

“Facing the Battle With Temptation” (pt. 1)

Mark 1:12-13; Matthew 4:1-11

Turn in your Bibles this morning to the first chapter of Mark, where I want to read verses 12-13. Why does so much of life involve a constant battle? It sure does seem that way. We seem to be locked in conflict every which way we turn. On a daily basis, we face pressure in a variety of forms as we’re pulled in multiple directions: what you want vs. what you should do, what’s comfortable vs. what’s beneficial, or short-term pleasure vs. long-term good. Life often involves choosing between battles instead of escaping them. If you have ever wondered why it is that way, then these verses in Mark will help shed some light on your situation.

After His baptism in which Jesus identified with those He came to save, Mark shows us that Jesus further identifies with us by facing an intense spiritual battle. The encounter in the wilderness between the Lord Jesus and Satan was the greatest conflict that has ever taken place on earth, and by far the most important. And this battle is very significant because of what it reveals about the enemy, and because of the way that our Lord fought and won the battle. Had He failed at any point, we would have no hope of salvation, nor could we resist the pull of evil within our own hearts. But Jesus did in fact win the battle, and His victory has ongoing effects for you and me. This morning we’re going to look at a subject that every single one of us deals with, and that’s the subject of temptation. (Read)

Satan opposes all that glorifies God. He seeks to ensnare, to entrap, and to prevent people from coming to knowledge of the truth. Satan opposes Christ, he opposes the church, and he opposes the Christian. His tool of choice is the use

of temptation. Satan uses temptation like a battering ram, hammering at the fortress of our heart until he can finally create a breach.

Mark's account of the temptation narrative is the shortest of all the gospel writers. While Matthew and Luke record the details that were involved, Mark sticks with the big picture. Remember that he is writing a fast paced, action packed account of the life of Christ. Mark's favorite word to use is the word 'immediately' which is seen in verse 12. Though what he says is brief, of all the gospel writers, Mark is the most descriptive in his language as he says that the Spirit immediately drove Jesus into the wilderness. There, over a period of 40 days, he was being tempted by Satan. It is the same pattern that we see in the Old Testament story of Israel. After their 'baptism' through the Red Sea, they are brought into the wilderness where they will be for 40 years. But where Israel had failed, Jesus will be victorious. But it is also a reversal of everything that had been ruined in the fall of Adam. While first Adam experienced temptation from a serpent in a garden and failed, the last Adam will face the temptation from the serpent in the wilderness and succeed. The first Adam goes up against the evil one and fails, and the garden becomes a wilderness. But to the serpent who deceived Eve, the Lord said:

Genesis 3:15—“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

The promise is the arrival of a second Adam who will go up against the evil one and triumph so that one day we will live with Him in the garden again. And that sums up the entire storyline of the Bible. Jesus is the promised Seed. He is the Second Adam. He is the Messiah, the Son of God. He was with the wild animals, and angels were ministering to Him. Mark's depiction no doubt reflects

the experience of Christians in Rome who faced temptation to renounce their faith in Christ or suffer the consequences under Nero. The Roman historian Tacitus, writing around 100 AD, said:

“Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer.”

It was a terrible, terrifying time to be a follower of Jesus. It was a time of severe trial, yet Mark reminds his readers of the fact that Jesus knows what that's like. The world has become a dangerous wilderness because of Adam's sin and the ravages that sin has brought on. Mankind has an enemy who seeks their destruction. But Jesus endured His time of temptation, and now He stands as One who helps and strengthens those who are facing their own trials. And so from this passage, let me point out some lessons that I believe will encourage us as we find ourselves locked in a battle with the enemy. We're going to look at temptation from several different angles.

1—The TRIAL of temptation is common (1:12; 4:1)

“The Spirit immediately drove Him out into the wilderness... Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

How do we define temptation? What is it, and where does it come from? If you are a believer, then you already know full well that there is a constant struggle that exists within your mind. As the result of living in a fallen environment, the Holy Spirit who lives within the believer is at constant war with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Think of the world like a pool of gasoline, the flesh is a

match, and the devil is the one who comes along and entices us to strike the match, offering the temptation to create the explosion.

Warren Wiersbe—“*A temptation is an opportunity to accomplish a good thing in a bad way, out of the will of God...It is when we want to satisfy these desires in ways outside God's will that we get into trouble.*”

Eating can lead to the temptation of gluttony. Sleeping can lead to the temptation of laziness. Sexual desire can lead to the temptation of immorality. Temptation is the tug at us to satisfy our desires in a sinful way. It is the solicitation to go outside of the will of God to serve ourselves, to satisfy our own desires. John writes about this when he says:

1 John 2:16—“For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”

All humanity is left with in his lost condition is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. That's what the world lives for. That's all that the world lives for. The enemy comes along and tempts us in one of those areas:

- “The lust of the flesh” refers to physical temptations
- “The lust of the eyes” refers to materialistic temptations
- “The pride of life” refers to self-advancing temptations

We're not going to look at it this morning, but if you look at Matthew's account of the temptation, you'll find that Satan tempted Jesus in these same three areas. Any temptation that you will ever face as a believer can be narrowed down into one of these three categories.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13—“Therefore let him who stands take heed lest he fall. 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.”

I like how those verses are paraphrased in the Message—“No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; He’ll never let you be pushed past your limit; He’ll always be there to help you come through it.”

Temptation is common to us all. What do we learn about this common trial of temptation that we all face?

It involves a common struggle

Verse 12 emphasizes how the Holy Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted. Keep in mind that Jesus came for the purpose of saving us from our sin. But in order for Him to do that, He had to identify Himself with us in order to be our Substitute. This is seen both in His baptism and His temptation. Jesus enters into the wilderness where He goes toe-to-toe with the powers of the evil one. And where others have failed, Jesus has won the battle over this struggle that is common to us all.

Someone might ask, “Why am I tempted? Am I tempted because I am a sinner?” We’re tempted because we’re human. Temptation is common to man. Which is to say it is a universal human experience.

Oswald Chambers—“*The word temptation has come to mean something bad for us today, but we tend to use the word in the wrong way. Temptation itself is not sin; it is something we are bound to face simply by virtue of being human. Not to*

be tempted would mean that we were already so shameful that we would be beneath contempt. Temptation is not something that we can escape; in fact it is essential to the well-rounded life of a person. Beware of thinking that you are tempted as no one else—what you go through is the common inheritance of the human race, not something that no one has ever before endured. God does not save us from temptations—He sustains us in the midst of them.”

In his gospel, Mark presents Jesus as the Servant of the Lord, which involved that He know full well what it meant to face temptation. If we're to be servants of the Lord, then temptation will be a common feature of our lives. Which means that there is no such thing as an untested servant of God. We can go through the Bible and see how this is the case. Tests are a part of life to strengthen God's servants. And so Jesus, as the model Servant, He too is exposed to trials and tests and temptations. And His victory over them prove His unique identity as the Son of God. Jesus faced temptation from the enemy, but Mark wants you and I to understand that Jesus overcame the tempter. Because of that, as those who trust in Him, we too can know victory through Christ.

Hebrews 2:17-18—“Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.”

As believers, you and I are not immune to temptation. We are subject to it. But because Jesus has identified with us, He is able to aid us in our struggle. The writer of Hebrews goes on to say this:

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.”

The Son of God was subjected to common temptation just as you and I are, but He was without sin. He overcame the temptation rather than being overcome by it. Scripture is full of examples and warnings of how we are to be ready for temptation when it comes. Such examples include:

- Joseph facing temptation in Potiphar’s house (Gen. 39)
- David tempted to number the people (1 Chron. 21:1)
- Solomon warning about sexual temptation (Prov. 5)
- Paul warning Timothy about greed (1 Tim. 6)

In His model prayer that He gave to His disciples, Jesus even instructs us to pray in such a way that we are aware of temptation’s reality—“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” Temptation is a common struggle that is a constant struggle. It often seems to creep up when we least expect it.

It serves a common purpose

I find it interesting that both Mark and Matthew tell us that Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. In other words, it was all part of the plan of God. Just like His baptism, His temptation was necessary for the fulfillment of all righteousness. It was the Spirit of God that led Jesus to the place where He would face the greatest test at this point in His life. Such temptation was permitted in His life. That is, God the Father allowed God the Son to be put in the position where He would face temptation.

We need to remember that nothing ever comes our way that has not first of all been filtered through the gracious hand of God. However, this is not an excuse for us to go looking for an opportunity to be tempted. I mean don't be like the fellow who struggled with an addiction to Krispy Kreme doughnuts, who confessed that his weakness was not helped by the fact that he drove past Krispy Kreme each morning on his way to work. One morning, trying his best to resist the urge, he said to himself, "I won't stop unless there's a parking place open at the front door. If so, then I guess it is just providential." Wouldn't you know he found that open parking place, but he only had to circle the block eight times...

Don't allow yourself to be put in a situation where you know you will be tempted. Don't play with fire. Instead, we need to realize now that there will come a time when we will be in a tempting situation. God doesn't tempt us, but He does test us by allowing us to be placed in certain environments where we are vulnerable. Which is to say that He permits certain circumstances where our faith is put to the test. As James explains:

James 1:12-14—“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.”

One of the best illustrations of how God allows believers to be tried and tested is the life of Job. God allowed Job to be tempted, but was not involved in any way in the temptation. The enemy was given permission to assault Job's life. And rather than caving in to the pressure, Job's response was one of worship. He said:

Job 1:21-22—“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.”

Job 2:10 - “In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”

God tests our character, but does not tempt us to sin. And when Christians find themselves in situations where they’re being tempted, it is an opportunity for us to resist it in the power of the Spirit, bringing glory to God and strengthening their character. In this way, such testing can be purposeful in our lives, provided we see it as an opportunity to resist sin and reflect God’s glory. Temptation involves a common struggle, serves a common purpose, and then:

It comes from a common origin

Verse 13 says that Jesus was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. Trials come from God to help us be strengthened, but temptation comes from the enemy to cause us to stumble. In that desolate place, Jesus is away from His family. Jesus is away from any who would be His followers. Mark says He was with the ‘wild animals.’ He was in the wild places to do battle with the ancient serpent of Eden. There is an evil one who lurks in the wild places of this world, one who is bent on our destruction, one who is seeking to ‘devour’ us.

1 Peter 5:8—“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

“Devour”—*to cause the complete and sudden destruction of someone or something*

Isn’t that what Satan does? He is a destroyer who wants to destroy lives, to destroy homes, to destroy churches—and he dangles the bait through

temptation. That's exactly the way the enemy works to ensnare and destroy your life. He wants to make you as comfortable as possible as he slowly destroys your life. He knows that each of us are on the very cusp of wrecking our life through one simple decision that is outside of the will of God.

But the good news is that our enemy is defeated! The Son of God overcame the serpent in the wilderness. He then went all the way to the cross to pay the price of redemption and rose again from the dead to prove He is the One who now holds the keys to death. He gives His victory and life to those who turn from sin and trust Him in simple faith. In the common trial of temptation, Jesus is our strength.

2—The TIME of temptation is coming (1:13; 4:2)

“And He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan...And after fasting forty days and forty nights He was hungry.”

Temptation knows how to find us. You can be all by yourself or in a crowded room, and temptation will still be a problem. You can climb a mountain or descend to the bottom of the sea, and temptation will still know where to find you. That's because temptation is inescapable in this life. And as long as the followers of Jesus are living in this world, rest assured that we will wrestle with temptation. It is never an 'if' but is always a 'when.' You're being tempted right now, and so am I. Most of the time we may not even realize it. And in each of those moments, we overestimate or underestimate the power of that temptation. We often overestimate temptation by having an attitude of defeatism that says we are incapable of resisting. On the other hand, we underestimate temptation through an attitude of pride that assumes we are incapable of caving in.

When temptation comes, we should neither overestimate nor underestimate its power. Instead, we should have an exit strategy, and that only comes through understanding how the enemy works and relying upon the power of God's Spirit.

When the temptation came

Notice the Bible says 'The Spirit immediately drove Him out into the wilderness.' By way of context, the gospel writers tell us that it was after Jesus' baptism that He was led into the wilderness to be tempted. Which means Jesus faced temptation following a season of monumental obedience in His life. The same emphasis is seen Matthew 4:1 which is a statement linking what had previously happened with that which is about to happen. Verse 17, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Satan then moves to challenge this through tempting Jesus. It is the same thing in Mark 1:11, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased." And notice the Spirit immediately drove Him into the wilderness. It is often in the midst of making spiritual strides that Satan tries to trip us up. When we experience great spiritual victory, it is fair to expect that an intense time of testing will soon follow.

Remember that yesterday's victory doesn't make us immune to today's struggle. No, temptation is a constant struggle that demands we be on guard, always watching.

1 Peter 5:8-9 (NLT)—"Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are."

That is a two-fold instruction. To ‘stay alert’ means that I am to be awake. To ‘watch out’ means that I am to be aware. Many are often overcome by temptation because they are not awake or alert and not aware of the enemy’s strategy.

1 Corinthians 10:12—“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”

Lest we ever forget, we are sinful men and women who have the propensity to sin in the most grotesque sort of way. You and I are not beyond doing anything outside the will of God. That’s why we need a humble attitude. And neither should we condemn others when they fail the test.

F.B. Meyer—“*When we see a brother or sister in sin, there are two things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. We also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances.*”

Never underestimate your own sin and the subtlety of Satan. Consider the example of King David in 2 Samuel 8-11. In chapters 8-10, we read of his military victories and successes. In chapter 8, he crushed the Philistines. Then in chapter 9, he showed grace to Mephibosheth, grandson of Saul. And in chapter 10, he conquered the Ammonites and the Syrians. What’s the next thing that happens?

2 Samuel 11:1—“It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.”

David was in the wrong place.

2 Samuel 11:2—“Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king’s house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold.”

David was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

2 Samuel 11:3—“So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, ‘Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?’

David was in the wrong place at the wrong time thinking about the wrong thing. The way of escape was still there and available for David, but it grew more narrow as desire blinded all reason and expanded in his proud heart.

2 Samuel 11:4—“Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her.”

Notice the progression of sin in David’s life. What begins with a look leads to lingering and longing for something that is forbidden. It has well been said that sin will always take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay. We should not assume that success makes us invincible. For in many ways, it only makes us a bigger target. When we experience success, we easily forget God. The enemy of your soul knows this full well, and he lures us to take God as well as our own propensity toward sin for granted.

Where the temptation came

First, the enemy attacked in a place of personal wilderness. Mark points out that Jesus was in the wilderness, or in the wild places, when the enemy came and

attacked Him. In other words, Jesus was in an isolated place and was away from everybody else—no family, no friends, no followers. Now, you would think that after a monumental moment like His baptism was, where the Father declared Him to His beloved Son, the Spirit would drive Jesus into the city of Jerusalem where He would assume the throne. But that is not what happens. God's plan involved that His Son enter into combat with the usurper.

It is the wilderness experiences of this life that the enemy seeks us out. We may often find ourselves in a season of discouragement or fatigue, frustrated by the circumstances of life. It may stem from problems at work, problems at home, or problems at random. Lurking in the shadows of those difficult places is our enemy who easily recognizes that we are in a place of vulnerability.

But then notice how Satan attacked in a time of physical weakness. Matthew says Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights and was hungry, and was in a place of physical weakness. And it was to this weakness that Satan offered his first temptation. We should know our weaknesses and limitations, because the enemy does. Yet where we are weak, Christ is strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10—“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Charles Spurgeon—“*The way to grow strong in Christ is to become weak in yourself. God pours no power into man’s heart till man’s power is all poured out. A Christian’s life is one of daily dependence on the grace and strength of God.*”

We’ve seen the when and where of temptation, then notice:

Why the temptation came

“Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God.’” The devil attempts to put a question mark where God puts a period. Through temptation, Satan tries to launch an all-out assault on Jesus’ credibility and role as Messiah. If he could be successful in getting Jesus to cave in, then Jesus could be discredited and disqualified as our Savior. But the gospel says He is tested and triumphant.

Let’s face it—we’re all in desperate need of a Savior. This is where we’ve blown it time and time again. Maybe you’ve once again said hurtful things to your spouse or to your kids out of uncontrollable anger. Maybe you’re secretly wrestling with the constant struggle to want the approval of others. Maybe you wrestle with the constant pull toward some controlling substance like alcohol or something else.

Why does the enemy tempt us so? What does it reveal?

Temptation is so strong in our lives because it’s not about us. Temptation is an assault by the demonic powers on the rival empire of the Messiah. That’s why conversion doesn’t diminish the power of temptation, as we often assume, but actually ratchets it up. Satan does not want Jesus to get glory through our lives. But the enemy is defeated!

Revelation 12:10-11—“And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.’”

The trial of temptation is common, and there is none of us who are invulnerable. The time of temptation is coming, and it is not a matter of ‘if’ but is only a matter of ‘when.’ Since this is true, the followers of Jesus must be prepared for it when it comes. And though we’ll stop here and come back to this, I want to show you how Jesus is our triumph over temptation. Times of temptation call for desperation that drives us to the only place where we can find refuge from the storm of temptation—the finished work of Jesus.

What temptation are you facing today? What temptation have you been subjected to? Maybe you’ve failed so many times you wonder if its possible to have victory at all. But let me say to you: yes, it is possible. Better than than that—it is inevitable through, and only through, the Lord Jesus Christ, and only by facing your trials and your temptations the way He did. To suffer tests and temptations is part of what it is to be a servant of God. We can expect testing of all sorts in life. We will overcome when we understand that although the devil wants us to fall into temptation, God will use the tests for good. He is our help and refuge, and He will lead us from strength to strength.

Before we pray, I want to read something to you. You’re all familiar with John Newton, the notorious slave trader who was converted and then wrote “Amazing Grace.” He wrote a lot of other hymns, one in particular about the confusion that we often have regarding trials and temptations in the Christian life. When we

think, "This shouldn't be happening to me! I'm a Christian, I'm a child of God! Why is all of this happening to me? Surely I should be delivered from these hardships now that I'm one of God's children!" We often fail to realize that this is not just happening because the devil has instigated it at times, but it's happening because God's Spirit has arranged it for our good, for our strength, for our faith, for our victory. Listen to these lines Newton wrote:

*I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek, more earnestly, His face.*

*'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust, has answered prayer!
But it has been in such a way,
As almost drove me to despair.*

*I hoped that in some favored hour,
At once He'd answer my request;
And by His love's constraining pow'r,
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.*

*Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry pow'rs of hell
Assault my soul in every part.*

*Yea, more with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe,*

Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,

Humbled my heart and laid me low.

Lord, why is this, I trembling cried,

Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?

'Tis in this way, the Lord replied,

I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ,

From self, and pride, to set thee free;

And break thy schemes of earthly joy,

That thou may'st find thy all in Me.