

Wilderness Temptations

Mark 1:9-15

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In the Gospel according to Mark, everything is abbreviated and happens *immediately*. Jesus is baptized by John. The heavens are torn open violently, the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove, and the voice of the Father bears witness, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

And what happens next, *immediately* after Jesus' baptism? What does the Spirit, that descended upon Jesus in the water do immediately after? He *drives* Jesus into the wilderness. The same word is used for when Jesus is *casting out* demons. The Spirit drives him. Literally forces Jesus violently to go into the wilderness for forty days.

Forty days of fasting. No food. Forty days with no visible means of support, where all there are, are the wild things, the scorpions, snakes, coyotes, jackals. Forty days of temptation by Satan, the accuser, the liar, the enemy. That's where Jesus' baptism takes Him - to direct confrontation with the devil on his own turf, in the wilderness, with no visible means of support, where even the Father and the Spirit appear to be absent, where Jesus has nothing, but the Word with which to defend Himself. (William Cwirla)

Each time Jesus is tempted by satan, what does He do? He quotes Scripture? *Oh, that we would do the same!* Each time, Jesus is quoting from the same sermon given by Moses in Deuteronomy. After being miraculously delivered out of slavery in Egypt, what do we hear? *"In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died, by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There, we sat around pots of meat, and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve us to death!"* (Exodus 16)

Moses preaches his sermon to Israel after they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days. There's a direct parallel. Like us, Israel worried about their present situation. How were they going to make it? What would happen to them and their families out there in the wilderness? Where was God in all of this? Like Jesus, like us, they too, had met the Tempter in the wilderness.

What is Jesus saying about the temptations we face in our own wilderness experiences? Why is turning stones into bread, like worrying, or complaining about the lack of food, or income, or whatever else we're tempted to complain about?

And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 8)

In the first temptation, the tempter whispered to Jesus, "How are you ever going to make it out here all alone? Where is your Father now? He's abandoned you! You can't depend on your Father. What good is He doing you now? You've got to do something. You better take things into your own hands and provide for yourself."

And as Luther quotes satan, "Your only concern is for bread; forget about God's Word; bread is what you need." He whispers in *your* ear, in *your* heart, "Your only concern is food, or money to pay the bills, or a job, or help for someone in your family, or relief from the stress you're under. Forget about God's Word. You've got more pressing needs to be concerned about!"

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" As if to say, "Even though my present situation might make it look to the contrary, my Father will take care of Me. I trust Him, over what my present situation might seem to be telling me. I may not have bread right now, but I have the Word of My Father ... and that's enough, for Me."

Failing to get Jesus to turn away from His Father, the tempter tries the reverse strategy. "Since you trust your Father so much to take care of you, here's a perfect *test*, in order for Him to PROVE He's so trustworthy.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If (since) you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

"Okay Jesus, since you seem to think Your Father is so trustworthy, here's a chance for Him to prove it. Shouldn't be hard, why even the Scriptures you look to quote will back you up on this one! Doesn't your Father promise in Psalm 91 that if you jump to your death, He will send His angels to rescue you? Go ahead. Here's your chance. What are you waiting for? Prove it. Do you really trust Him, or not? What are you afraid of, that He won't come through for you?" Sounds pretty tempting. What would we do? "I'll show you satan! ..."

Again, when tempted, what does Jesus do? He quotes the Word of God. Oh, that we would learn to do the same! **"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."** (Dt 6) - *as Israel tested Him at Massah (which means "test") - and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ... And ... they tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?"* (Exodus 17:1-7) We don't know! Can we really trust Him?

Can we? Can you?

Israel and Jesus were not in the wilderness by accident. God led them both there. And God leads us there as well. To test us, to know what's in our hearts. To show us what's in our hearts.

Tempting and testing. "The same word is used for both. Its meaning depends on the context. Satan tempts us to *weaken* our faith in God; to lead us *away* from Him, and bring us to *ruin*, to ruin our lives. God tests us to *strengthen* our faith and lead us *closer* to Himself, and bring us *life*, for our good, to better our lives - in Him.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1)

How would you describe satan? If you remember nothing else, remember that satan is a LIAR. *He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies!*" (John 8)

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

We've all heard this voice of the Tempter. He's everywhere? All over our culture and everywhere in adds. "Your personal happiness and comfort are all that really matter! Immediate gratification is the name of the game. Just bow down and worship me, and you can have it all!"

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Satan tempts Jesus as he tempted Adam & Eve, as he tempts you and me. Behind every temptation, he's basically saying what? "Don't trust God. Trust me instead. Take matters into your own hands. Do *your* will, not God's."

As hungry as He was, Jesus hungered *EVEN MORE*, for something else! More than food, Jesus hungered, not to do HIS will, but the will of His Father in heaven. (John 4:34) And what did His Father will? But that His Son shall undergo this test. And so, it was to be. No fast food. No miracles. No stone soup. No bread from heaven. Jesus was going to do His Father's will ... even if it killed Him! And the test showed the Father what was in the heart of the Son.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ... For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:38)

It was tempting to take of the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. And she took some and gave some to her husband. It was tempting for the people to grumble against God in the desert. And they did. It's tempting for us to grumble and complain in our own wilderness. It was tempting for Jesus to turn stones to bread, to show how God's angels would protect Him, to take the easy way out and just bow down and worship satan and have it all!"

Unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus clings to *nothing*, but *the Word*. He seeks no proof. He looks for no evidence. He clings to nothing, but the bare Word of God. And in His final breath, what does Jesus say? *"It is finished. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."*

And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. (Hebrews 4)

Where Israel fails to trust God, Jesus succeeds. Where you and I fail to trust God, Jesus succeeds – for us. To do what we haven't done. And credit it to us, as if we've done it ourselves!

There are two great temptations recorded in the Bible - the temptation of Adam and the temptation of Christ. The temptation of Adam resulted in the fall of all of humanity into sin and death. The temptation of Christ resulted in the fall of Satan and the rescue of humanity - *your* rescue - from sin and death!

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

God led Israel through the baptism of the Red Sea, into the wilderness. It turned out to be forty years, an entire generation, in the wilderness. They didn't want it, but they needed it.

The road of faith, leads into the wilderness, the place of testing and temptation. The wilderness is a place of formation. A place where patient endurance is honed. Where character is formed. Where hope is forged in the fire of testing. (Cwirla)

What are we to do when we're tempted? What did Jesus do? He remembered the Word of God. He trusted the Word of God. When you're tempted to **worry**, remember ... *"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."* (Mt 4/Dt. 8) *Do not be anxious about your life ... saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* (Mt. 6)

When you're tempted to **spend more** than you probably should, especially on something you don't really need, remember ... *"Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only."* (Dt. 6/Mt 4) *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Mt 6)

When you're tempted to think that **God isn't loving**. "How can God be loving when there's so much evil in the world? So much going wrong in my life?" remember ... *"God so loved ... that He gave His One and Only Son ..."* (John 3:16)

Luther, echoing the words of James 1, says, "When these things happen to you, when you find yourself in the wilderness, being tempted by the devil, and tested by God, **rejoice**. God is exercising your faith." God is at work in your life, strengthening your faith.

And so begins LENT. 40 days in the wilderness of temptation – a place where you're completely dependent upon God for your spiritual survival. 40 days of temptation. 40 days of repentance, of truth-telling. 40 days of "living on every word that comes from the mouth of God!" 40 days of "worshipping the Lord your God and serving Him only." 40 days of either *testing* God's faithfulness or *trusting* God's faithfulness.