

Jesus' Triumph over the Tempter

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[0 : 00] We read that the Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness 40 days being tempted by Satan.

And he was with the wild animals and the angels were ministering to him. Well, as I said just a few moments ago, those of you who are here remember last Lord's Day evening.

We began our series in Mark's Gospel. Remember as someone has described it, quite rightly, a racy pacey Gospel that gets to the point quickly, that gets to the point of Jesus' life, you might say dynamically.

This Gospel that alerts us to the actions of Jesus in his ministry of salvation for sinners. And if you remember last week we noticed how Mark, as we said, gets straight to the point.

He gets right at the start of the Gospel, he gets straight to the identity of Jesus. As we noticed, Mark asserts four wonderful things about Jesus. Things that confirm who Jesus is.

[1 : 06] As we saw right at the start there, he's Jesus. He's the Christ. He's the Son of God. And he's directly connected with the Gospel. The Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One.

He's Jesus Christ, the Saviour, who was anointed by God as prophet to proclaim salvation in him alone. He's Christ, who offered himself up as a once-for-all sacrifice.

And he's King. King to bring in his rule into the hearts of his people. And of course, as Mark tells us also, he's the Son of God. That title that speaks of Jesus being co-equal with the Father.

Fully God in his divinity. He's the divine Saviour of the world. Come in human flesh to save his people from their sins. That's what his name means. Jesus means Saviour.

And in that confirmation of his identity, Mark moves swiftly on to record the baptism of Jesus. That baptism, as we noticed, in which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were involved in the inauguration of Jesus' ministry.

[2 : 17] His public ministry. The baptism that Jesus undertook that identified him with sinners. Even though Jesus knew no sin. That baptism that Jesus identified with sinners.

To show that Jesus had come to take the place of sinners. In his substitutionary death on the cross for us. He had come to save us from our sins.

And we notice too, and we'll get to the point. But we notice too that, you know, Mark starts his gospel with the word beginning. And of course, doing that to relate that word to John the Baptist. Because as we notice, it's only after Jesus is baptised by John that Jesus begins his public ministry. That Jesus begins to proclaim the good news of salvation in him alone.

Remember as we saw, John the Baptist had been doing the work of the herald. The individual who in times past would announce the arrival of the king. That's what had been prophesied of John many centuries before.

[3 : 25] The king has come to bring in his eternal kingdom. And Jesus, after his baptism, will go out and bring that message of salvation to others.

So, you know, right at the start there we've seen that Mark's given us, we might say, a kind of a bullet point present, or description of the start of Jesus' ministry. It's a ministry that's been heralded by John.

It's a ministry that's blessed immediately by the anointing of Jesus, by the Holy Spirit. It's a ministry that's affirmed by the voice of the Father. When the Father declares of Jesus, his Son, you are my Son, my beloved Son.

With you I'm well pleased. And you might think, well, you know, with that glorious presentation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit revealed right at the start in the ministry of Jesus, that Jesus might ease his way into ministry.

No, absolutely not. Jesus must do the work that his Father had given him to do and show his credentials for that work by an immediate confrontation with the author of sin, with Satan.

[4 : 36] Jesus has work to do. And that work has to begin immediately. And it's that immediate experience with the temptation of the devil.

So, that's what, of course, we'll be looking at this evening. Two verses, just two verses, two verses of description. But remember, this is Mark. Mark's gospel. Mark, as we notice, very economic with the words that he uses.

So, in this economic telling of the life of Jesus, at the same time, it's so full of teaching and meaning and application. So, just these two verses, verse 12 and verse 13.

And, you know, just if we look at the first place as a whole, you know, notice how Mark moves through this decisive episode in Jesus' life in very sort of fast-paced, short sentences and little clauses.

Because he's showing the immediacy and we might say the potency of Jesus' experience. He's showing how Jesus faced that barrage of satanic attacks and in that first test, we might say, of Jesus, the Savior, his Messiah.

[5 : 51] And then when you start looking more closely, it's almost like going closer and closer into the text. Notice, for example, verse 13. Don't say many times the word and is there.

And he was in the wilderness 40 days being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals. And the angels were ministering to him. So, in other words, there's no long reflection of what Jesus is doing for the sake of sinners and his perfect obedience to suffering.

I mean, the reality of suffering is happening right there. And it's for us to take this in. Yes, it's a very simple style of writing, but it's a very powerful style of narrative.

Mark's getting straight to the point, straight to the matter. So that we can take time to meditate on all that Jesus experienced in that wilderness for our sakes.

And in that meditating on Jesus experience and Jesus being tempted by the devil, well, there are actually a lot to ponder, a lot to consider in that very short description.

[7 : 01] I've noticed five things I think we can look at. I've maybe condensed them a wee bit in the notice sheets. But five separate things we can look at in these short verses. The precise time of Jesus' temptation.

And then the place of Jesus' temptation, where it happened. And then the person involved in Jesus' temptation. The perils, the dangers surrounding Jesus' temptation.

And then finally the presence of angels during Jesus' temptation. So, these five things let's look at this evening. The precise time of Jesus' temptation.

We notice Jesus has just been affirmed by the Father as his Son with whom he's well pleased. We might say that the favour of God has smiled in Jesus, as Jesus is about to go in that mission to save sinners.

But notice there's no delay in that mission. The smile of God's favour is going to give way to the wiles of the devil. That's what Mark's showing us in the way he writes this down.

[8 : 08] Verse 12, And immediately, or verse 12, And immediately the Spirit drove him. Immediately. There's no time for Jesus to ponder his mission.

There's no rest before action. Jesus will immediately embark on his mission. Because such is the urgency of that mission.

Such is the urgency to reveal that conflict over Satan in these first moments of that mission.

Because that's what Jesus had come to do.

He'd come to fulfil scripture. He'd come to fight the devil. He'd come to defeat the devil. He'd come to deal with the problem of sin by triumphing over sin, over Satan, and over death itself.

And there in the wilderness, Jesus will demonstrate what he'd come to do and demonstrate that immediately. Now, of course, the decisive victory over Satan, that would wait until the cross itself.

[9 : 11] But Jesus must immediately go into the wilderness to reveal the purpose of his mission. To confront the evil one. To bruise the head of Satan.

This was prophesied in the Garden of Eden. As you can read in Genesis. That was prophesied, of course, after the fall of man. We didn't have time to read in Genesis 3, but you read it there.

And if that's the case with Jesus, it's going to be the case with you and your experience with the evil one. Because the spiritual warfare that the Christians engaged in, there's no lull.

There's no ceasefire. That spiritual warfare is ongoing. It's continuous. Yes, of course you know times of much blessing. Yes, of course you know the smile of God at particular times. But don't you know that it's so often, immediately after these mountaintop experiences, these times of great heavenly blessing, that you immediately come face to face with the evil one.

[10:14] And immediately you're into the fray again. You're in that spiritual warfare. And the temptations of Satan come hurtling towards you. And you know that that fight is real.

You know that you're facing the wiles of the devil. But remember that you're assured. We're assured that when the devil does come upon you with his temptations, then you're assured, as God's Word tells us, that when you resist him, he'll flee from you.

But of course, you're to resist. And how do we resist? How do you resist? You resist with the Word of God. You resist in the power of God. You resist Him.

Well, remember why he attacks you with these fiery darts of temptation. He does so because he's out to damage you. He's out to bring misery to your soul.

He's out to divert you from your work for the Lord. There in that wilderness, the devil set out to tempt Jesus, to divert Jesus from his work.

[11:19] But before we actually consider the actual temptations of Jesus, as Mark records for us here, let's not just jump ahead of ourselves. Let's just take into account what Mark's showing us in the Spirit driving him, driving Jesus.

As we haven't really looked at verse 12, the Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness. Because think of the context. The Holy Spirit's just anointed Jesus for that mission.

And then immediately he's sending Jesus into the wilderness. There's a very particular word that Mark uses here to indicate the Spirit driving him out. There's this word like casting out, throwing him out, thrusting Jesus out.

And there's this sort of force, the force behind this word, this ejecting of Jesus into the wilderness. Because bring all this together and we see the urgency for Jesus to engage in that spiritual warfare with the devil.

As Jesus will continue to do until his death. But such was the love of God and that thrusting out of Jesus to meet with Satan.

[12:32] Because you see, the work of salvation isn't any kind of casual work. Jesus didn't enter into any kind of casual saving of souls. No, his work was dramatic.

It was energetic. It was serious. Because sin's serious. Because remember the separation that sin brings between man and God. Only Jesus could bridge that separation in his triumph over Satan and over sin.

And of course, seen ultimately on the cross. But first, Jesus must face his tempter. He must face the father of lies. He must face the one through whom sin came into the world.

And he must do so in the most bleak, the most dangerous, the most hostile of conditions in that wilderness. And that's our second point. The place of Jesus' temptations.

Because look again where the Spirit drove Jesus to. Where the Spirit thrust Jesus into. It wasn't the busy city of Jerusalem. It wasn't the comfort of a palace.

[13:40] It was the wilderness. It was this isolated, barren, wild animal, infested wilderness. This hostile environment where Jesus would spend 40 days being tempted by the devil.

And Jesus, in these 40 days, is going to face a barrage of temptations in the most inhospitable of environments. And he's going to be there without human company.

He's going to be where wild animals are near. He's going to be where we might say in his humanity he's going to face privation in the most intense manner. But it's in these conditions that Jesus will show his utter resilience against Satan.

It's where Jesus will demonstrate that he will not be defeated by all the tempting that the devil can throw at him. And, you know, that location of Jesus' temptation, it's no mere coincidence.

And for lots of reasons, there are many reasons I think we can look at. I'll maybe mention two. And that's why we read in Genesis. Because we have to look at the contrast between Jesus and Adam.

[14:52] Think of Adam, the contrast between Adam and Jesus. Think of the paradise of Eden. Because it was in that paradise that we read off in chapter 2, that paradise, that perfection, and that perfection, Adam sinned.

It was in that environment we would say that Adam succumbed to the temptation of Satan in the most perfect of surrendering. Adam, they lacked for nothing.

And yet he sinned. And sin entered the human race. And I contrast that with Jesus. Jesus isn't in now in a perfect Eden. He's in a barren wilderness.

But Jesus will not succumb to the tempter. He'll triumph. Because such is his love for sinners, for those for whom he came to free from the bondage of sin.

And just think in that. Dwell in that wonderful truth. What Adam failed to do, we refer to of course to Adam in Genesis as the first Adam. What Adam failed to do in remaining obedient to God there in the beauty of Eden.

[15 : 57] Jesus, the last Adam, our representative Jesus, remained obedient in the most hostile of conditions. And he did so for your sake, for the sake of all for whom he came to give his life in suffering, even in death.

I think there's another thing we can point to there in that description of Jesus being in the wilderness. We're told there he was in the wilderness for 40 days. We'll think of the 40 years of wandering in the desert by the Israelites.

The Israelites sinned again and again in their disobedience to God. But in these 40 days of Jesus' experience in the wilderness, Jesus is wholly obedient to God.

Jesus will not be lured by the devil. He'll remain steadfast in his zeal to save sinners. The old Israel failed. The old Israel failed in their obedience to God in the wilderness.

But Jesus triumphed in the wilderness. And he did so to make it possible for his church, for the new Israel of God, to know that victory through him, through Jesus, who remained obedient to his Father, even in his suffering and to death.

[17 : 13] But what else do we notice here? We notice the person involved in Jesus' temptation. Who tempted Jesus? It was Satan. The devil.

We're told there that being tempted by Satan. I mean, Mark's got no hesitation in being absolutely frank about the one who's tempting Jesus.

Remember who, in all probability, Mark sources. It's Peter. Remember Peter gave Mark information about Jesus. And Peter himself was unhesitating in his affirmation of the reality of Satan.

You go to Peter's first letter, chapter 5, verse 8. Be sober-minded. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

Scripture, of course, tells us, affirms that Satan's no figment of imagination. He's no myth of ancient history. This is Satan. This is the fallen angel.

[18 : 15] This is the same Satan who tempted Adam in the Garden of Eden. And of course, at that time, succeeded in his guile. But the Lord Jesus, the last Adam, the Lord Jesus will not be defeated by Satan.

Yes, Jesus was continually being assaulted by Satan even in that verbal temptation in the wilderness. Notice how it's written there.

He was being tempted. In the middle of verse 13, he was being tempted. And the way that's written in the original tells of ongoing, continuous temptations.

Yes, we know that in the other gospel accounts of Jesus' temptation, we're told of three specific temptations. But notice what Mark's doing here. He wants us to see that Jesus was continually being tempted in the most harsh of circumstances.

And Mark's not specifying the temptations that Jesus faced, because Mark doesn't need to. Mark wants to show how intense these temptations were, how real they were over this lengthy period of time.

[19 : 25] And yet, through these 40 days of Jesus being tempted, Jesus remains true to his calling. He's not going to succumb to the continuous barrage of temptations thrown at him by Satan.

And you know, we're so ashamed when we consider how easily we, each one of us, succumb to the devil's tempting. Because remember, the devil attacks us, not in the wilderness, he attacks us, whether it be the comfort of our own homes or our workplaces, even in a place of worship such as this.

And when your eyes aren't fixed in Jesus, when you think, oh, how a little toe in the door of temptation, you think, that's not going to do me any harm.

And before you know it, you're lodged in that darkness of the devil's clasp. And we fail again and again. And so, in these circumstances, surely, it's for each one of us to look to Jesus and his defiance against Satan because of the intensity of his love for sinners.

Sinners for whom he came to die. not once did Jesus yield to the devil's snare. I mean, even in the continuity of Satan's tempting, Jesus wouldn't seek to be released from his mission of salvation for his own.

[20 : 53] Even though that mission would involve his suffering, even though it would involve his death, even though it would involve bearing the sin of many on the cross, Jesus would not be diverted even by the temptations of the evil one.

Because these temptations were real. These temptations were probing Jesus' human nature. Temptations trying to divert him from the path of suffering for the sake of his own.

Jesus wouldn't be diverted. Think of the reason why. Because of his great love for sinners. And so, it's for you and for me to give thanks, even though to give thanks that the Lord Jesus did not succumb to the devil's temptations.

That Jesus remained strong in his resolve to fight Satan when he engaged in that spiritual warfare, that battle for the souls of his people.

And you know, that battle of course is characteristic of the warfare between God and Satan. And that battle that Jesus ultimately triumphed in on the cross.

[22 : 02] remember when Jesus said, cried out to that loud voice, it's accomplished, it's finished. And Jesus took the sins of his people in himself when he faced the due penalty for sin, when he faced death, and we cry out for a saviour.

So take heart when you're tempted by the evil one. Yes, these temptations are real because Satan is real. Yes, he does. As Peter tells us, go about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. And yes, you will be attacked. You'll know and you'll face temptations. We said, especially after a time of spiritual blessing. But as God's word commands you, be strong in the Lord and the power of his might.

Look to the Lord Jesus. Look and find strength in him. And do, as Peter called the church to do, in light of the activity of the devil, resist him.

Firm in your faith. Knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brothers throughout the world. You have God given weapons to resist the evil one.

[23 : 15] What did Paul declare, Ephesians 6, 16? You have the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. So exercise that faith in God.

Be strong, strong in faith in him. Strong in faith in the one who extinguished all the fiery darts that were cast at him, at Jesus in the wilderness.

Then, fourthly, the perils, the perils, the dangers surrounding Jesus' temptation. You notice in that experience of Jesus in the wilderness, Satan continually firing these darts of temptation at Jesus. You know, Mark, as we said, he moves so fast on and in the next breath, as it were, he tells us that Jesus was with the wild animals. Now, you know, there are three gospel narratives that tell of the temptation of Jesus.

But only Mark, only Mark tells us of the presence of wild animals. Now, what these wild animals are, Mark doesn't go into detail. It could have been wolves or foxes, it could even have been hyenas or lions, the animals that were around at the time, the jackals, the vultures.

[24 : 27] But why does Mark tell us this precise detail? Is it some kind of random comment? Well, surely not. I mean, this is Mark. This is, as we said, someone who's so economical with the amount of detail that he gives.

There's us to be some particularly special meaning in telling us of Jesus in the wilderness with wild animals. And surely Mark's telling us this in the context of what Jesus is doing in his ministry of salvation.

Think of the context again. Jesus, that first test we might see in his ministry, the resisting of the temptation of Satan, Satan trying to divert him from his mission of saving souls.

Jesus doing what Adam had failed to do when Adam sinned against God. As we said, Adam sinning in the perfection of Eden where there was everything Adam needed for life.

The land was good. Adam had dominion over all the creatures. Adam named them as we read. Named them each one. He enjoyed the presence of these animals in the paradise that was Eden.

[25 : 36] But of course, when sin came, sin destroyed that perfection. Sin affected not just humanity, but all of creation. All of creation. Including the animal kingdom.

And the wildness of the wilderness matched by the wildness of, as we read here, of so much of the animal kingdom. We're seeing the curse, the revelation of the curse of God on all creation.

As we said, not just for Jesus, the perfection of Eden, for beauty, harmony all around, but Jesus must live in the sin-scarred world to fight the enemy of the soul.

Jesus must win that victory and win it over sin, over Satan, over death. And so with Jesus here being described as in the wilderness of wild animals, we've got to look in the bigger picture surely and see that Mark is telling us or is showing us this epitome of the sinful world that Jesus has come into in order to save.

Jesus must live with those who hate him. It's the wild beasts who we sang off in Psalm 57. Jesus must live in the wilderness of a sin-ravaged world.

[26 : 54] Jesus must endure the hostility of sinners in order to save sinners. That's the measure of the cost of your salvation.

And when you know that, you know, if you're a Christian, you're living in a modern-day wilderness, you're living amongst, as it were, wild beasts who tear the church, tear the gospel to pieces, and you're frightened, you're worried, you're maybe scared even, you remember what Jesus endured for you in that wilderness amongst the wild animals.

Jesus endured through the love that he has for sinners so that you might know the joy of salvation. We have, you have that prospect of the new heavens and the new earth.

You have that wonderful foretelling of that eternity for the lion will lie down with the lamb for creation will be restored and there'll be no more wilderness.

There'll be no more enmity between man and God, between man and man and between man and the animal kingdom. And that's what we look forward to in that new heavens and new earth.

[28 : 12] No more wilderness. No more tears. But then, finally, the presence of angels. The presence of angels during Jesus' temptation.

And he was with the wild animals and the angels were ministering to him. Jesus' first test in the wilderness and his, you might say, last test before his crucifixion in Gethsemane.

Both occasions Jesus has angelic sustenance. In the wilderness they were told the angels attended to his needs. Move forward three years and Gethsemane as Luke tells us an angel strengthened Jesus during his agonies before his crucifixion.

Now, there's no detail got into by Mark this mystery of angelic support. But we can say this, that the humanity of Jesus required that angelic ministry.

And you see it in the way that's recorded here by Mark. Again, the way that Mark writes it down here tells us that Jesus had continuous angelic support by a multiplicity.

[29 : 25] Not just one angel, but many angels sent from heaven. The heaven sent saviour was ministered to by heaven sent angels. When we think of the intensity of Jesus' experience in his conflict with Satan, we're told here that Jesus was given angelic support.

Now, as we said, Mark simply tells us, he doesn't go into detail, he tells us without any kind of specific detail what that angelic support involved.

But we can safely say this, that Jesus needed that support in these hours of his need. Because Jesus experienced in the wilderness.

Let's not tell ourselves. That experience was no mere walk in the park. This was intense, severe, excruciating, suffering, and the powers of heaven itself were on Jesus' side for the sake of the saviour, for the sake of the saviour's work of salvation.

So, even these two verses there, we're seeing the extent of the activity of God and the angels and the sustaining of the Son, so that Jesus would continue in that road to the cross, so that you might be saved.

[30 : 52] So, in this context of worship, give thanks. Give thanks. Bow before the Father for his love in sending his Son, and bow in thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit in that anointing of the Son for that work.

Bow before the Son, in his steadfastness, in his fortitude, in his willingness to suffer there in the wilderness with wild animals and with Satan in order to bring you to the promised land of glory.

Lord, you'll know that perfect peace with him, and you'll know that freedom from sin. Lord, you'll know that joy in the Lord that's yours because of Jesus' perfect obedience to the Father.

Father, and so as we close the service, we praise his name. We praise his name for his love towards us. We praise his name for his enduring and suffering even in enduring these temptations of the evil one in that wilderness for your sake and for his glory.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you again for the reminder of the cost of our salvation. Even through the temptations that Satan threw at Jesus, and Jesus resisting the evil one, and Jesus resisting to the very end, even there on the cross.

[32 : 19] Thank you, Lord, that in that cry it is finished, that Jesus accomplished all that you, our Heavenly Father, gave him to do in winning souls for your glory.

So help us each one to look to the Savior, to rejoice in him, to be glad in him, and to follow him, and to seek that sustenance from above in our resisting the temptations of the evil one.

Help us then to be strong in you, and in the power of your might. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's resume in singing in Psalm 91.

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