

Tempted for Us

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, ¹³ and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

This is this one of the strangest contrasts you’ll see in the Bible. It’s where you scratch your head and wonder, “What just happened?” In an instant, from verse 11 to verse 12, everything is changed. Everything is different.

- In verses 9-11, Jesus is in the cool waters of the Jordan River. In verses 12-13, Jesus is in the heat of the desert.
- In verses 9-11, the Spirit is descending on Jesus like a dove. In verses 12-13, the Spirit sends Jesus away into the desert to be tempted.
- In verses 9-11, Jesus hears the words of love and affirmation from his Father in heaven. In verses 12-13, Jesus hears sinister words of temptation from the one who hates the Father.
- In verses 9-11, Jesus’ identity is heralded and celebrated. In verses 12-13, Jesus’ identity is about to be assaulted and undermined.

Two scenes couldn’t be scarcely more different. In one moment the heavens are opened. In the next moment Jesus faces the adversary of hell. Why? Why the sudden change? For this all important reason: Jesus came to live the obedient life we have failed to live. That’s what’s taking place in these verses, and Jesus is doing it in our place, for us. He is, as it says in Matthew’s account of Jesus’ baptism, “fulfilling all righteousness.”

First, consider what “righteousness” means. Most define it as being right with God or living a life that is right with God. Now consider that phrase “fulfilling all righteousness.” Can you and I say that we’ve done that in our life, that we’ve fulfilled all righteousness? Absolutely not, right? We all know that there are stains and blemishes of sin all over our lives. And because there are, that’s why you rarely, if ever, hear someone say, “I am a righteous person,” which ironically puts into perspective someone saying, “I am a good person.” You will say, “I am a good person,” hoping or convincing yourself that good is good enough. But down deep you know it isn’t, which is why you can’t say or won’t say, “I am a righteous person.” Now are you beginning to see why Jesus is fighting temptation in the desert? He is doing this for us in our place for all the times we have fallen to temptation, for all the times we have failed to fulfill all righteousness.

And notice the urgency of this. After Jesus’ baptism Mark says, **“At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert.”** That expression “at once” and similar expressions is used 43 times in the gospel of Mark and 11 times in chapter one alone. That’s because what Jesus came to do for us was crucial. There was no time to linger at the Jordan River, no time for a reception in his honor, no time for a press conference or a photo op. Jesus was purposely thrust into the fray to fulfill all righteousness for us, to accomplish all that we were meant to do but have failed to do, to live a perfectly obedient life on our behalf because we’ve lived a “perfectly” disobedient life.

When Jesus heard the voice of his Father at the Jordan River, he heard that voice as a summons to fulfill his mission, his mission to save us. That salvation has two parts. The part we are most familiar with is how Jesus came to take away our sins. But the other part is how Jesus came to provide righteousness for us. You need one as much as the other to get into heaven. So I hope you understand how important the message is that you are hearing today.

This is not your everyday temptation Jesus is fighting in the desert. Jesus is in combat with a ferocious enemy who plays for keeps. What you read in verses 12 and 13 is warfare between the Son of God and the archenemy of God. And at the heart of this warfare is the very mission Jesus came to fulfill. You see, Satan knows that Jesus is the Son of God. But what kind of Son will Jesus be is why Satan tempts him. Will he truly submit to his Father's will? Will he deny himself? Will he be the obedient Son? That's what's at stake in these verses. Satan is trying to subvert the master plan of salvation. And if Satan had, who would fulfill all righteousness? You? Me?

When it says in Hebrews, **"But we have One who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin,"** do you see why it is so important that we understand that Jesus did this for us in our place? If he didn't, then we'd have to do it. Who of us can do that? None of us. But he did for us! That's what's happening in these words of Mark.

Too often the temptation of Jesus is used simply as instruction for us to overcome temptation. Too often it's emphasized how Jesus set the example for us to fight Satan. When application like that becomes overused, you need to remember that before you see yourselves in the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert, you need to see Jesus himself. More than teaching you how to fight temptation, Jesus is fighting for you, in your place, overcoming temptation for you for all the times you have been overcome by temptation, obeying for you for all the times you have disobeyed, fulfilling all righteousness for you for all the times you have failed to be righteous.

Yes, resisting temptation is important for us to do. Don't leave here this morning thinking it isn't. But here in Mark 1:12-13, the most important thing for us to know is not how to resist temptation but to know that Jesus did – for us and our salvation.

Now listen to this: Because Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin – not only did that make him the perfect Savior to fulfill all righteousness for us, but it also made him the perfect sacrifice for our sin on the cross. Not only did a perfect life need to be lived for us in our place, but a perfect death for sin needed to be made for us in our place, which is what he did. That emphasizes that Jesus is our complete Savior. It means that we have everything we need for salvation (to get into heaven) – righteousness and forgiveness – through faith in him.

Dear friends, for all the times you doubt God really loves you, for all the times you question could God really accept you or forgive you, for all the times you struggle with condemnation, don't forget that Jesus stood in your place. He was tempted for you. He obeyed for you. He suffered for you. He bore God's wrath for you. He died for you. He lives and reigns for you. I will say it again, Jesus is your complete Savior. Everything that was necessary for Jesus to do for you, HE DID. He did it perfectly. Your greatest confidence is in Jesus. Amen.