

Jesus in the Wilderness

Phil Rogers Mark 1:12-13, Matt 4:1-13, Luke 4:1-13

Then immediately (*after his baptism*) Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was thrust out (*and*) led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and he was in the desert for forty days, being tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild animals. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them, after fasting for forty days and forty nights, he became hungry.

1. The tempter, the devil came to him and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

2/3. Again, the devil took him to a high place, a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. And he said to him,

"I will give you all this, all their authority and splendour, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to, So if you will bow down and worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered him, "Get away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

3/2. Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you carefully; and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he then left him until an opportune time, and angels came and ministered to him.

(Colour Code: Matthew, Mark, Luke, Duplicated)

John the Baptist was preaching a baptism of repentance in the river Jordan. He was just about to immerse his relative Jesus in the river Jordan, even though this thirty year old had no sins to repent from. At first John objected - you ought to be baptising me, not me baptising you. But Jesus insisted that this was 'the way to fulfil all

righteousness'. What did he mean? Jesus knew that in a little over three years time he would be crucified, die and be buried. Yet the scriptures promised that his Father would not let him decay in a tomb, but would raise him from the dead on the third day. Would he go through with it? This is why he had been born into the world and everything in him responded "Yes, Father". He would fulfil his destiny; he would fulfil all righteousness and bring about the only means whereby lost sinners could be made righteous.

So as John plunged him under the waters of the Jordan it was as if he was embracing his own death and burial. He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the substitute who would take the place of the billions of human beings who would believe in him during thousands of years of human history. But as John hauled him out of the river with the water pouring down his face and as he gasped for breath, Jesus was filled with confidence that his Father would raise him up again. That had been their plan from the beginning, and the sense of anticipation of accomplishing this most important transaction in all history made his heart burst. "I'll do it, Father!"

"I know, you will Son", came the reply, "You are my Son whom I love and I am very pleased with your commitment to fully accomplish our plan." Suddenly the Holy Spirit fell upon him anointing him with power from on high as his Father stamped him with his seal of approval. Now he really was totally and completely the Messiah, God's Anointed One! Now Jesus was all set, raring to go!

So fresh with a sense of destiny and the exhilaration of being filled with God's Spirit, he found himself being led by the Spirit... Mark uses the term impelled by the Spirit ... into the wilderness! "What's going on Father? I'm full of the Spirit let me start my work, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom and healing the sick." But no! The Spirit took him away from crowds and the people he would soon begin to minister to, into the desert, the wilderness of Judea where he had nothing to eat and nothing to do ...

except talk to his Father. It was a time of seclusion, a time of testing of and of preparation for the ministry that lay ahead. As usual when you don't eat his hunger pangs wore off after a few days and his spiritual senses became acutely attuned as he spent some forty days clarifying his mission plans and talking his strategy through with his Father, and wrestling in his mind with all kinds of thoughts that are not recorded for us. He was already facing some kinds of temptation, even while he was communing with his Father. And that can happen

to us all. Even when we draw near to God and he draws near to us, unclean spirits may try and distract us from our fellowship with God.

But after about forty days of glory in his Father's presence, his body had used up all its energy reserves and began to break down muscle tissue in order to survive and with that came the most agonising hunger pangs. At this point even a stone looked like a small tasty round loaf. How easy would it be to use the Spirit's power to turn it into real bread? He could see the smooth oval stone in his hand, and imagine himself speaking to the stone, "Become bread!" He only had to say it and it would happen, he was quite confident that it would. Yet he resisted the temptation to use such powers to satisfy his own needs. So he quotes Deuteronomy "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God," rebuking the tempter. He may have been physically racked with hungry pangs but his soul was totally satisfied with his forty days communion with his Father, his food was to do his Father's will. "It is my Father's word that gives me life not food." And he turned away from the temptation to satisfy his own desires and needs – his call was to serve his Father not himself.

So somewhat deflated, Satan takes him up to a very high mountain where he could see distant lands and kingdoms in all their splendour. Satan is legally the lord and god of this world and he was telling the truth when he said, "all this authority and splendour had been given to me and I can give it to whoever I want". The God of this world controls human affairs and keeps his subjects blinded to the glory of this man who would die to be their Saviour. He offers Jesus an easy way to achieve Kingship; 'just bow down and worship me and all this will be yours'. It was a very tempting shortcut. To be exalted as King over all the kingdoms of this earth without having to die on a cross! But if he put himself under Satan's authority he could never then take it back and rescue mankind from Satan's dominion. No, Jesus would take no shortcuts. Again quoting Deuteronomy, he reminds this fallen cherub, who wanted to set a throne for himself as high as God's, that it is unlawful to worship any except God alone. No, one day he would rescue people from the dominion of darkness and transfer them into God's Kingdom of love, he would not bow to Satan. His Father alone would exalt him to the highest place and give him a name above every name; he would make no deal with the father of lies. The ways of God may involve huge sacrifice and great difficulty, but Jesus refused to take any shortcuts. He would go set his face to Jerusalem and go the whole way, God's way.

Finally they leave the wilderness and come to the city. Jesus is starving and no doubt light headed, and finds himself on a turret on top of Herod's great temple in Jerusalem. "Just throw yourself off and God has promised in scripture that angels will carry you up so your feet won't even touch the ground. Imagine the spectacle, the amazement of the people. How they will revere you and make you King!" But however weak he felt he would not let himself fall off the pinnacle of that great temple. Would he float on angels' hands or would he end up a bloody mess on the temple courtyard? Just because you can quote a verse of scripture doesn't mean it is right to use it to put God to the test. Such presumption would guarantee the second outcome. Again he resists the tempter, quoting Deuteronomy. "Do not put the LORD your God to the test." He would become King of kings and Lord of lords, but only in his Father's way and in his Father's time. No, he would only take promises from the scriptures that the Spirit spoke to him. He would not take scriptures that the Liar quoted at him. He was not hearing from his Father, "Throw yourself down, Son." He knew his Father's encouraging tones and this Tempter's voice sounded sickly in comparison. No, he would only do what he saw his Father doing and repeat what he heard his Father saying. "I'm not in this for me, Satan, only for my Father - and for the billions of lost souls for whom only my obedience to my Father will bring about redemption. So back off and leave me alone." And he did, it tells us, until an opportune time. We have to learn to distinguish by practice and experience to distinguish between God speaking to us in scripture and the way the Evil One quotes it at us to condemn us or test us or make us try and test God.

Two other bits of information we read here: 1. He was with the wild animals. There were a number of dangerous animal living in the wilderness of Judea at that time that have now been eradicated. There were species of lion, bears, leopards, wolves, poisonous snakes. (David as a shepherd boy, killed lions and bears) The Jews had a dream that one day when Messiah came that 'the lion will lie down with the lamb', (Is 11:1-5) that the enmity between human beings and wild animals was not how things should be and God would resolve this somehow through the Messiah. Here we have Jesus the Anointed one spending forty days alone in an area with wild animals and he was untouched. (Like Daniel in the lion's den) It almost reads as if the wild animals were his only companions, other than his Father of course. Do we see Jesus chatting to snakes and wolves and lions and bears as he wandered the wilderness?

2. We see that angels came and ministered to him after his forty day fast and after his final ordeal with Satan. How they ministered we don't know. Did they bring him food to break his fast? Did they provide him with water to drink throughout the forty days - because water would have been quite difficult to find in that desert? We don't know, but angels are not just fanciful, like fairies, a fable; No angels are real and they are ministering spirits sent from God to serve those who will inherit salvation (Heb 1:14) and so we are told 'do not neglect to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it'. So what are we to do with that in a world that teaches us to be suspicious of and fearful of strangers? Let us be welcoming of people we don't know, especially visitors on a Sunday morning!

Conclusion: Jesus had a mission. He was baptised in anticipation of that mission, but immediately he was compelled to spend six weeks alone with only God and wild animals for company where he sorted out his priorities and prayed through his plans in order to strengthen his resolve, before he ever set out preaching and healing people. Then in three tests where Satan tried to undermine his integrity and deflect him from his purpose, he successfully resisted him by quoting the scriptures, parts of which he had obviously memorised, and he came out of that period stronger and clearer about what he was going to have to do. He remained sinless so that he could die for our sins so that Satan's authority and control over us would be broken once and for all. He would rise again to give us new life and forty days later he would ascend into heaven so that he could pour out the Holy Spirit upon us, just as he had experienced after his baptism. Have you taken advantage of what Jesus offers you? Have you come to him and allowed him to take away all your sins? Have you expressed your faith that he can do this by getting baptised, washing away your sins? Have you been anointed with the Holy Spirit as Jesus was and started out on a life of being led by the Spirit? That might well mean being thrust by the Spirit into times of seclusion as well as times of faith filled activity for Christ? Jesus would later call some of his friends to follow him. He calls you today, if you have never done this before to follow him. Will you do it? Will you do what your heavenly Father wants and not follow your own plans for your life? Will you get baptised and then receive the Spirit to live inside you and fill you with everything God wants to pour into your life?