

Mark 1:4-13 “Prepare to Meet the Beloved Son”^{**1}Series: “*Mark: The Servant in Action*”

Main Idea: As we read the opening of Mark’s gospel in Mark 1:4-13, Mark prepares us to meet the Beloved Son. He uses two acts of preparation that teach us much about Jesus, namely, that Jesus indeed is someone special.

- I. We see John preparing the people for Jesus (4-8).
 - A. He turned people away from their sin (4-5).
 1. Repentance involves confession.
 2. Repentance involves a choice to change.
 3. Repentance involves concrete action that pleases God.
 - B. He turned people to Jesus (6-8).
 1. God’s kind of minister focuses on the Word, not his opinions.
 2. God’s kind of minister exalts Christ, not himself.
 3. God’s kind of minister promotes God’s kingdom, not his own empire.
 4. God’s kind of minister helps people face their sin, then get rid of it.
 5. God’s kind of minister gives people hope.
- II. We see God preparing Jesus for the people (9-13).
 - A. He used Jesus’ baptism (9-11).
 1. The Spirit came upon Him.
 2. The Father commended Him.
 - B. He used Jesus’ temptation (12-13).
 1. The Spirit led Jesus into enemy territory.
 2. Jesus faced Satan’s assault and won.
 3. From this time on, Jesus would rescue others from Satan.

Make It Personal: Is the Beloved Son beloved in *your* life?

1. Let’s get serious about our sin.
2. Let’s get serious about knowing Him.

We love Jesus more than anything at WBC, which is why this morning we’ll be doing two things. One, towards the end of this service, we’ll be coming together to the Lord’s Table, to remember and worship the One who gave His life for us. To prepare us for that special opportunity, we will now place ourselves under the ministry of His precious Word, by returning to the Gospel of Mark for a series we launched last week entitled, “*The Servant in Action.*” We want to know The Servant!

As I read the opening of Mark’s gospel, I’d like for us to be thinking about a question. *How does God treat those He loves?* You may be shocked at the answer we’re going to see today. In today’s passage, Mark prepares us to meet the One identified by God as “My Beloved Son”. Pay particular attention to what happens to this beloved Son right after He hears those words from His Father.

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:1-13

He’s the greatest person who ever lived. That’s no exaggeration. If anything, it’s an understatement. No one has made a greater impact on this planet than He did. Today nearly one-third of the earth’s population professes allegiance to Him. Countless books have been written about Him, His teachings, and His influence. There are movies about Him, songs about Him, with more coming out all the time. There are hospitals, schools, publishing houses, and recording studios in existence today, all because of Him.

In His brief thirty-three years of earthly life, He healed the sick, preached hope to the hopeless, even raised the dead. He Himself conquered death and returned to life, a feat unmatched in human history.

I’m talking, of course, about Jesus Christ. And I haven’t even scratched the surface when describing His influence, so great it is.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2004.

When it comes to the subject of Jesus, where do you begin? In the Bible there are four biographies of His life, and they each begin from a different launching point. Matthew, writing for a Jewish audience, begins with a genealogy that shows His connection to King David. Luke begins with two birth narratives, that of John and Jesus, for he wants to demonstrate the Messiah's humanity for a Greek audience. John begins with the creation account, emphasizing that the Son of God was present in the beginning, indeed, that He created everything in the beginning. And then there's Mark.

Mark begins in a very different fashion, as we began to see last time. Mark gets right to the point. There's no genealogy, no birth account, just a short Old Testament prediction and boom, He's an adult launching His public ministry!

There is no greater pursuit than to get to know Jesus, and if we do know Him, to get to know Him better so that we might make Him better known to others. That's why we began this series last week, with Mark as our tutor. We want to know the One who came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

In today's text, Mark 1:4-13, we're going to see two acts of preparation that tell us much about the worth of the person of Jesus the Christ.

I. We see John preparing the people for Jesus (4-8).

Verse 4 begins, "John appeared." Note that Mark takes no time to introduce his audience to this person called John, apparently assuming they knew about him. Mark is writing about thirty years after Jesus returned to heaven. Until now the gospel has been preached. But now it's time to write it down, so guided by the Holy Spirit, Mark did just that. And the reason for his writing was twofold.

First, there were non-truths about Jesus being circulated in the Roman world that were dishonoring to the Lord Jesus and hurtful to His church. Second, there was persecution against His followers. So Mark wrote this gospel, as directed by the Holy Spirit, to address these two problems, presenting the truth about Jesus, and showing that He suffered too.²

Following his brief introduction, Mark puts the spotlight on John the Baptist. The NIV reads, "And so John came." This is one of the most repeated words in the book. *And*. In the NIV there are 583 appearances of "and" in Mark, with "and" beginning sentences over 30 times. This is a fast-moving, action-packed presentation of Jesus' life.

And so John came. In fulfillment of the prophecies by Malachi and Isaiah that Mark cited in verses 2 & 3, John came. According to Mark, John came to fulfill a ministry of preparation. John prepared people for Jesus by engaging in two actions.

A. He turned people away from their sin (4-5). "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."

How do you turn people from their sins? John's approach was pretty simple. He did it by baptizing and by preaching. In fact, the method he used became his nickname, *John the Baptist*. We need some background to appreciate this.

When a Gentile chose to become a Jewish proselyte, he had to do three things. One, he had to be circumcised, for this was the mark of the Jewish covenant community. Two, he needed sacrifice to be made for him, for only blood could atone for his sin. Three, he had to undergo baptism which symbolized his cleansing from sin and his shameful past.³

² Many feel that Mark wrote for a Roman audience, presenting Jesus from the perspective of Peter.

³ Barclay, p. 14.

That's what happened to Gentiles who wanted to get right with God. But John staggered his Jewish audience. He told them, "Listen. You need to do what you say the Gentiles need to do. *You* need to get baptized. Why? Because you think you're right with God just because of your religious heritage. But not so. God is not pleased with how you're living, and it's time to face the reality. It's time to *repent*."

My friend, if you want to meet the Messiah, you too must get serious about your sin. You'll never love the Messiah while clinging to things that displease the Messiah in your life. John preached a baptism of repentance.

But what does that actually mean? By definition, repentance (*metanoia*) is "a change of mind." And as we see here, repentance, which is a gift of God, shows itself in three ways.

1. *Repentance involves confession.* Mark says that scores of people made the trek to see John. If it was fascination that brought them, it quickly turned to conviction. They *confessed their sins*. To "confess" is *exomologeō* and means "to agree, to consent, to admit, to acknowledge." In other words, they got serious about their sin and they did something verbal about it. They used their mouths and *confessed* it, both to God and to appropriate others. I include the latter because Luke says John gave very specific instructions to those repenting about their sins (he told tax collectors to stop ripping off people, and soldiers to quit using their position to take advantage of folks). We don't turn from sin with generalities. When repentance is real, we make specific confession of specific sin to those we've sinned against, including God and others.

2. *Repentance involves a choice to change.* Having confessed their sins, they were baptized. The act of baptism reveals that this is no mere emotional decision. It takes a person beyond big talk to a concrete, draw a line in the sand, public action. It says, "By the grace of God, I am turning from my sin. I'm under new ownership."

You say, "If God knows my heart, why make it public?" The short answer is, if something's real in your heart, you want to make it public. Think of a young lady who just got engaged. Does she make it public? Yes, gladly!

John preached a baptism of repentance "for the forgiveness of sins".⁴ The wording is important. The Greek preposition indicates that John baptized, not so much *for* the remission of sins, but *unto* the remission for sins. John's ministry was preparatory. John prepared people for Jesus through whom the remission of sins comes. So it's not baptism that gives forgiveness. It's Jesus that does that, as only He can.

But the point is, when repentance is genuine, it involves confession, but also a choice to get rid of sin, to change, not by one's own strength, but enabled by God and His grace.

3. *Repentance involves concrete action that pleases God.* When people left John to return home, they left with the realization that change wasn't optional, but mandatory. John told them so, again as seen in Luke's account, which says, "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance (Luke 3:8)."

What kind of fruits? *If you have two tunics, share with the person who has none*, he told the crowds. *No more hypocrisy*, he told the Pharisees. *No more taking extra money* he told the tax collectors. And so on.

Let's be honest. Many people come to Jesus because they aren't satisfied with their lives. So, they sort of add Jesus until once again *they* are satisfied. Then they put Him on the shelf until they need Him again. My friend, true repentance is different. The issue

⁴ Forgiveness (*aphesis*, "remission" in KJV) means "release from bondage or imprisonment." Regarding sins it signifies letting them go as if they had never been committed.

isn't whether we are satisfied with our life (that's secondary). It's that *God* isn't. That's why we need Jesus. To repent is to say, I want my life to please God from this point on.

The words "user-friendly" don't apply to John. He was a tell it like it is kind of preacher. He wasn't interested in attracting self-preoccupied seekers. Even the pulpit he chose made that clear. Mark says the people of Jerusalem *went out to him*, out to the desert.⁵ And Jerusalem is at least twenty miles from the Jordan River and about 4,000 feet above it. So the trip to hear John took people through the rugged Judean hills and the return trip home would be even harder, all uphill.

In our day there's a common ministry approach that says, "If you want to reach lost people, you need to make it easy for them to come. Give them comfortable facilities. Assure them you've got quality programs for their kids. Make sure you use music they like. And by all means don't talk about commitment and don't preach very long.

I don't know if John would laugh or cry if he saw what's happening today in so many churches. For John there was no music, no padded pews, no air conditioning (and he preached in a desert!), no shuttle bus from the parking lot, no nurseries for the kids, and certainly no feel-good pep talks.

Rather, there was preaching. And I mean *preaching*, preaching that confronted sin, and called for repentance, and warned of the eternal consequences facing those who refused to do so.

Besides preaching there was baptizing, and not some sentimental ritual, either. To call for people to be baptized was to give them the opportunity to sign on the dotted line. It was to say, "It's time to do a 180 in life, no more playing games with God. He invites you to come home to Him, and today's the day. Are you in or out?"

And guess what? By the gracious working of the Spirit of God, multitudes said, "We're in. We want to be right with God."

This is what's needed today, preaching that takes sin seriously, both by confronting it and then by showing people how to get of it.

You say, "How do I get rid of my sin? How does it happen?" Here's the answer. Look at what John did next. To put it simply...

B. He turned people to Jesus (6-8). John didn't preach himself. Nor did he preach self-reform. He preached Messiah-reform. He existed to turn people to Jesus.

Watch how he did it, starting in verse 6, "Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey." Talk about dressing for success! I don't get the impression that John cared too much about what people thought of him. Or maybe he did. What did he communicate by his diet and choice of clothes (and he was intending to communicate something, as are we by our choice of dress)?

John reminded his audience of the Old Testament prophets, particularly Elijah. Why would he do that? Well, who were the prophets, and what did the prophets do? They were God's spokesmen, and it was their task to tell people what the Lord had said, no more, no less.

That's me, says John by his dress and even his diet. He wore a plain outfit (made of camel's hair) and ate simple food (locusts and wild honey). And in case you're wondering, people were known to eat locusts either raw or roasted and seasoned with salt or prepared in other ways.

⁵ The term "desert region" or "wilderness" (KJV) comes from the Greek *eremos*, translated also as "desert," "desolate," and "solitary."

When you looked at this man, you knew you were about to hear, not his opinions, but a message that had come from God Himself. If John's mannerisms captured the people's attention, his words captured their hearts.

Notice verses 7-8, "And he preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.'⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Of this man, Jesus would later say in Matthew 11:11, "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist."

There's much we can learn from The Baptist, particularly about how to help people get right with God. From John's example we see five commitments of God's kind of minister.

1. *God's kind of minister focuses on the Word, not his opinions.* "Thus saith the Lord!" was the drum John beat over and over. People need God's Word, not our ideas.

2. *God's kind of minister exalts Christ, not himself.* "I'm not worthy to untie His sandals," John said. In that day sandals were simply leather soles fastened to the foot by straps passing through the toes. To remove sandals was the task of a slave. Compared to Jesus that's how John saw himself. He is worthy. I'm not even worthy to be His servant.

Here's where I get into trouble. I forget my role. It's not my church, not my family, not even my life. It all belongs to Christ, and I get into trouble when I think it's mine.

3. *God's kind of minister promotes God's kingdom, not his own empire.* John pointed people to Jesus. In time he would actually turn people away from himself so they would follow the Master.

One day he was standing with two of his disciples, and Jesus walked by. Remember what John told those two men? "Behold, the Lamb of God (John 1:36)!" And they left him, and followed Jesus. And he (John) rejoiced!

4. *God's kind of minister helps people face their sin, then get rid of it.* It's not easy for a pastor, or Sunday School teacher, or camp counselor, to talk about sin. It's easy to be positive and encouraging, but when there's cancer growing, there's need for more than encouragement. The cancer must be identified, and removed if possible.

We're not helping someone if we re-label sin (for instance, when we call sexual sin merely as a "personal struggle"), nor if we allow blame-shifting (such as, it's not your fault that you struggle, after all the terrible things people have done to you, or didn't do for you). That kind of help doesn't bring hope.

But this does. We do what John did. We help people face their sin, and then get rid of it. How? By getting to know Jesus.

5. *God's kind of minister gives people hope.* This was John's message. "He's coming! I baptize you with water, to prepare you for Him. But He will do something far better. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Water cleans up the outside, but He will clean you up on the inside!"

So, point one, we see John preparing the people for Jesus. Next, Mark gives us a second act of preparation.

II. We see God preparing Jesus for the people (9-13).

How did He do it? He used two rather shocking events, first, a baptism of repentance, and secondly, temptation. Why those two events, and why for Jesus, the perfect Messiah? Let's find out.

A. He used Jesus' baptism (9-11). Notice verse 9, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan."

Mark begins with the words, “In those days.” The year was around AD 27. Jesus was thirty years old. After having spent His first couple of years in Bethlehem and Egypt, Jesus lived in the village of Nazareth in the region of Galilee throughout his childhood, adolescence, and early adult years. But *in those days* Jesus headed south to Judea. What days? The days when John was preaching in Judea.

It’s hard for us to fathom this since we know the rest of the story, but keep in mind that Jesus was basically unknown at this point. He had a common name, Jesus, the Greek form of Joshua, and there were many men named Joshua in Israel. He had a very common background, a carpenter from an obscure village in the outpost district of Galilee. For years now He’s been making yokes and ploughs and building furniture. There was no halo around His head, no glow that accentuated His countenance. He was an ordinary man living an ordinary life.

Or so the people thought. Public perception was about to change, and here’s where it began. It started the day Jesus traveled from Nazareth to be baptized by John.

Hold on. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. When people came to John, they came to confess their sin and express their desire to change. When they entered the water with John, it was to proclaim their intention to turn from sin to righteousness. Why then did Jesus come to John? After all, Jesus was (in the words of Hebrews 7:26) “holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners.” Of Him Peter said in 1 Peter 2:22, “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

So why did Jesus come to John for a baptism of repentance? This is shocking. Mark doesn’t tell us why. Matthew’s account indicates that John actually protested against baptizing Jesus, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me (Matt 3:14)?” But Jesus proceeded and joined with the sinful multitude in this baptism of repentance.

And why? In Matthew’s account Jesus gives the answer. He said it was to “fulfill all righteousness (3:15).” But why would the One who is altogether Righteous go through a baptism that signified repentance?

Paul gives us a clue in 2 Corinthians 5:21, saying, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” There is why Jesus came. There is why He did what He did throughout His ministry, from His baptism, all the way to the cross and the empty tomb. The Righteous One identified with the unrighteous, so the unrighteous could become righteous.

When a person joined John in the water, it was to indicate his repentance. But of whose sin could Jesus repent? His own? No. He had no sin. But He had come to earth to bear sin. Whose? *Ours*.

This is not an easy question to answer, but J. D. Jones offers a helpful explanation, “He made confession in Jordan of your sin, my reader, and mine. For when Jesus entered our humanity, He so utterly and entirely identified Himself with us that He made our very sin His own.”⁶

Don’t misunderstand. He never sinned. But He did come to earth to identify with us and then, while on the cross, to bear our sin and give us His righteousness in exchange.

Two results happened after Jesus was baptized.

1. *The Spirit came upon Him*. Verse 10 says, “And when he came up out of the water⁷, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.”

⁶ J. D. Jones, *Mark*, p. 16.

⁷ Note that Jesus’ baptism is no mere sprinkling of water on his head, but an immersion in the water.

Mark uses very strong language to speak of this heavenly entrance. He says the heavens were “torn open,” a verb he uses only twice in his gospel. We find it here and also in Mark 15:38. Do you remember what was torn there? “And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.”

These two appearances of this verb are like bookends in Mark’s gospel. From tearing open to tearing open, this is the story of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

And so, when He came up out of the water, He, Jesus Himself, saw the heavens being torn open. Some say that this is when Jesus became God, at His baptism. Is that true? Certainly not. The person who went into the water and was baptized by John was the eternal Son of God before He went into the water, who has always existed. Remember the name the angel said to give Him at His birth? Call Him “Immanuel”, which means, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

So what happened then at His baptism? In the Old Testament when the Holy Spirit came upon a person it was to inaugurate a new ministry. And we see the Spirit doing this again and again when He came upon kings like David and prophets too. Now Mark says that *Jesus* saw the Spirit descending on Him. This was a message specifically for Jesus.⁸

And what’s the message? “It’s time now to break the silence and begin your ministry.”

Mark says the Spirit came “as a dove.” Elsewhere the Scriptures compare the Spirit’s work to cleansing fire that burns and to mighty wind that blows the undesirable away, both symbols of violence.

But a “dove?” In the Scriptures this image speaks of gentleness, harmlessness, and humility. The poorest were allowed to bring a dove as their offering for sin. How fitting for the One who later when reviled, did not retaliate, for Him who was a friend of tax collectors and sinners, for He who did not come to be served but to serve!

And who sent this message to Jesus? Notice verse 11, “And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” Luke alone says that Jesus was praying at this time. And His Father responded.

2. *The Father commended Him.* So, we see all three persons of the Trinity here, don’t we? God the Son coming out of the water. God the Holy Spirit descending like a dove. And God the Father speaking. And oh, what encouraging words He spoke!

Listen to the voice. The voice reveals Jesus’ identity, “You are *my Son*.” The voice reveals His relationship with the Father, “my *beloved Son*” (NIV, “whom I love”). The voice also emphasizes the Father’s appraisal of His Son, “with you I am well pleased.”

My friend, God the Father said audibly that He is pleased with His Son. Are you? Is the beloved Son *beloved* to you? And are you telling Him, and are you showing Him?

God used this baptism to prepare His Son for the public ministry He designed for Him. He wants Him to know that He loves Him, that He’s pleased with Him, for He knows His Son will be hearing a very different response in the next three years, ultimately hearing, “Crucify Him!”

So God used His Son’s baptism to prepare Jesus for the people. Then He used a second event, and it too is shocking.

B. He used Jesus’ temptation (12-13). Notice verses 12, “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.” That word “immediately” is significant. It’s one of the key words in the book. The Greek term *eutheos* appears 47 times (9 times in chapter one). It’s as if Jesus’ isn’t even dry yet, and the Spirit drove Him into the desert.

⁸ Mark specifically says, “*He* saw...” Did the people see the heavens being torn and the dove descending? And did the people hear the voice saying, “This is my beloved Son”? I don’t see an answer in the text.

Verse 13 tells us, “And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.”

What a strange way to show someone you love them! You are my beloved Son. Now go into the wilderness, face the wild animals, and be tempted by Satan. What’s going on here?! We need to consider carefully three insights into Jesus’ temptation.⁹

1. *The Spirit led Jesus into enemy territory.* The text says that the Spirit *drove* Jesus into the desert. *Ekbollo* is a strong term. Typically, the word is translated “to cast out,” such as with demons. It’s the word that would be used to depict expelling a person from society or banishing someone from a family. It means “to cast out, to drive out, to send out,” at times with the notion of violence. It’s what Jesus did with the money changers in the temple in Mark 11:15 and the demons in Matthew 8:16.

Here it’s what the Spirit does with Jesus. He drove Him into the wilderness. This doesn’t mean that Jesus was afraid or unwilling to go, for He always acted in complete compliance with the Spirit, willingly and gladly. And it was always His delight to please His Father, no matter how difficult the assignment.

But the driving indicates this was an absolute necessity. It must happen, and it must happen now, at once.

Why? And what was this assignment for which the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert? Mark uses only two verses to describe Jesus’ temptation experience. Matthew has eleven, and Luke thirteen verses. Mark records no specific temptations, nor does he mention Jesus’ victory over Satan. There was victory, for sure, but Mark wants to emphasize that, as Wessel states, “Jesus’ entire ministry was one continuous encounter with the Devil and not limited to a few temptations.”¹⁰

This is key. There was a *divine necessity* to this forty-day battle with temptation. Why? Think of that number *forty*. Where else do we see it? The flood lasted forty days and nights. The Israelites spent forty years wandering in the wilderness. Prior to his ministry, Moses spent forty years in the wilderness, and then God used him to deliver His people from bondage.¹¹ Forty in the Bible often symbolizes a period of testing.

This is why Jesus came, to do what Moses did, only better! He will deliver slaves, not from Egypt, but from sin and Satan himself. How? He will, He *must* face what we face. There was always divine necessity for every step the Savior took on earth. “I must needs go through Samaria,” He later would say. And, “Take this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done.” The path Jesus walked was established in eternity past in the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

Thus, the Spirit *drove* Him into the wilderness. Think of it. What Jesus faced in those forty days in the desert was to fix our problem, and it merely anticipated what the next three years would hold for Him, with the wonderful, terrible climax happening at the cross. God’s path for His Son would involve isolation, rejection, scorn, suffering, and finally death, followed by a triumphant resurrection, and a seat on the throne of heaven. This was His Father’s plan, a plan they agreed upon before He ever came to earth.

Could Jesus be distracted from such a costly plan? For forty days Satan unleashed his arsenal at Jesus. Matthew’s account indicates his strategy was to get Jesus to take a shortcut to the throne. Some people have the notion that Jesus fasted 40 days and *then* experienced the temptation at the end of the period. Mark indicates the assault lasted the entire time. In actuality, Satan’s attack continued all the way to the cross.

⁹ The term *peirazo* means “tempt,” but also “try, test, prove,” and even “examine.” In this context the former is in mind. Satan’s objective was to tempt Jesus in order to get Him to sin.

¹⁰ Walt Wessel, p. 623.

¹¹ Later, Moses also spent forty days and nights up on the mountain.

Please realize that although Satan was the direct agent of this temptation, the Father used it in His Son's life, as He did in the case of Job, and as He does with us. At the very outset of His ministry Jesus faced what He would face for the next three years.

Listen again to J. D. Jones: "In vision it was revealed to our Lord what our redemption would cost... It was the Father's testing of the Son's obedience and faith. He showed Him the bitter cup the Redeemer of Souls would have to drink. Privations, sorrows, bitter scorn, the life of toil, the mean abode, the faithless kiss, the crown of thorns—these were all ingredients in that bitter cup. And the Father showed them all to His Son in the wilderness, and said, 'Art Thou able to drink of the cup?' And our Lord, counting the bitternesses, every one, knowing all the pain and shame involved, answered His Father, 'I am able.'"¹²

Let's be clear. Jesus did not face temptation to see if He might possibly fail, but to prove that He would not, indeed, He could not fail. He is the absolutely sinless One. He was not only without actual sin, but was also without a sin nature. He possessed no inward tendency to sin, as we do, as the sons and daughters of Adam.

And yet, this was a real temptation. G. Campbell Morgan's insight is warranted, "I know the old controversy of the theologians and the scholars as to the peccability of Christ. But unless He was *tempted*, then He was *not* tempted; unless He felt the lure of the suggestions made, there was no temptation!"¹³

And so, it lasted forty days. The time also corresponds to Israel's forty years of testing in the wilderness. Israel, of course, failed the test. What about Jesus? Again, Mark's account is brief. He doesn't give us the specifics of this particular confrontation with the Evil One. He simply wants us to know that the Messiah's conflict with Satan and his forces has begun, and would continue for the next three years, until the cross.

Yes, even from the outset of his book, Mark makes it clear that...

2. *Jesus faced Satan's assault and won.* For forty days the Savior endured Satan's temptation, and did not succumb. Later, He will rescue others from the clutches of the Evil One, as He has done for us who believe in Him. For as John later writes, "Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world."

There's a powerful contrast here. The first Adam faced Satan in a beautiful garden and *lost*. Jesus the last Adam encountered the devil in a barren wilderness and *won*.¹⁴

And He wasn't alone in that wilderness. Mark says He was with the "wild animals." The KJV uses "wild beasts," the term can signify any living creature. Metaphorically, it can refer to a brutal or savage man. Interestingly, over three-fourths of the use of this term in the New Testament are found in the book of Revelation where it refers to *the Beast*, the Satanic leader in the Tribulation period.

But there were angels, too, and to describe their activity, Mark uses the term *diakoneo* which means "to minister or serve." It's what a servant does for his master. It refers to meeting practical needs in the life of another. In the noun form it signifies a "deacon."

What a contrast here! Jesus was surrounded by *wild animals* (creatures that devour and destroy) and *angels* (God-created beings that, in the words of Hebrews 1:14, are "sent to serve those who will inherit salvation"). That's the contrast Jesus would face throughout the next three years.

It's what we face, too. There are beasts, creatures that seek to harm God's people. Like those the psalmist had in mind when he cried out in Psalm 57:4, "I am in the midst

¹² J. D. Jones, p. 19.

¹³ G. Campbell Morgan, p. 26.

¹⁴ Observation by W. Wiersbe

of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts— men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.”

Brothers and sisters, this vile world is no friend of grace. But let us never forget there are angels, too, God’s messengers sent to aid God’s children in this battlefield. They came to Jesus in the wilderness, and later in the Garden. They came to Peter in prison, to Paul when shipwrecked, and they come to us when the Father sees we need them.

John Paton was a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands. One night hostile natives surrounded the mission station, intent on burning out the Patons and killing them. Paton and his wife prayed during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them. When daylight came they were amazed to see their attackers leave. A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ. Remembering what had happened, Paton asked the chief what had kept him from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, "Who were all those men with you there?" Paton knew no men were present-- but the chief said he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords circling the mission station.¹⁵

Notice something else about the wild animals. They didn’t hurt Jesus. They were *wild* animals but they weren’t wild with Him. They didn’t act according to their current, ferocious nature, not with Him. See the authority of Jesus here, my friend, the same authority He will demonstrate later when He tells a storm to be quiet, and at the future day when He establishes His kingdom on earth, and when the lion and the lamb will live peacefully.

John prepared the people for Jesus. God prepared Jesus for the people, at His baptism and then in wilderness. For forty days Jesus faced Satan’s assault and won.

3. *From this time on, Jesus would rescue others from Satan.* It’s why He came, my friend. He came to set sinners free. He can set *you* free today, if you will ask Him.

What a Savior! Hebrews 2:14-15 says, “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”¹⁶

Make It Personal: Is the Beloved Son beloved in *your* life?

You say, “I want Him to be. What does it take?” According to John, two responses.

1. *Let’s get serious about our sin.* My friend, sin is a big deal. Any sin. All sin. It’s why Jesus came, to rescue sinners *from* sin, *to* God. Do you hate your sin? Then repent of it. To be saved, you must. To live as a saved person, you must. Hate sin. Repent.

2. *Let’s get serious about knowing Him.* And trusting Him. And loving Him. And living our lives for Him. For indeed, there’s no one like Him.

Closing Song: #210 “Jesus Paid It All” (all four verses)

Communion – Indeed, Jesus did pay it all, and all to Him we owe. To keep that reality fresh in our minds, He gave His church a simple command. “Do this in remembrance of Me.” Do what? Take some bread, and eat it together. Why? It will remind you of my broken body, which I gave for you. And take the fruit of the vine, and drink it. Why? To remember how I shed my blood to provide cleansing for your sin. If you know Him, this table is for you. Let’s remember and worship Him together.

¹⁵ *Today in the Word*, MBI, October, 1991, p. 18.

¹⁶ Hebrews 2:18 elaborates, “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Hebrews 4:15, “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.”