

The joy of Christmas has come and gone. The arrival announced by Epiphany has been acknowledged. Now it's time to go to work. In Mark chapter one, Jesus has His eyes locked on salvation road. Every step from here on out goes to one place— the cross. This champion must start His race from the beginning...from where Adam failed...from where Israel failed. He's our last hope. He has to do it right.

So, He enters baptismal waters and gets covered. What is it that covers him? It's not just river water. It's sin; human sin. He's like a sponge coming up out of the waters of the Jordan. But what's amazing is that the Father is still pleased. Jesus sees heaven torn open; the Spirit descending; the voice of His Father proclaims that love is still the foundation of this divine relationship. What a boost! What an endorsement there at the riverbank! We can imagine an *empowered* Jesus standing with John the Baptizer, ready for whatever comes next. Which would be good, because what comes next is anything but pleasant.

Immediately the Spirit throws Him out into the desert. You heard that right. It's violent. The Gospel of Mark describes Jesus being cast out of the Promised Land. Kicked out for what He now carries: Israel's sin. He is Israel condensed into One Man. And so, He is driven away into the wilderness as if He had the problem with disobedience and doubt. God had made His people Israel in the same desert, bringing them through the waters of the Red Sea to the holy mountain where He declared them to be His own and promised to provide for them. But even when He gave them bread every day, and sheltered them from the heat with their own personal cloud, they grumbled against Him and put their trust in other things. But the only grumbling Jesus has is in His stomach—to the point that He might die. He has to trust where Israel did not. Even more so, He has to make up for their rejection. He has to do it without all the perks they had to make it easier. And so, His stomach throbs. Days pass. I don't know if you've gone a whole day without food . . . let alone two, or three, or four. How are we to understand forty? Jesus is hungry to the point His body is consuming itself to survive.

But it's more than hunger, isn't it? The hot desert sun glares down on the sand and rocks which stretch out for miles as far as the eye can see. Not a tree. Not a shelter. Nothing but dry, dusty loneliness. Rugged. Rocky. Empty. Lifeless. He is the true Israel reduced to One Man. He is the new Adam. He is the Seed born to crush the serpent's head. The Scriptures from beginning to end are funneling into this Man. And at this very moment, His sworn enemy is doing everything he can to get Him to think about himself, to serve himself, to avoid this pain and suffering. Make some bread, Jesus. Use all your power, Jesus. Skip the cross, Jesus, and go right to the throne. What's the harm in that? Satan is crafty. But he will not prevent Jesus from doing a new thing through all this. He cannot stop obedience born of love.

Do you need this new thing? Do you need some peace— some rest? Look carefully. He's doing it. He is the new relationship. He will not mess up on the way to the cross. He will not try to wriggle out from under the mission He's been baptized into. He does what Adam could not; what Israel could not; what I could not. And the devil fails.

And look at what happens next. Did you notice the wild animals that arrive at this place of victory and peace? The ones made dangerous by Adam's Fall? The ones you would never want to be staring down in the wilderness? But look at them with Him. Their wildness is calmed. The peace that passes all understanding is there with them in the flesh. "And heaven and nature sing." Even these wild animals have found peace at His side. It is a beautiful picture: our battle-weary Lord sitting on a rock with the animals approaching Him, restored to the peace of Eden. If Jesus can do that for them, do you see, He can calm you and tame the parts that still run wild.

Did you notice who else is there with Him? Yes, the holy angels. In the desert! With the wild animals. What are they doing there? Serving Jesus. He has brought the high ministry of the holy ones down to the lifeless plain of the wilderness. His obedience brings heaven down to all the lifeless places in the world around us. He's doing it again today, this bringing of heaven to earth. It's what we're doing here, right now, "with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven." Jesus brings heavenly service to the wilderness as He speaks to us through His Word. Jesus Himself provides heavenly service here at His table, an oasis in the middle of the wilderness.

This Jesus comes to heal your pain, your brokenness, your guilt, by uniting it with His own person. There is only one question: Will you give all of this to Him?

He is baptized for you—withstood every temptation for you—He is punished for you—and raised to life for you. All of it for you, as your substitute, standing in place of you.

When you trust that Jesus did this for you, all of your desperate striving to justify yourself can finally be calmed. He brings heaven to earth to heal you in the present moment, and also as a preview of what lies ahead. Receive His grace. Receive His forgiving love. Receive the life of Jesus, who is with you through Water and Wilderness, and on to the world to come.