

Jason Upchurch - Mark 1:12-13 - The Good News of Jesus's Temptation

This morning builds on last week where at the baptism of Jesus, Jesus is anointed by the Holy Spirit in a special way for ministry. This empowering was prophesied in the OT and came to pass at his baptism. I know last week was a lot to chew on, so let me just recap briefly because it'll help us understand the implications here.

My argument last week was that it was at Jesus's baptism that he became fully aware that he was the Messiah, that he was God in the flesh. He may have had some kind of knowledge before that time that he had a special relationship to God - we see that in Luke's gospel when Jesus is 12. But biblically I think everything we see points to his baptism for that self actualizing moment when Jesus as a man understands who he is and his role in salvation.

I know that was a lot to chew on last time. But the reality is Jesus in his humanity had to come to that understand sometime. Luke makes it clear Jesus learned things as he grew older, he grew in wisdom. Hebrews says he learned obedience. And there were many things in Jesus's life that he didn't know even after his baptism: the day or hour of his coming, the names of demons, or who touched him to be healed.

And there's nothing to indicate in the biblical record that he secretly knew he was God or the Messiah and that he was trying to keep all that under wraps. His family and friends and those who knew him best all saw him completely average, having no special theological training or miraculous ability.

The turning point in his life is at his baptism.

And at his baptism Jesus is empowered by the Holy Spirit in a special way that he wasn't before. There is a massive shift that happens.

Now, just like last week, this morning we're treading on the deep things of God. His very nature. God is a Trinity: one eternal God, three co-equal, eternal glorious persons. Three in one - eternally inseparable.

At the same time the Son of God, Jesus, has 2 distinct natures: a fully divine nature that he has had for all eternity, and a fully human nature that he had the moment of his conception and that he will continue to have forever. Jesus will forever be fully human and divine. And although he is one with them, the Father and Spirit do not have a human nature, only Jesus.

At the same time, the *man* Jesus is anointed by God the Spirit and led by the Spirit into service as the Messiah. What does that mean? I thought he was already one with the Spirit. Well, he is one with the Spirit in his divine nature. But in his human nature he is now led by and empowered by the Spirit.

I know you've heard these things over and over and you might be asking "why do all these distinctions matter?"

Did you ever watch the Karate Kid? Where Miyagi has Daniel do all these weird chores: paint the fence, wax the car, sand the floor. And Daniel has no idea why he's doing this? Daniel's confused and about to give up and Miyagi attacks Daniel and all these skills come out of nowhere and Daniel's a karate genius? Miyagi was training Daniel and he didn't even know it.

Well, whether we realize it or not these distinctions matter. And the language matters. We say these phrases over and over: Jesus has 2 natures in 1 person, or the Trinity is 3 persons yet one God to train our minds to think in biblical categories. If we get these wrong we can fall into grave error.

Let me just give you some historical heresies that have come up when people misunderstand the Godhead and specifically the person of Jesus. And when we say heresy what we mean is a belief or teaching that is not compatible with saving faith. To believe or teach these things puts a person outside the faith; they are not a Christian.

So, one error is that Jesus's human nature and his divine nature are sort of melted down into a new unique nature. This is called Monophysitism. Jesus is not fully human, nor is he fully God, he's a mixture of both. That's heresy. He has to be fully human to take our place. He also has to be fully God to atone for all the sins of all his people. Both human and divine nature has to be fully intact or salvation does not happen.

Then there's a heresy that's the opposite of that called Nestorianism after a heretic named Nestorius. Nestorius taught that Jesus had 2 persons. So in the man Jesus was a divine person and a human person. Almost like in the cartoons where there's an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other. That's kind of what he believed was happening inside of Jesus. Almost like there was this schizophrenic battle going on inside Jesus.

But there's no battle as though somehow Jesus has this conflict inside of him all the time. The Bible doesn't teach that Jesus was 2 persons, it teaches that there are 2 natures in 1 person. There is a divine nature and a human nature in the 1 person: Jesus Christ.

There's another heresy - Apollinarianism - that says that the man Jesus was basically just a physical human shell with no actual human mind and it was just the divine nature controlling this human robot. That's not it either. If that's the case then why does Jesus not know some things in the gospel? Is God pretending in the Bible? Is he deceiving people?

Jesus had a human nature: mind and body, which is why it's so tough for us to understand how that matches with his divine nature.

Those are ancient heresies. Modern ones are where people only think Jesus is a good person, but not God: they believe he only has 1 nature. The average person off the street probably believes this: Jesus was just a good teacher.

Mormons believe Jesus has a human nature and a divine-ish nature - but that he's not fully God. They also believe that his divine nature can become fully divine and you can have a divine nature too. Obviously, this is not biblical.

As you can imagine, the list goes on and on.

We have to be very careful trying to reconcile all this. And I want to encourage you parents and grandparents: Don't try to smooth this over for little ones. All the analogies in the world fail because inevitably analogies are wrong.

The analogies with the Trinity: ice/water/steam, egg/yolk/white - those are all inaccurate. Trying to make some illustration for the two natures of Jesus usually ends in really bad theology.

Jesus is 1 person with two natures: fully human and fully divine. As we work through the gospel of Mark understanding those categories will be helpful as we understand and worship Jesus.

Now, with that, we're diving into the work of God the Holy Spirit in the life of the man Christ Jesus. Everything from here on out is Jesus being compelled by the Spirit, led by the Spirit. That's actually good news for us in several ways as we'll see.

We're going to look specifically at these 2 events that happen immediately after his baptism that are an encouragement to us. First is the temptation of Jesus. And then the preaching of Jesus. Let's look at his temptation first. **Read 12-13**

Now, although Mark often gives us more information about specific situations in Jesus's life, here he gives us a fair amount less. The other gospels talk about the specifics of the 3 temptations: the turning stones to bread, the falling off the Temple, the worshipping of satan. Mark gives us none of that. Instead, Mark's sketch here focuses on something different.

So much to say here. First, the temptation of Jesus is a mirror of what happened to Israel wandering in the desert. I mentioned this before but remember that the history of Israel is really just a faint picture of the life of Jesus. We usually think of it the other way around: that Jesus is reenacting Israel's history. But all things in the Bible point **to** Jesus so Israel's history is actually sort of the preview of coming attractions for Jesus himself.

We see all these connections: the Son of God, like Israel was the God son, has just come through the water. Now he's in the wilderness and he's being tempted over and over to sin. Angels are ministering to him.

All those things are written about Israel's time in the wilderness. If you haven't read Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible) in a while you might not make all these connections. But they'd be unmistakable to the Jews.

The wilderness wandering of the Jews was an infamous time of Israel's disobedience. Remember God delivered Israel out of Egypt, took them to Sinai where they received the 10 commandments. Then he led them to the edge of the Jordan River and Israel sent 12 spies into the Promised Land to check it out. Do you remember how long the spies were in the Promised Land? 40 days. When they got back 10 of the spies said they couldn't take the land, 2 said they could. The nation of Israel followed the advice of the 10 and God was so angry at Israel, his firstborn that he brought out of Egypt, that he made them wander in the wilderness for how many years? 40 years.

Forty in the Bible is often a time of testing and trial.

In the wilderness Israel is limited with their food. Manna every morning, and eventually quail. Water is scarce. Everything is provided supernaturally by God during this time of testing.

What about the wild animals? **Read 12-13**

Jesus was out in the wilderness with wild animals The wilderness Israel endured had wild animals. **Numbers 21:6:** the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people and many died.

Deut 8:15: The wilderness had fiery serpents and scorpions.

Other descriptions of Israel's wilderness include jackals, hyenas lions, adders, and wild beasts in general.

Angels minister to Jesus, just like angels ministered to Israel in the wilderness - going before Israel to protect them.

Now, you need to understand that Mark doesn't add that there are animals and angels so we get this idea that Jesus was at the zoo. He throws that in so we make the connection.

And the big picture here is that where Israel failed in their wilderness temptation, Jesus succeeded - and he does it in spades. This is amazing.

Here's Jesus, freshly baptized, on mission as Messiah, now empowered by the Spirit and his first mission by the Spirit is 40 day onslaught of every temptation imaginable by no less than Satan himself. And he does it without any food. He fasts the whole time.

I don't know about you, I tend to sin more when I'm hungry not less. When Israel realized they didn't have food in the wilderness you know what they did? They grumbled and complained. They sinned against God.

That's what we'd do! We're no better than sinful Israel.

But Jesus never sins. He never waivers. And you say "what's the big deal?" Here's the big deal: When we think of the gospel message, usually what comes to mind for us is that Jesus died on the cross in our place for our sins. And that is true. We call that the passive obedience of Jesus. Jesus willingly let himself be crushed for our sins. He willingly endured the wrath of God. But in a passive sense.

But in Jesus there is what scholars call the active obedience of Jesus. This is the righteous record he earned for us during his life. **Turn to Rom. 5:12-21** for a minute.

So this is an amazing passage and we could spend a lot of time here. But the gist is that all humanity is either under the headship of Adam stuck in sin and death or the headship of Jesus freed to eternal life. We all start out with Adam as our head and it's bad news because in Adam all sin and all die. Just the fact that we die tells us we are guilty of sin. **Read 12-14**

So because of Adam, all who are born have a sin nature. He passed that down to us. That's why we die: because we're sinners. By nature and by choice. Both. Adam is our representative unless we believe in Jesus. **Read 15-17**

So Adam brings death and condemnation to all but Jesus brings grace and justification and the free gift of righteousness.

That's the gospel. Not just that Jesus passively bore our sins. But that he actively lived a righteous life in our place. Here's where he puts it all together. **Read 18-21**

Why is it important that Jesus not only died in our place but obeyed in our place? Because we have to have the active righteousness of Jesus to be credited to our account.

We have to have a Savior who actively obeyed God at every single turn. It is through his perfect obedience that we are made righteous. It is through the righteous, obedient life of Jesus that we have eternal life.

And back in Mark, it's not an easy road for Jesus. The Father doesn't give Jesus the simple easy way of obedience. Now, to be clear, Jesus never sinned before his baptism or after or ever. But immediately after he is baptized he is thrust into the greatest temptation imaginable up to this point.

I mean think about this. If humanity's fate were tied up in our obedience and our righteousness we'd probably want to be put in a padded room somewhere all by ourselves far away from the outside world that could tempt us. We'd want to be alone forever. Maybe we'd probably want to be sedated so we don't do anything or say anything that might cause us to sin.

We'd want God to keep temptation as far away from us as possible.

God does just the opposite in Jesus. The moment the Spirit comes down on him, identifying him, empowering him - the moment the Father says you're my Son, you're the Messiah - his righteousness is put to the ultimate test.

Next to enduring the cross, Jesus's first mission is arguably his hardest mission. God pulls no punches. The Spirit compels him into the wilderness. No food, no comfort, no doctors, no nothing. It's Jesus, the jackals, the scorpions and Satan unleashing every flaming dart of temptation he can possibly throw at newly anointed Messiah.

And Jesus passes the test. Where Israel failed miserably for 40 years. Where we would fail miserably just like them, Jesus succeeds in our place for our righteousness that, as Paul says, we might have eternal life.

This first temptation is massive in God's economy. Will Jesus make it as the Messiah. Answer: 100%.

And because he does here - and everywhere - the righteousness of Jesus is credited to the account of all who believe in him.

Now, we're also confronted with 2 other issues here. First, what's God's role in our temptations and trials?

First of all, notice: Why does Jesus go into the wilderness to be tested in the first place? **Read 12-13**

He goes because the Spirit drives him into the wilderness. The NIV says sent him out. The word used here is ekballo - it's the word to throw something and it's usually used when Jesus casts out a demon.

It's a very vivid word that that implies force and authority. The Spirit didn't nudge Jesus or whisper to Jesus. Whatever the interaction here was a compelling of the Spirit out into the wilderness.

And God the Holy Spirit knew exactly what was going to happen in the wilderness. He knew that Jesus would be tempted by Satan. So what is God's role in temptations?

Well, we know that God never directly tempts anyone to sin.

Jas. 1:13: Let no one when he is tempted say "I am being tempted by God" for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.

God, because of his divine nature, is never tempted to do evil because evil is completely contrary to what God wants to do. And James says that God himself never tempts anyone. God is never the *direct* agent of temptation.

Now, God does use people and events and even evil angels to tempt people. Matthew makes it clear that the whole purpose of the Spirit sending Jesus out into the wilderness is to be tempted by Satan - that was the purpose.

It's not like Jesus was compelled into the wilderness to pray and, oops, Satan found out and now it's a disaster. No - the purpose was temptation.

But God never does it himself. And you say "Doesn't that make God responsible?" No it doesn't because although God is sovereign over all events, yet he is never accounted guilty of sin or temptation because he never sins and he himself never actually tempts.

He always uses agents. In the OT God makes it clear that there will be times when he sends false prophets to Israel to test Israel. Is God sinning? No. Because God is not the false prophet. He wants to test Israel. Israel is to put the false prophets to death.

God used a spirit with a lying tongue to deceive king Ahab. Did God sin? No he did not. Did the Father or the Spirit sin in sending Jesus to be tempted? Of course not.

In the same way, when you and I are tempted to sin, God is sovereign but he is never guilty and never responsible for our sin.

So what is God's role in our temptations? He will often orchestrate the situation and people in the temptation, but he is never guilty of tempting us. And when we go through trials, it's so that we - like Jesus - would be found faithful.

The second issue that often comes up here is: Could Jesus have sinned?

I mean, how bad was this temptation? Jesus is God after all. He can't very well sin. I think when we look at the life of Jesus and his perfect obedience to God I think we often think that was easy for Jesus to obey. He's God after all, so he couldn't sin, right? So when we're called to look to Jesus as our example of obedience, how much encouragement does he give us really?

But what the Bible pictures for us is that although Jesus is fully God, and for argument's sake couldn't sin, the reality is that he still endured every temptation we endure by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The same Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus empowers us. And the Bible calls us to the same perfect standard of obedience. And you say, well, that's nice - but he endured it knowing that he wouldn't sin. How does that help us?

Here's the reason Jesus was able to endure all that temptation: Because he was submissive to the Spirit. We too can endure temptation like Jesus by being submissive to the Spirit.

I'm going to steal an analogy from Bruce Ware's book called *The Man Christ Jesus*. And Bruce Ware gives a great illustration. He says there was a man who set the world record for swimming in the open ocean. It "was completed by Chloe McCardel in 2014. The swim took 41 hours and 21 minutes and covered 77.3 miles (124.4km)" and he did not flow with any current. (<https://www.odysseyopenwater.com/open-water-swimming>). That's pretty impressive.

What if I told you it was almost impossible for him drown? Not because he had a life jacket on or because he was in shallow water, but because there was a boat just a few yards away from him the whole time. Would that make his accomplishment any less impressive? Not really. He still swam 77.3 miles nonstop over 2 days - all on his own.

Now, remember how I said avoid analogies because they're not perfect?

I think this takes a stab at understanding the temptation of Jesus. Could Jesus have sinned? Not really, he's God after all. God cannot do something contrary to his nature. But he's also 100% man - and as a man he endured perfectly every temptation that came his way. He was 100% obedient to God in every way from the moment of conception to his final breath.

He didn't swim 77 miles over 2 days, he endured hundreds of thousands of temptations by Satan himself without waivering even one time - even in his mind.

How did he do that?

Through the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit we have in us. Listen, when we sin, when we cave into temptation it's not because of God. It's not even primarily because of the temptation. It's because we fail to submit ourselves to the Spirit of God. It's because we love our sin more than we love the Spirit of God.

When the Bible calls us to follow Jesus in obedience it's not calling us to some astronomically impossible task. It's calling us to walk in the Spirit. Like Jesus did. It's calling us to hold fast to the Word of God as we live out the Word of God. It's not unattainable, Jesus our Messiah showed us it's possible through his temptations.

What if we fail? And we will fail. Then we also look to the temptation of Jesus and are encouraged that where Israel and us and everyone else has failed, Jesus has succeeded for us. He has overcome, he has conquered that we share in that victory with him.

Pray