages them to live for Him too.
 - d. Another benefit: We increase our love for God and our joy in Him and our hope in Him when we suffer for Him.
 - 1) It is true.
 - As you lay down your life for Him, you love Him more.
 - It is a way for us to show Him our love—a thing love delights to do, and as that is done, the love grows.

- 2) And that is what makes our joy full...
 - Joy in the New Testament is almost always in the context of suffering... and that is because that is where the greatest joy is found.
 - You know how it makes you happy when you serve God—when you make the effort and serve Him... it has a great reward.
 - So it is when you suffer for Him—it brings gladness that you have done it.
- 3) And all the while it fills you with more hope.
 - Jesus on the cross saw His seed—the people He was dying for.
 - He had hope in what it would accomplish—that many would come to serve the LORD.
 - That was His hope—to see us in glory with Him praising God
 - When you suffer in this world it turns your eyes to consider the coming glory that God has promised.
 - It enhances your hope.

Conclusion: But know that as good as our suffering for Christ is for us...

- The only one whose suffering was able to fully set the record straight, that God is worth serving, is Jesus Christ.
 - We come to God through faith in what He did for the whole church.
 - Our suffering does not make us worthy of heaven—only Christ's suffering as our priest can do that...
 - But with our suffering we show that we concur with Him that God is worthy to serve in the wilderness and we grow.
- How glad we ought to be that Jesus did not proceed from baptism to a throne, but from baptism to the wilderness.
 - How glad that He did not take up a throne, but a cross.
 - Now let us gladly take up, not thrones, but crosses as He did.