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Date: December 23, 2007
Title: The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ - His Temptation
Text: Mark 1:1-13 (vv. 12, 13)
Theme: The temptation of Jesus Christ and His triumph over it shows Him to be worthy of the ministry entrusted to Him.

The Advent Emphasis:

Today is the fourth Sunday of the Advent Season. The church historically celebrated this season as a time of anticipation of His arrival in fulfillment of the promises made in the Old Testament.

¹⁷“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness. ¹⁹ I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of crying. ²⁰ **No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, Or an old man who does not live out his days; For the youth will die at the age of one hundred And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be thought accursed.** ²¹ They will build houses and inhabit them; They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² They will not build and another inhabit, They will not plant and another eat; For as the lifetime of a tree, so will be the days of My people, And My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands. ²³ They will not labor in vain, Or bear children for calamity; For they are the offspring of those blessed by the LORD, And their descendants with them. ²⁴ It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear. ²⁵ **The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent's food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain,**” says the LORD” (Isa. 65:17-25).

Today we celebrate the fulfillment of a promise. When the Son of God took on the form of humanity, “He was to be tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). The story we consider in our text is a real part of Christmas.

Once again, the intent of the larger passage (vv. 1-13) is to verify the character of Jesus Christ and the efficacious nature of redemptive activity. Each of the thoughts present, His forerunner (vv. 2-8), His baptism (vv. 9-11), and His temptation (vv.12-13), all seek to explain why He is worthy and why the sacrifice He offers is efficacious against sin.

John foretold the birth of this child. At the baptism of Jesus Christ, the Father placed on His Son His delight and pleasure in the work that He was to perform. Here, in the temptation of our Lord, His nature will prove to be all that He claims. He is the Son of God. The power of the sacrifice offered to cleanse us of our sin is possible because of the one who offers, as well as the offering. Both are infinite.

Introduction:

Although this is not your traditional Christmas day study, its importance to the entire storyline of God cannot be overestimated. Had Jesus failed in his temptation, the rest of the story would have been unnecessary. **The story is pivotal to the entire plot.** There is an intended parallel between the wilderness experience of Israel and that of our Lord's baptism and temptation. Where Israel failed, our Lord succeeded. The same imagery exists between the first Adam's failure and the second Adam's success.

Mark's account of our Lord's temptation is the briefest of the three. Both Matthew (4:1-11) and Luke (4:1-13) go into the actual temptation.

How will they best hear?

All of us have felt temptation's tug. No one can escape it. Even our Lord knew what it was to be tempted.

1. Use the imagery of a deliciously prepared meal and being hungry. Have the picture present while you try to speak. Call them not to pay attention to the picture. The desire to look at the picture and not listen to the speaker is a "temptation."
2. Use the imagery of a gift whose content is harmful. Temptation often comes in colorful packaging.

Questions:

1. Is anyone exempt from temptation?
2. Is the idea of temptation sin?
3. When does temptation become sin?
4. Is victory over temptation possible in this life?

To Know: To know that temptation is real and ever present.

To Choose: To choose to resist temptation daily.

To Feel: To feel the joy of resting in the victory of Jesus Christ over temptation in our behalf.

"Mark's use of the characteristic word 'at once' shows the close connection between the Baptism of Jesus Christ and His temptation. Mark's account of the Temptation is very brief. He devotes only two verses to it whereas Matthew has eleven and Luke thirteen." (Walter W. Wessell, "Mark," EBC, [Zondervan, 1984], 8:623).

In Mark's brief account he seeks to emphasize the continued encounter our Lord had with the Devil. Whatever the idea is behind His temptation, it deals directly with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is here that we find the basis for the author of Hebrews to pen the following words:

"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Jesus is our Savior, our Emmanuel, and our eternal Intercessor. All of this hinges on the event before us. Here, He shows Himself mighty to save.

Calvin: Do you believe in the devil? You know, a supreme evil being dedicated to the temptation, corruption, and destruction of man?

Hobbes: I'm not sure that man needs the help"

With tongue in cheek, Bill Watterson captures the dilemma faced by all. Temptation is an undeniable experience of anyone living. In the narrative of Mark, four thoughts come to the forefront concerning temptation with two more offered by Matthew and Luke. I would like us to consider this for our personal edification.

First, there is a **purpose** behind every temptation ("the Spirit sent Him out"). Regardless as to how we might understand this thought, it was the Holy Spirit who drove Jesus into the wilderness in order to be tempted of the devil. The temptation of Jesus and His willingness to resist the devil and obey His Father was directly tied to the death He was to die. If He would have failed in His temptation, then the sacrifice He offered would be blemished and would not have the power to forgive sin. Whenever we are tempted we must understand that the temptation is neither random nor arbitrary. There is a purpose behind it, even if we cannot see it or understand it.

Second, there is a **place** of temptation ("in the desert"). Our temptations often come when we are in the dry place. It is often when we are left to ourselves that we find ourselves struggling against the appetites of the flesh.

Third, there is a **period** for temptation ("forty days"). Temptation has a life-cycle. There are seasons to temptation when it appears the greatest. Regardless as to our personal struggles, there are those occasions when its voice is softer and less threatening, and there are those occasions when its voice is taunting and menacing.

Fourth, there is a **power** behind temptation ("being tempted by Satan"). It is often noted how our temptation to sin comes from three sources: the world, our flesh, and the devil. In our passage, our Lord's temptation came directly from the devil. Sometimes we give the devil too much credit for our struggles, but often we dismiss him altogether, as if he has no impact or influence on our struggle. There is a real devil who oversees thousands of demons and whose desire is to destroy the redemptive work of God in the redeemed people of God. The New Testament calls us to resist the devil in order that he might flee from us (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9). This is exactly what Jesus did and what we must do.

In addition, Matthew and Luke offer two other thoughts concerning temptation:

Fifth, there is a **pattern** to temptation (Both Matthew and Luke). Paul tells us that we are not oblivious to his methods (2 Cor. 2:11). Although the devil is not limited by the following categories, they are suggestive of where the devil attacks. In temptation there is typically an attack against **God's provision** ("Bread"), **God's protection** ("Throw yourself down"), and **God's priority/person** ("Worship me"). This same idea was present with Eve (Gen. 3:6) and with Achan (Josh. 7:21) and is no less true for us. If you are in combat, knowing how and where your enemy will attack does not prevent him from attacking, but it does enable you to prepare and withstand the attack.

Finally, there is a **persistency** in temptation ("he departed from him until an opportune time" Luke 4:13). Although there are seasons to temptation, we are never completely safe from temptation. The battle with temptation is cyclical. All of us have questioned God as it relates to His provision and protection, and I would venture to guess that we have questioned whether or not He is actually in control of everything. Paul assures his audience that God does provide a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13) and how we are more than conquerors in Christ (Rom. 8:37). John equally notes how "greater the one in us is than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Understanding the nature of temptation is a first step in fighting temptation. Ultimately, it is only as we rest in the simplicity and sufficiency of Jesus Christ that we can triumph over daily temptation. **It is because He has that we can.**

In light of this, let us look at the relationship of three elements within temptation.

I. The relationship of the Holy Spirit to temptation (v. 12)

"One thing stands out here in such a vivid way that we cannot miss it. It was the *Spirit* who thrust Jesus out into the wilderness for the testing time. The very Spirit who came upon him at his baptism now drove him out for his test." (Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, 21).

Mark uses a strong word to describe the Spirit's action in driving Him into the wilderness to be tempted.

We must not forget that it pleased the Lord to bruise His Son.

"But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand" (Isa. 53:10).

Even in the Disciple's Prayer in Matthew 6:13 our Lord speaks the following words:

"And **do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.** For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (Matt. 6:13).

Somehow, its true nature is veiled from us; God is working in and through our temptation to show Himself mighty. There is a great mystery in this thought, but God brought Jesus into this moment in order that His purpose would be fulfilled; God also brings us into our moments in order that His purpose would be fulfilled.

II. The relationship of Satan to temptation (v. 13a)

The word “Satan” in Hebrew simply means an adversary. The word “tempted” is “a present tense participle speaking of continuous action. Satan tempted Messiah constantly during the forty days.” (Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies, [Eerdmans, 1973], 1:25)

III. The relationship of the spirit world to temptation (v. 13b)

A. The wild animals

“The first Adam fell into sin in an environment that was perfect and harmonious. The last Adam maintained His sinlessness in an environment that was hostile.” (Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies, [Eerdmans, 1973], 1:26).

I do not see the animals as a threat. The animals came as a comfort to the Son of God. It speaks of a day when the lion and the lamb will lie down together, and the child will play on the hole of a snake (Isa. 11:6-8). This day gives us a glimpse of a fuller day.

B. The angelic hosts

The angels were there ministering to Jesus in the temptation and after the temptation. God did not abandon Him in His moments of trial.

“The verb is in the imperfect tense, indicating continuous actions. All during the forty days of the temptation, the angels were continually ministering to the Messiah.” (Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies, [Eerdmans, 1973], 1:27)

Our Lord’s triumph over temptation is a confirmation for His people.

“Jesus went the way that all his people must go; and he could do it because he had heard the words of love, the words of life.” (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, [WJK, 2004], 7).

“The last Adam was being put to the test to show that He was equipped and ready for His ministry as prophet, priest, and king. The universe was looking on.” (Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies, [Eerdmans, 1973], 1:26)

Today, as we celebrate the arrival of God in flesh, let us praise Him for He is victorious over sin and death. Today is a day of life and light. It is this day that has made all following days glorious.

APPLICATION: (What the NEXT STEP? – Let us leave with five practical thoughts)

1. You and I will be tempted.
2. Our temptations will be fierce and, at times, we will fail.
3. God's love for us will not waver in our temptation, regardless as to the immediate or temporal nature of the outcome.
4. Today, do you know Jesus Christ as the Savior of your soul? Is He for you God in flesh? Do you know Him as your eternal intercessor and advocate?
5. Hold fast to what is true -- that the Father loves you and that He has not left you to yourself.