

## Title: “40 Days in the Wilderness”

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Mark 1:12-13

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**Exegetical:** In his narrative, Mark describes the baptism, temptation, and beginning ministry of Jesus. On the banks of the Jordan, Jesus was baptized by John and the immediately driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit where he was tempted by Satan. After 40 days he began his ministry by proclaiming the gospel in Galilee. It provides evidence to his readers that Jesus is God and has been sent for a specific purpose.

**Focus:** Jesus entered into the wilderness where he overcame temptation and prepared for his journey to the cross.

**Function:** That the listeners will use Lent as a time to enter into their own wilderness, not to be tested by temptation but to reflect on their sins and disobedience to God as they prepare to celebrate the salvation won by Jesus through his death and resurrection.

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Today we live in a world where everything is immediate, where we even *expect* it to be so. Gone are the days when we must wait for a TV show to air before we watch it, or wait for the morning paper so we know what to expect from the weather that day. So much is now available to us immediately and so often we take that for granted. We can decide on a moment’s notice to drive a long distance without any preparation because we know that along the way we can address any need that might arise: gas, food, whatever. This is our world; this is our *immediate* world. And in so many ways it is truly a blessing to have the resources available to us to minimize what we must first prepare for.

For Jesus, it was a different world. A journey into the wilderness, filled with wild animals and empty of restaurants and hotels is dangerous, even deadly. But in perfect obedience that is exactly what Jesus did:

<sup>12</sup> The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> 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.

The Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness, and he followed, immediately. He knew the dangers that lay ahead of him as he took those first steps. He had no food, no water, no protection. All he had was full obedience and full trust in God, his father. An obvious question is “why?” Why was he not able to first prepare? Clearly, if he had been able to do so his experience would be so much better; those 40 days would have been so much more comfortable. At the very least he could have mentally prepared for what lay ahead. But here’s the thing. The journey itself wasn’t the main event; it wasn’t the *thing* that he had to prepare for. His journey into the wilderness was only the

second earthly step of the *three-year* journey that would take him to the cross where he would offer his life and defeat death for our sake.

Now, the gospels of Matthew and Luke record the details of this event more verbosely, but Mark summarizes it in just two verses. He doesn't discuss the conversations between Jesus and Satan, nor does he make obvious his perfect obedience to God. And so, this morning I, too am going to set all those topics aside and narrow my focus simply on his time in the wilderness as preparation for his real mission, for his real journey. Jesus was sent to focus on what lay ahead. He was sent to prepare for what he had to do. And this morning the passage says to us: "Go. Walk into the wilderness. Don't prepare beforehand. Use Lent *as the preparation* for Holy Week."

<Pause>

Imagine if, this morning, you decided to leave. If you decided to simply go on a journey, immediately. No preparations, no packing, nothing. You simply walk. All you have is just you and the clothes on your back. You are anxious, worried about what lays head. You wonder where your next meal will come from and where you will sleep that night. Maybe you even second guess your decision to not prepare. All of these things, and more fill your mind and distract you from where you are actually going. The path you are on leads somewhere but you can't contemplate that right now because you have more pressing matters to attend to.

Now, imagine that someone has attended to all of these concerns and you trust that person completely. You no longer worry about any of it. Are you able to focus now on the journey? Probably not because now you think about the schedules that you left behind. There are sons and daughters that need to be dropped off and picked up. There are parents that need caring for. Friends that are waiting to meet you for dinner. All of these people rely on you for *something* and the thoughts of not being able to meet their needs becomes a distraction for you. You simply cannot worry about where you are heading.

Let's go one more round. Imagine that someone has attended to all of these schedules and you trust that person completely. You no longer worry about any of it. Are you able to focus now on the journey? Maybe. Probably. At least for a time. All of your immediate concerns are addressed and so you can begin to contemplate the path that you are on and the destination that it leads to. Where does it go? Where does it end? What if you passed a sign that answered those questions? What if it said "Jesus crucified. 40 days up ahead." What would fill your mind during that trip? Maybe during the first few days there would be excitement, even anticipation that you would soon lay eyes on your God and King. But then that first thought would slip into the forefront of your mind. Remember that sin from just the other day? Just as quickly another would enter in. And before you knew it your brain would be replaying the mistakes and pains of your life. Images that you thought forgotten, that you believed successfully purged from your memory, would be resurrected in full color, full detail. The arguments that you had with your spouse, the words that you used as weapons to inflict pain and provide a shield for your own ego would come flooding back.

What would you do? Would you turn back from where you came? Would you seek the safety and security of the distractions of your life? Would you pick up the abandoned schedules, go back to work, shop for groceries, and live life in a way that would prohibit you from having to think about

your disobedience to God? Or would you continue on? As difficult as the path is, as remorseful as these memories make you, would you continue on until you reached the cross?

In many ways, this is the decision of Lent. It is one that we are all faced with. Every year we have an opportunity to travel into the wilderness..... or not. We have an opportunity to narrow our focus in on Christ - his death and his resurrection. Now we can't really abandon our homes, our jobs, our families, nor do we want to. And we are not even called to! But what we can do is understand that these are distractions that compete with our journey. These are distractions that keep us from experiencing the full heaviness of Lent and the full heaven-ness of Easter. These are what dilute the impact that Christ's resurrection has on our life. If we don't make the time to mediate on the sinfulness of our selves how can we fully appreciate the work of the cross? How can we fully celebrate Easter morning?

And so, this morning, I'm not challenging you to do anything, to make any change in your life. What I am doing is inviting you to experience the fullness and richness of Easter. I'm inviting you, motivating you to *want* to go on this journey. I'm inviting you to be excited about setting aside all of the distractions that you can so you can spend time preparing for the death and resurrection of Christ. The path will be dark, and heavy, and long. And the more time you can spend focused on the journey the darker and heavier and longer your path will be. But the colors of Easter will be than much more vivid, that much brighter.

So, are you ready? Will you begin your journey, today?

Please pray with me.

Lord,

Sustain, comfort, and protect us as we enter into this time of Lent. We know that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." Help us remember that even though Lent is a time of reflection on our sins and rebellion against you, it is also a gift that prepares us for a celebration of the forgiveness and salvation that you earned for us on the cross.

In your name we pray. Amen.