

Mark 1:12-15

Lent 1; February 18 & 19, 2024

What if there were no such things as disease and sickness? What if there were no such things as cancer? What if there were no such things as bankruptcies? What if there were no such things as wars and invasions? What if there were no such things as divorce? What if there were no such things as hatred? What if there no shouts of anger from people? What if there were no such things as shootings? What if nobody would be hungry and have to go on living without food? What if there were no tragic accidents? What if no one would grow old and die?

Imagine what the world would be like if that were true. It's almost impossible for us to think of a world in that way. We have never experienced a world without sin. We have only experienced a world that has death and sin and disease in it. We live in a broken world filled with sin. It is sin that separates us from our God. I wonder how Adam and Eve felt on that first evening after they had disobeyed his command? They could no longer walk beside God in the cool of the evening as they had done before. Instead, they now found themselves to be in a constant battle with the Devil. They must have felt so alone after that day. That day not only changed them, it changed this world and it changed us. On our own we could never win the battle against Satan. Adam and Eve must have felt so helpless after they had sinned. This battle, that they now found themselves in, could never be won by them. Here they stood in this beautiful garden that had been created for them, and it must have felt like they were now living in a desert – in a wilderness. They were now alone and no longer one with God. The temptations that they now felt were so real.

Ever felt like Adam and Eve on that day? They looked around and saw what they had and now were so alone. I think, that there are times that we can feel like we are living in a wilderness. We might look around at all that we do have, and we can feel so empty. Or maybe, you have that dream job, but it no longer is that dream job. Perhaps, you are feeling stress and depression and you can't tell anyone. Or maybe your wilderness is something else. But I think we may all know how it feels to live in the wilderness of sin and temptations. Yet, God didn't leave Adam and Eve alone in that wilderness of sin. He doesn't leave you alone. Instead, we see Jesus going straight out into that wilderness to do what we could not do.

Every day we get up and try to battle with Satan. Every day we might think that we can win. Yet, we are no match for Satan. He comes at us again and again; and again, and again we fail. Yes, there are days that we seem to do better. There are days like Abraham had in our first lesson. We are willing to give up everything for our God. We trust that he will provide the lamb. We know the words of the Apostle Paul: **"If God is for us, who can be against us?"** We don't always trust those words. We think we know better. It is then that we fail even more. The attacks from Satan don't stop. He is good at what he does. He has a way of making those awful things look so good, doesn't he? Soon, we find ourselves back in the wilderness of sin all alone. We feel beaten. We feel parched. We feel weak. On our own, we don't stand a chance against Satan.

As Mark recounts the temptations of Jesus he doesn't name the actual temptations, as the other Gospel writers do. **"At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him."** In these two verses, we don't see Satan questioning Jesus whether he was the Son of God. We don't see Jesus' quoting of Scripture to fight against Satan. There are no stones, no kingdoms and pinnacles of the Temple. Mark lets the actual fighting remain silent.

Why? Perhaps, Mark wants us to draw comfort not from the precise things Jesus did as He battled Satan in the wilderness, but rather from the way in which God was present with Him in the struggle. There will be times in our lives when we enter the wilderness. Our wilderness will be different from that of Jesus. But one thing remains the same: God will be there working for us. Mark offers all people three truths to comfort their souls in the wilderness of sin.

First, Mark wants us to know that God is in control. Mark begins by saying, **"At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness."** This is the Spirit that descended on Jesus in His baptism. This is the Spirit which came as God the Father said: **"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."** Temptations in the wilderness are not a sign that God has abandoned you, that God doesn't love us or that God is nowhere to be found. God wants us to know that when

those temptations come, he will never leave us or forsake us. God's still there with us, just as the Father was with Jesus in the wilderness. He is still in control.

Secondly, God still cares for us. Mark says: **"and angels attended him."** Even in the midst suffering and temptation, God is sending his angels to minister to people. The angels were created to serve God and his people. Luke writes: **"Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."** (Luke 12:7) If God knows how many hairs are on your head, he knows your needs and how to provide his angels to offer you the care you need in ways that we cannot fully understand.

Thirdly, we need to remember why Jesus came: **"Proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near."** Mark is very clear in his Gospel. The ministry of Jesus is a ministry of restoration. Jesus has come to make right what is so wrong in this world of sin. What you could not be, Jesus *I will be for you*. That Jesus, who is facing the temptations and living with the wild animals for 40 days, is our Champion. He is our substitute in the wilderness. He went there without hesitation. His plan is to wash the sins of this world away in his blood. His plan is to wash your sins away. Even though we may not be able to fully understand a world that has no sin, we will. Our Savior has won it for you. Amen.