

The Servant's Test

Mark 1:12-13

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.

I've entitled the message this morning "The Servant's Test." We saw in our introductory message a couple weeks ago the theme of Mark's Gospel is the Lord Jesus as the Servant of the Lord, the suffering Servant. Remember the theme verse, Mark 10:45, **For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."**

Matthew and Luke also record Jesus' temptation in the desert. When you read their accounts you find they tell much more details regarding the temptation of the Lord Jesus. I've taught you from the beginning of our studies that Mark has a specific purpose in how he lays out his Gospel. I believe there is a purpose in the brevity of his account. Matthew takes several verses and goes into great detail, dealing specifically with each temptation as the devil sent them to the Lord Jesus - and yet Mark covers it in just two verses.

His point is simply the theme of this Gospel. He wants us to see the Lord Jesus as the Servant of the Lord, and he wants us to realise that the servant of the Lord is tested. He wants us to see that Christ overcame the tempter, and because of that we also, as servants of the Lord after Him, can know victory through Christ.

Now let's remind ourselves of the context of where we find these two verses. John the Baptist - who, remember, was Isaiah's prophesied forerunner of Messiah - has prepared the way of the Lord, and declared that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Messenger. We have also seen that the Spirit confirms this by descending upon the Lord Jesus at His baptism like a dove, then the heavens are torn apart, and we hear the voice of the Father declaring: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

All of this has been preparation for the Messiah. They have been authentications of Christ's identity. And another part of the preparation of Jesus was this temptation he went through. I want to point out three emphases in Mark's account of the temptation.

1. Christ Was Led by the Spirit.

Now note, look at the words of verse 12, **"Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness."** Both Matthew and Luke indicate that the Lord went into the wilderness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but Mark is unique saying that **"the Spirit drove Him."**

Incidentally, if you look down Mark 1:34, this word is used of the Lord Jesus expelling demons. It is used again in the same context in verse 39 and verse 43 - expelling evil spirits! But here it is used of the Holy Spirit as expelling Christ into the wilderness!

Although Jesus has been clearly declared to be God's Son, though He is being declared here as the King who is bringing His kingdom. He is not permitted to go back into Jerusalem and live the life of a King, to live the life of the Messiah as the Jews expected it - God doesn't allow Him to go back and set up an earthly

kingdom. The Spirit drove Him into the wilderness! In spite of who He is, He must be in the desert, He must be tempted of the devil, and of course Mark's great theme is that He must go to the cross. In other words, He must do God's will in God's way, and God's way was the way of suffering not the way of force.

Though He was a King, He is God's suffering Servant, this is God's path for Him - and can I say: this is God's path for us. In a moment the Holy Spirit carried Him from light to darkness. In a moment He went from knowing the Father's smile to Satan's wile. It was as if, in an instant, after the heavens being opened, that all hell was opened upon Him. Does that tell us anything? The Servant's temptation was immediately after a spiritual high, and so it will often be in your life.

Now think about this for a moment: the same Spirit that anointed Jesus at His baptism, is now the Spirit that is thrusting Him forth into testing. Now why is that? Why does temptation often come immediately after a spiritual high? God allows the testing because He is strengthening us for the task to which He has appointed us.

Maybe one of the reasons why you have problems overcoming temptation is because of the way that you're viewing it? You don't realize that the Holy Spirit arranges testing for your good - that's what the Bible teaches. This is what God always does with his men and women -- He toughens them by driving them out into these kinds of experiences. This is what happened to Jesus.

You know, God does this all the time. He is not through testing people. It is designed to toughen us and strengthen us. Let me share with you a poem I ran across:

When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man,
And skill a man;
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part,
When he yearns with all his heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch his methods, watch his ways
How he ruthlessly perfects
Whom he royally elects.
How he hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows, converts him
Into trial shapes of clay
Which only God understands,
While his tortured heart is crying,
And he lifts beseeching hands.
How he bends but never breaks
When his good he undertakes.
How he uses
Whom he chooses,
And with every purpose, fuses him,
By every act, induces him
To try his splendor out.
God knows what he's about.

Yes, he does. That is what he did with Jesus to toughen him and test him and prove him. In Mark's Gospel I believe this is one of the points that he is bringing to us: this was a test and authentication of who Christ was, and proving the strength that He would have not just to overcome the devil in our place in temptation, but to go all the way to the cross as a perfect man, and be our substitute, and finish the work!

2. Christ Was Tempted by Satan.

Verse 13, **"And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan."**

We are told that Jesus went through a very severe and thorough testing. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan.

Mark suggests what other writers do not -- that all through this forty-day period he was tempted by the devil. He was continually being tempted during the 40 days He was in the wilderness. In other words, the devil came to try him out in every possible way -- body, soul, and spirit. He probed and assaulted and sifted and scrutinized and assailed him, and bombarded him with every thought and every temptation that we human beings are subject to. When you read the other accounts you can see that Matthew and Luke gather up the final temptations, the final mighty tests that Satan gave to Jesus. But these indicate the nature of the tests which came throughout this entire forty-day period, devised by the master tempter of all, the one who knows how to find the weakness in our hearts, knows how to get at us and upset us.

Now, of course, the temptations in the Lord Jesus' life didn't stop after the 40 days. We know that the Scribes and Pharisees often on occasions came and tempted Him, tried to test Him. But it's interesting that Mark does not mention that Jesus was victorious over this temptation, although it is implied. Mark also does not mention that there was any end to the temptation, whereas Matthew does - the devil left Him. What I think Mark is trying to get across to us is that this was what the whole life of the Man of Sorrows was going to be. He was being continually tempted and tested in His life. Yes, Jesus was victorious, but His final victory had not come yet. It would have to come at the cross.

God allows testing for our strength, and yet Satan is doing it for our failure. You must beware, because Satan is real, and Satan is a fearful foe. As Luther put it:

'For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe,
Whose craft and power are great,
And armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal'.

So we should beware of Satan, and we should know that we are not his equal, and that's why we should not lead ourselves into temptation - though God can arrange it, we're not to run into it! We're not meant to flirt with it! We're not meant to look for it, or be in the place where it will come before us! No! We're meant to flee from Satan! But though we are not his equal, praise God, Christ in the wilderness was more than his equal, and because He defeated him there, and defeated him at the cross, He has made us more than conquerors!

Now why does all this matter? Scripture affirms that in these temptations Jesus gained an ability to understand and help us in our temptations. Hebrews 2:18

says, **"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."** And again in Hebrews 4:15, **"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."**

That's why it matters. Though He didn't sin, and He couldn't sin, His temptation was real! That's why He suffered when tempted, so that He might be able to help those who are tempted. That's why we have a Great High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses - for He Himself, in every respect, has been tempted as we yet without sin.

Mark records one other thing about Jesus' temptation. Despite the fact that he was without human help, and assailed by the tempter in all these ways, nevertheless he was not alone. He was sustained by a ministry of comfort.

3. Christ Was Strengthened by the Angels.

Verse 13, **"and the angels ministered to Him."**

Now, we don't have time for a study on angels in this meeting, save to say that Hebrews chapter 1 verse 14 gives us an interesting insight into what their purpose is. The writer says: **"Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"**

What does that mean? Angels are our helpers. Now if you think about this, from the beginning of the Bible to the end, we don't have time to go through every instance, but remember Hagar? She knew what loneliness was. She was an outcast into the desert, Abraham and Sarah had cast her out, and in Genesis 16 there is Hagar with Ishmael her son, and we read that the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness. She's in the wilderness, she's cast out, she's tested and tempted and tried, and an angel finds her.

A story very akin to the Lord's temptation, is that of Elijah - and he's in the wilderness too. He's being fed in the barren desert by an angel. There is Elijah saying: "I alone am left! I'm the only one doing anything for God!" - and in his loneliness and his testing, God comes through an angel.

There was divine help! The angels ministered to Him. We might feel like the loneliest person in the world in our particular circumstances, but we never alone! Though temptations and trials come we don't need feel alone because we have help! We've got the angels, we've got the other members of the body, we've got the Lord Jesus Christ our Great High Priest, we've got the Holy Spirit.

Maybe that is why in 1 Corinthians 10:13 Paul says, **"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."**

That is the ministry of angels -- invisible yet very real. Many of us have experienced the ministry of angels without even knowing it. Sometimes when your spirits are suddenly uplifted, and you do not even know why, that is the ministry of angels. And Jesus was upheld that way.

What temptation are you facing today? What temptation have you been subjected to? Maybe you've failed so many times you wonder is it possible to

have victory at all? Can I say to you: yes, yes it is possible, only through the Lord Jesus Christ, and only by facing your trials and your temptations the way He did. How's that? By recognizing that to suffer tests and temptations is part of what it is to be a servant of God. We can expect testing, especially after spiritual climaxes and zeniths, it will come!

Also by understanding that although the devil wants us to fall into temptation, God has willed it for good, and He will lead us help us through it.

I heard a story about Rev H. C. Trumbull. Mr Trumbull was preaching, as he often did, in the prisons to some of the inmates. On this one occasion he said: 'The only difference between me and you is owed to the grace of God'. He was identifying with them as sinners. Afterwards one of the prisoners came to him and said: "Mr Trumbull, did you mean what you said about sympathizing with us, and that the only thing that makes a difference in your life is the help that you've got from God? That's the only thing that's made you to differ from us?." When the preacher said yes, this is how the prisoner responded - listen to this very carefully: "I am here for life, but I can stay here more contentedly now that I know I've got a brother out in the world."

That's the way it ought to be for us, if we are the servants of God. In this life of suffering, temptation, and trials, we ought to be able to say, as we look at our Savior in the wilderness: I can stay here more contentedly, because I know I have a Brother in heaven who sends grace and mercy for my need and my temptations.