

Mark 1:12-15

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. 14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (NRSV).

As I mentioned last week, Mark is one of the synoptic gospels. They are called synoptic because the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke have similar in content. Mark is thought to be the first Gospel written. Mark is concise and to the point, and does not contain many of the details that are found in the others. Today's Scripture is a good example of this. There are two stories in four verses; Jesus in the wilderness being tempted by Satan and the beginning of his preaching ministry.

The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness forty days where he encountered wild beasts, was tempted by Satan, and was cared for by angels. Matthew and Luke reveal the details of three temptations that Jesus faced. If you are hungry, use your power to turn the stones into bread. Prove you are the Son of God by throwing yourself down where the angels will protect you. Look at the kingdoms that can be given to you. Jesus goes from the cleansing ritual of being baptized for the forgiveness of sins to the wilderness in order to pass the test of temptation. This sets the precedence for us. We have the public confession of faith and we get baptized. From then on we are to live a life that is free of sin and live according to the teachings of Jesus. However, we don't do a good job of that. Unfortunately, many people go about life with virtually no change. This actually means that they never really repented. We are all faced with temptation, each and every one of us, no one is exempt. The world is full of temptation and Satan is the tempter, the enemy of God. Satan is tricky, will confuse you, and deceive you, to get you to fall into temptation. Jesus is much stronger than the rest of us. Jesus is the only adult that is able to 100% completely and fully passes the test of temptation. The rest of us need help to resist temptation. We get our help from the one that is able to resist temptation. If we focus our lives on him, he will help us resist temptation. When we fail, we need to repent and then we receive God's grace.

The other part of the Scripture takes place after John was arrested. Mark does not give us the details of John's arrest. John was killed for making a stand on righteousness and for his devotion to God. John publicly attacked the sins of the corrupt king. After John is arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." John's message is nothing new; it is based on Old Testament law. He continued the cleansing ritual by baptizing people in order to get people right with God. This requires repentance. His baptism was for the forgiveness of sins and is a physical act that ratifies the repentance. Jesus picks up where John left off and proclaims the good news of God and continues the call for repentance. Repentance is the key to getting right with God and it always has been. Repentance is an Old Testament theme. Repeatedly God calls for the people to have a change of heart. Over and over again, Old Testament stories show the necessity of getting right with God. The ministry of John Baptist and the ministry of Jesus match Old Testament teachings because they are both being true to God.

Early in the Gospel of Mark, the author shows us that the word of God cannot be stopped by evil. Scriptures show us that evil is in the world and evil is very strong. Evil cannot overtake God but God overtakes evil. Satan can tempt people and evil can overtake people but evil cannot overtake God. We receive grace, the forgiveness of our sins, from the one that is free of sin. Jesus did not give into temptation. Our weakness is temptation but our strength is from the one that did not give in to temptation. We are to repent, we are to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, and the Son of God, and we are to live our lives devoted to him.