

Christ Is Victor!
Mark 1:12-13
June 15, 2025
Pastor Francis Bezzam

¹² *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.* ¹³ *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.* Mark 1:12-13

In the late nineteenth century, there was a counter-cultural movement in England called the Aesthetic Movement. This movement came into being in opposition and in defiance to the Victorian culture. The people who promoted this movement thought that Victorian traditions were repressive or conservative at the least. The Aesthetic Movement began with wanting to appreciate “art for art’s sake”. However, the movement did not remain with just appreciating art. It extended to pleasure-seeking. One of the key figures of the Aesthetic Movement was Oscar Wilde, an Irish playwright. Wilde went from appreciating beauty to living a life of excess or debauchery in secret. Wilde was imprisoned for homosexual activity which was illegal in Victorian England. Sadly, Wilde died at the age of 46. Fast forward to our day and age, Oscar Wilde is seen as an icon in the modern Gay Liberation movement. You can see a glimpse of Oscar Wilde’s thought process from what he wrote in one of his novels. He wrote “*We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. . . . Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden itself*”. Wilde is known for his maxims and one of them is “*I can resist anything except temptation*”. This sort of thinking has given rise to what we see in today’s culture in what we call “expressive individualism” or unrestrained “sexual expression”. It is really unmasked unashamed depravity that God abhors!

Oscar Wilde was not the only man on earth who had faced temptations, tests or trials in life. We all face temptations of various kinds. This world is full of temptations. Jesus taught that “*Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!*” Luke 17:1

Temptations, trials or testing can look different for you depending on where you are in your life journey.

1. If you are in your pre-teens or teens, peer pressure or trying to fit in or technology may be some of your challenges.
2. If you are in your twenties, maybe you are getting ready for work or you are working. You are single and you are hoping to begin a relationship or you are in one. You have desires, hopes and dreams and the temptations that you face may appear to threaten your dreams.
3. If you are in thirties and forties, your temptations may look different.
4. If you the fifties or sixties, career goals or retirement may on the horizon.
5. If you are in the seventies or eighties, your temptations may look different.

Regardless of where you are in your life journey, in this passage we see that our Lord Jesus himself was tempted as thirty-year old. *Tested* is perhaps the more appropriate word. After being tempted, tried and tested, our Lord Jesus Christ emerges victorious! Christ is Victor and is victorious. In Christ you can be victorious too.

Last week we saw Jesus being baptized and affirmed as the chosen Messiah by the Holy Spirit and the Father. We saw why He was baptized. Jesus's baptism was affirmation from The Father and the Holy Spirit. The Father speaks directly from His throne in Heaven and says "*You are my Beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*"

So after Jesus' baptism, you would think there might be a celebration, but things turn out differently. There is no festivity or celebration but a trial, a test or an ordeal.

Have you ever tried to begin a new godly habit or abandon a bad habit but you feel challenged, tested or even attacked? You are not alone!

Jesus was tempted at the *beginning* of his ministry. Some say the greatest struggles often accompany the first steps of a new work.

Tests and trials develop genuineness and teach humility, and reliance on God.

In verse *twelve*, we see that the Spirit immediately drove Jesus into the wilderness, into a no-man's land. The Spirit *drove* him. The word is – "*ekballo*" meaning to be cast or driven.

Why was Jesus driven into the wilderness?

Mark's Gospel does not tell us why but Matthew's Gospel does. The Spirit drove Jesus to be *tempted* or *tested* by the devil (Matthew 4:1).

The same Holy Spirit who *descended* on Christ for His baptism also *drove* our Lord into the wilderness. This is the third time we see the word *wilderness* from verse one through twelve. First time you see the word *wilderness* is in verse 3 “a voice crying out in the *wilderness*’. A second time is in verse 4 “John appeared baptizing in the *wilderness*”. Here a third time in verse 12.

Why the wilderness?

The wilderness or the Judean desert as it is called is largely a barren or an inhospitable place. There are snakes, scorpions and vegetation is low. The wilderness is a lonely and dull place to be.

The wilderness has a prophetic and redemptive meaning. In Old Testament Israel and many of their leaders, the desert was a place of testing, encounter, and renewal. Moses fasted (Exodus 24) for *forty* days for the people of Israel, Elijah fasted (1 Kings 19:8) for *forty* days.

The wilderness is also representative of our world of sin, the world of the devil, the world of lies, deception, death, hunger, thirst, exhaustion from heat and deprivation of warmth because of cold and food is scarce.

Given the month of June that we are in, it may appear that this whole month is like a wilderness - dedicated to the celebration of sin and sinful lifestyles.

The source of temptation:

The desert environment, the lack of food, the lack of a resting place was not the source of the temptation.

You have to be careful to not put yourself in circumstances or environments where your temptation is fueled and your resolve is compromised or weakened. The environment is not the source of temptation. What the source of temptation? Satan.

Our Lord Jesus Christ described Satan as someone who fell.

Luke 10:18 “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven*”. Satan was thrown out of heaven because of his pride. Jesus tells us more about Satan this way in the Gospel of John.

What is Satan’s character?

“*He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, he is a liar and the father of lies*” John 8:44

Celebration of pride is the celebration of sin. And you can be guaranteed there is no flourishing when sin is celebrated.

So Satan is the tempter. The Gospel of Matthew provides us details of Jesus' temptation. Matthew chapter four verse two.

² And *after* fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

- Notice the temptation did not begin at the *beginning* of the forty-day period or *during* the forty-day period but *after* the forty-day period. This is crucial because it helps you see how our Lord resisted and how you can resist temptation as well.
- Notice Satan came *after* the forty-day period.
Have you ever been hungry, lonely and tired at the same time for a while?
These conditions are fertile grounds for all kinds of temptations.
Jesus was physically at his lowest point, deprived of food, tired and thirsty. That is when Satan came to test Jesus.
- Satan does not test Jesus because he was physically weak. Satan uses those things to test Jesus on the basis of his *identity* – Satan said, "If you are the Son of God".
- When faced with a temptation, remind yourself that you are a forgiven child of God. If you have not received the Lord Jesus Christ and have not yet been forgiven of your sins, then you need to repent first and put faith in Christ before being reminded that you are a child of God. We were once children of wrath, but by turning from sin and trusting in Christ we became adopted children of God. (Ephesians 2).
- Also, stop blaming God if you are in a trial or test. *Reject* every impulse to blame God when you have a trial or a test.
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. ¹⁴ *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.* ¹⁵ *Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.* James 1:13-15
- Satan's temptations are based on your legitimate needs sometimes. Satan told Jesus to give himself a break. You are tired. You are hungry. You are lonely. So satisfy your physical appetites ("turn these stones into bread"). But Jesus was there to prepare for his mission. It was not for himself. It was for others that Jesus came. To lift others up.

How does Jesus respond to Satan?
 Jesus *responds* with God's Word.

⁴ But he answered, "It is written,
 "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*"

Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3 where Moses reminds the people of Israel about their journey in the wilderness for forty years. The Israelites were tested and many grumbled, complained and lost faith. They disobeyed God even though God provided for them supernaturally. Satan is very crafty. He wants to try and test Jesus to disobey his Father but Jesus learned obedience as a sinless son.

Satan does not give up though. He tests Jesus again and improvises by quoting scripture back to him.

Second temptation:

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,
 "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'

This time Satan dares to Jesus to jump off a wall because his angels should minister to him. But Jesus responds by quoting scripture back. Jesus relies on God's Word during the test. You must learn not just to *respond* but also *rely* on God's Word during a test.

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Jesus' response is from Exodus 17:2-7 where the Israelites complained and demanded water in the wilderness. Satan wants Jesus to do the same thing. See your condition. How pitiable you are. Demand from God that He prove Himself to you.

The Pharisees did the same thing to Jesus when he drove out those selling sheep and oxen in the temple. They said, "*What sign do you show us for doing these things?*"

There are people who say, "If this miracle happens, if such and such a thing happens, then I believe in your Jesus". The problem with such a claim, they never want to believe. They want the benefits not the benefactor. Jesus said in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus that even if someone rises from the dead, they will not believe.

There is a difference between presumption and faith.

So, *respond* with God's Word when tested and *rely* on God's Word during the test.

Third temptation:

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." I will give you power, wealth and influence ("rule all the kingdoms of the world")

Satan challenges Jesus solely on the basis of His identity – the Son of God.

And every time Jesus *responds*, *relies* on and *resists* with Scripture.

Resist Satan by worshipping God.

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "*Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."*"

Jesus refuses indulgence and rejects the world's glory.

Similarly, when you resist temptation or face a test or a trial, face it knowing that you are forgiven child of God. Resist temptation and fight the lies of Satan. Fight temptation as an un-condemned sinner knowing that Jesus was condemned on your behalf.

Application:

The most powerful weapon in your hands against temptation is the sword of the Spirit.

Know and use it well.

"It is when a child of God is fullest of grace; when he has been declared to be a "son," even a "beloved son or daughter" of God; when he has made a public profession of Christianity, that he is most of all exposed to temptation. Testing is not an injury. The perfect weapon comes out the stronger, and receives the stamp that will carry it over the world. Even so the testing and trying of the Christian is not an injury. He who has formed the believer for Himself is not going to break or destroy the work, the beautiful work of His own hands. He is purifying, fitting, fashioning, polishing. Carry this along with you, and you will understand how it comes about that at the very moment of your being "full" of the Holy Ghost, at the very moment of your announced sonship, you are most violently assailed". - A. B. Grosart

If you began reading the Bible at the beginning of the year, don't give up the middle of

the year. Keep going. If you have begun a prayer routine, keep at it. Pray with your family or spouse.

This trial is not to show whether Jesus would have the slightest inclination to sin but rather to show us that his humility and willingness to obey His Father in His humanity.

Why does God allow us to be tempted?

1. To strengthen our faith. The unused limb becomes weak and tender; the neglected instrument of music gets out of tune; the untouched weapon loses its keen edge. So, many a man knows nothing of self-denial until God tries him by a great sorrow.
2. To bring out latent good qualities.
3. To make us watchful. We must prove our armor. We must learn our weak points.
4. That He may one day give us our reward. *“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”* (James 1:12).

Lastly, temptations, tests and trials don't last forever.

Receive divine help.

Verse 13:

¹³ *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.*

We don't know what kind of animals were there with Jesus but the animals are representative of the garden of Eden. Adam lived in harmony with animals. Jesus was also ministered to by angels.

“God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

One commentator says that some people see nothing in the world but the wilderness, the devil, and the wild beasts. Resist these temptations, and you will find it full of angels, full of grace, full of satisfaction, full of vigor, full of radiance.

View our lives thru a redemptive lens.

I began with the Aesthetic movement and Oscar Wilde who gave into temptation and justified it. Winston Churchill wasn't that kind of man. He once gave one of history's great speeches. His speech was a driving force for England to overcome Nazi Germany.

I have borrowed and paraphrased part of Churchill's speech.

We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before an enemy that wants to assail us, tempt us, buffet us, trap us, defeat us, overthrow us, weaken us and throw us in despair. You ask what is our policy: It is to wage war with all our strength and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage against this monstrous tyranny of SIN. You ask what is our aim, our goal?

The answer in one word is victory! Victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no glory. I take up this task with buoyancy and hope. Come then, let us go forward in the strength of the Lord.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Christ Is Victor. Mark 1:12-13

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why was Jesus tested or tempted? What was Satan's role? How did Jesus respond?
Hebrews 2:18, 4:15

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe trials, tests and temptations help you strengthen your faith in Christ and increase dependence on God? How?
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What are some ways to be equipped for a trial or test?

Καὶ εὐθὺς τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτὸν ἐκβάλλει εἰς τὴν ἔρημον.

And immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness.

¹³ καὶ ἦν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ σατανᾶ, καὶ ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι διηκόνουν αὐτῷ.

And he was in the desert forty days being tempted (tested) by Satan, and he was with wild animals, and the angels were serving him.