

## **In the Wilderness – Mark 1:11, 12**

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Our children like to put things to the test. I have brought a few things to show you. This is a handle from off of our dresser. It didn't pass the test. This is a pair of sunglasses. One of the lenses is missing. As you can see, they didn't fare any better. This is a leather strap from Elijah and Abigail's clothes hamper. It couldn't take the pressure and tore off. I found it lying on the floor. These (my ears) have also been put to the test. So far, they have survived. But I am sure I don't hear as well as I used to. I don't think I have ever heard anything that compares to a baby's or a toddler's scream.

Our story today takes place in the wilderness. What Jesus experiences here puts Him to the test.

Our story today comes from Mark chapter 1 verses 11 and 12, our Scripture reading today. I will summarize it for you. Immediately after Jesus' baptism, the Spirit sent Him into the wilderness. Jesus remained there for 40 days. While He was there, He was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals. And the angels ministered to Him.

Today we will consider the experiences of three participants in this story. First, we will consider the experience of Satan. There are a lot of ideas about Satan floating around in the world today, so I would like to take a couple minutes to consider what the Bible says about Satan. As we begin I invite you to turn to the book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible. We will read chapter 12 verses 7 – 9. We learn from this verse at least two things: (1) Satan used to live in heaven, but now lives here on earth. (2) Satan has angels as his followers, just like Jesus does. So, what is Satan doing here on earth? Let's turn to 1 Peter 5:8. Peter speaks here of the devil as our adversary. The word translated, "Satan" in Mark and Revelation comes from a Hebrew word which means "adversary". So, Peter is referring here to Satan as our adversary. And he informs us that Satan is walking around the earth looking for people to destroy. He is our enemy. He wants us to be lost.

Now that we understand a little bit of what God's Word says about Satan, let return to our story. The incident recorded in our story today (Mark 1:12) is the only time in the Gospels where Satan is mentioned as tempting Jesus. Certainly, Satan was there all along, but the fact that he is mentioned by name here is significant, as we will see in a moment. The word translated, "tempted", means to put to the test". As Revelation 12:7 mentioned, Satan is an enemy of heaven. He came to put Christ to the test in order to derail Christ's ministry. Christ had come to save us, and Satan is determined to destroy us. Why did he come to Jesus at this time? Jesus was alone. Satan loves to come against us when we are alone. He came to Eve in the Garden of Eden while she was alone. And he came to Christ while He was alone. He has had his greatest success when people are alone.

So, this is what Satan experienced in our story today. Secondly, we will consider what the angels experienced in our story. The word translated "angel" is "angelos" and means messenger. In fact, John is referred to as an "angelos" in Mark 1:2. He was God's messenger.

One of the responsibilities of angels is to run errands for God. Often this involves caring for humanity. We will consider two texts today to help us understand angels and what they do. There are a lot of ideas out there about angels, so it may be helpful to take a few minutes to see what the Bible says. First, In 1 Peter 1:12 Peter says that the angels have an intense interest in the plan of salvation. They were really interested in why Jesus had come to earth. They had known Him as their Commander and Leader in heaven. It amazed them that He would leave His home in heaven. Second, in 1 Kings chapter 19 Elijah has run away from Jezebel, the wicked queen of Israel. He has escaped into the wilderness. While he is there, an angel comes to his aid. Elijah is discouraged. He is hungry. He is tired. In fact, he just wants to die. (Incidentally, this takes place right after the experience on Mount Carmel) While Elijah is sleeping, the angel prepares a meal for Elijah and gets him some water. He wakes Elijah up and tells him to eat. This happens twice (Elijah falls asleep again in between). Elijah lives off of this nourishment for 40 days.

The angels' experience in our story in Mark is similar to the angel's experience with Elijah. The angels come to Jesus, who is also out in the wilderness, all alone. According to Matthew and Luke's accounts, Jesus did not eat anything during those 40 days. How honored the angels must have been to care for their Commander, indeed, their Creator, who had taken humanity. The word Mark uses gives us the picture of them waiting on Him. I'm sure they not only fed Him food, but also fed His spirit and encouraged Him.

So, this is what the angels experienced in our story today. Third, we will consider what Jesus experienced. Mark says the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. The word translated, "drove" can also be translated "ejected". It gives me the picture of an eagle pushing a baby eagle out of the nest. Jesus' experience during His baptism must have been very refreshing. He is with His forerunner, John. The Spirit comes upon Him with power. His Father speaks words of affirmation from heaven. But then He is ejected out into the wilderness where He is all alone. And He stays there for 40 days. This time has a purpose. It is meant to give Him time to reflect on the great task that lies before Him. It's a time to prepare and contemplate the path He must follow. Jesus is not the first to have such an experience. Moses was in the wilderness for 40 years. He had previously been in Egypt. But His people had rejected him saying, "Who made you a ruler and a judge?" (Acts 7:30, 35) But the Lord appeared to Him in the wilderness, and said, "Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:10)

In the same way, John the Baptist spent time in the wilderness being prepared for his ministry (Luke 1:80). And God's church, represented by a woman, in Revelation 12:13, 14 is nourished and protected in the wilderness.

While Jesus is in the wilderness, He is tempted (or tested) by Satan. We learned from Revelation 12 that Satan is Jesus' enemy. As His enemy, Satan puts Jesus to the test. He does everything that he can to make Jesus change His mind, to go back to heaven. He tries to separate Jesus from His Father in heaven. According to James 1:13, God cannot be tempted. So, this was a unique and new experience for Jesus having taken our humanity. You may wonder why God ejected His Son out into the wilderness only to be tested by Satan. James gives us a clue. In James 1:2-4, he says that the result of being tested is you become "perfect

and complete, lacking nothing.” There is a difference between being sinless and being perfect. Adam and Eve were sinless. God allowed Satan to test them so that they might become perfect. But they failed, and so Jesus came to overcome where they failed.

While Jesus is in the wilderness, His only company (before the angels came) is the wild animals. Mark is the only one who gives this detail. The wild animals known to live in this area of Judea are wolves, boars, hyenas, jackals, and leopards. All of these are hunters. Perhaps Mark mentions them to help us visualize what Jesus’ experience was like in the wilderness. He wants us to understand that Jesus was surrounded by danger on all sides, whether it was Satan himself or the wild animals.

I believe Jesus also experienced a need for help while He was in the wilderness. Surrounded by danger. Tested by Satan. All alone in the wilderness. No friend or family member is there for Him. He must have felt a need for the angels who had waited on Him in heaven. What a blessing it must have been when they did appear to refresh Him. It was probably like having family from home come for a visit.

So, this is what Satan, the angels, and Jesus experienced in our story today. Now how is Jesus revealed as our example of a healthy and dangerous Christian? I believe Jesus is revealed as such in three ways.

First, He begins His ministry by spending time alone with God. He goes to a place where there are no distracting noises. There are no donkey or camel caravans going by. There are no people demanding His attention. He doesn’t have an agenda to fulfill. He is there for one purpose - to be prepared for His ministry. He is not in the wilderness for His personal enjoyment, to perfect one of His hobbies. He reveals that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who spends time alone with God in order to be prepared for ministry; not to feel anything; not to learn more. Jesus is not lacking in any of these areas. He is being prepared and perfected for His ministry. A healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who spends time alone with God in order to become who they need to be in order to fulfill God’s call for them.

Second, Jesus is a threat to Satan. While there in the wilderness, He catches Satan’s attention. Satan sees that Jesus has come to destroy him and his kingdom. A healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who gets on Satan’s “most-wanted” list. You may be spending time alone with God, when He comes to test you. This is not a reason to be discouraged or afraid. It’s part of being a healthy and dangerous Christian. Because Jesus left the wilderness victorious, we have no need to fear Satan.

Third, while surrounded by danger, Jesus is protected by the angels. A healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who lives in danger. But they are protected. When Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den, he was protected. When David was fleeing from King Saul, he could say, “The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.” (Psalm 34:7) As long as God has a plan for your life here on earth, He will protect you. Nothing can harm you.

This truly is a great story. Jesus emerges from the wilderness empowered, inspired, and determined. (We will learn more of this next week) But Jesus’ experience in the wilderness took

place for more than a good story. Why did Jesus spend 40 days in the wilderness being tested and surrounded by danger? It was for us. It is to inspire us. According to Hebrews 2:18, the reason Jesus was tempted was so He could help us when we are tempted. It's so that when we feel overwhelmed and we're struggling, we will cry to God for assistance. (Hebrews 4:15, 16) I know from experience that this is not the natural way to respond. It is more natural for me to respond in one of two ways. First, I often try to ignore the temptation. I keep moving ahead, without taking the time to figure out what's going on. Whenever I have done this, I always lose. I have never overcome a temptation while doing this. Second, when faced with a test or temptation, I often feel overwhelmed and hopeless. I don't see any way out. I can't seem to think about anything else. A black cloud comes over me, and I feel horrible. Either way, I lose.

But I praise God that because Jesus came to this earth. Because He went into the wilderness, I have a third option. I can cry for help. And every time I call, I get an answer. Peter gives us a great example. He was sinking in a stormy sea. He was surrounded by danger. And in his time of need, he cried out for help. "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus' hand was there. Jesus saved Him. And He will save us as well. May God help us to be aware of His presence when we are in the middle of temptation and danger. May God help us to remember Jesus in the wilderness. May God help us to cry for help. Immediately, His hand will be there.