

**Gospel Love: Jesus' Temptation:  
Mark 1:12-13**

High on our list of temptations is to make Jesus in our own image. But a Jesus you make up won't challenge you, correct you, or disturb you. And that means that a Jesus of your own making can't change you either. The call to follow Jesus is the call to follow Jesus as He is—not as we might want Him to be. So, we have begun to look at Mark's gospel to discover the real Jesus and we're praying for the discernment and courage to follow Jesus as He really is.

Last Sunday we considered the commissioning of Jesus as He began his public ministry. It was a commissioning saturated and steeped in the eternal love of the Triune God. Mark has woven together the ministry of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He seems to be saying that if you only see God as a singularity, you will miss Him. Like a musical chord, God is one. But He has been exploding with love shared between the Father Son and the Holy Spirit from all eternity. God is one, but God is not a singularity. The triune God overflows with mutual love, honors, cherishes, prizes, defers to and serves one another. From eternity each has orbited around the other. If God were a singularity there would be no love prior to creation because *love happens when the well being of another, their honor, safety, security and joy mean more to you than your very own.*

So, Mark lets us peak into the very interior of God's being and paints a vivid picture of God's love that motivates, energizes, and saturates the launching of Jesus' public ministry and the gospel.

Three events make up Jesus' commissioning.

- His *baptism*,
- the *loving affirmation of the Father and the Spirit*,
- and Jesus' *temptation* in the wilderness.

Each one overflows with the love of God. Jesus' baptism symbolized the love of God who would take our place as sinners and actually become sin for us. Paul says, "He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God." By being baptized, as a sinner, Jesus accepts our sin as his own and He then gives us the record of His righteousness as a gift so that we might be folded into the love of the Triune God. At His baptism, Jesus laid aside the prerogatives of His Divinity for our acceptance, peace, and joy. He loved us and defined love for us. Real love lays aside its prerogatives in the service of God and others.

The affirmation of Jesus by the Father and the Spirit was also filled with love. When Jesus came up out of the water, God the Father punched a hole in the universe, ripped open up the sky, and said, "This is my son. In whom I am well pleased." The Father covered the son with words of love and acceptance. In love, the Holy Spirit rested or enveloped Jesus reassuring Him that he would not have to do this alone. When you look into the interior of the triune God you see a love where each person of the Trinity, honors, defers to, cherishes and prizes the other. The Father covers Jesus with words of love, the Spirit rests on Jesus, and Jesus lovingly accepts the love that will cost Him everything He held dear.

**Jesus Wilderness Temptation: Gospel Love**

This leads us this morning to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. It is the third piece of his commissioning, which is also teeming with love. Three aspects of gospel love emerge:

1. Gospel love must be tested.
2. Gospel love is a love marked by a set of counter-intuitive values and
3. Gospel love seeks mercy over judgment.

**Gospel Love: A Tested Love**

First, the love of the gospel is a tested love. Notice the work of the Holy Spirit in v.12. "*The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.*" Jesus' season of severe testing came by the leading of the Holy Spirit of God. Mark could not have used a stronger word. *Ekballo* is often translated to cast out, throw out or force out. Today some say that God would never lead His children into any difficulty or agonizing

circumstance. Not only is this not true; it is not even desirable. You can't know any measure of nobility that doesn't cost you something. There is no such thing as nobility or love without serious pain.

Years ago I was facing a difficult season of testing. I told a friend of mine, "John, life is just not supposed to be this difficult!" He said, "Where in the world did you get that idea? Certainly not from Jesus." He asked me, "Does your faith in Jesus have anything to do with following Jesus?" Although his response seemed harsh it was incredibly liberating. The suggestion that true love is pain free, untested, and a walk in the park, is a pathetic and superficial vision of love. God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son. Do you think the love of God wasn't full of grief and pain? Of course it was. That's what makes it so amazing (i.e. that God would let His heart be broken to that extent for our eternal joy). The same is true with the blessings of childbirth. The wonder and love of bringing a child into this world comes through the pain of labor. That's why they are called *labor* pains. And we associate that hardship with a noble love and rightly so.

But some ask, "Does not the book of James say that God does not tempt anyone?" Of course God does not tempt anyone to sin. God is holy. By leading Jesus into the severe testing, God did not *entice Jesus into sin*. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to test and prove His love. Satan uses the same circumstance to entice Jesus into sin. God doesn't entice anyone one to sin. But God does put your faith to the test to prove its reality against the circumstance of Satan's temptation. Joseph said, "What men mean for evil God means for good." The Spirit of God led Jesus out to be tested for to prove and reveal His great love. That same circumstance was picked up by Satan to entice Jesus into betraying God and love. True love and gospel love must be tested and proven to reveal its validity.

Mark is contrasting the first Adam's testing with Jesus' (the second Adam). The first Adam was called to obey God in a beautiful garden. The second Adam was called to obey in a dust-ridden wasteland. When Adam was tested, he was living in harmony with the animals. Jesus was tested among wild beasts. Adam was full and satisfied. Jesus was hungry and empty having fasted for forty days. So, envision this scene. Jesus is there physically alone in a desolate wasteland, in a physically weakened state for forty days, surrounded by dirt and wild beasts and then gliding into His presence comes this resplendent figure of Satan, radiating with power, promise, and elegant beauty. He holds out to Jesus everything he thought Jesus could want and offers him a way to wealth, glory, power, and ruling influence over the whole world without any sacrifice to personal ambition. That test could have not been more severe. Beloved, gospel love is a tested love and a proven love.

### **Gospel Love & Counter Intuitive Values**

Second, gospel love is marked by a set of counter intuitive values. Mark doesn't reveal all the details of Jesus' temptation. However, from Matthew we know that Satan put before Jesus three propositions. All three were subtle distortions of what it meant to be a legitimate child of God. He tempted Jesus much the same way he tempted Adam and Eve. He attempted to get Jesus to doubt God's goodness to Him and to doubt the sacrifices of love. In the desert there was no bread. Jesus fasted because fasting reminds you rather quickly that you are a dependent being. Jesus wanted to be keenly aware that His life was in the Father as He faced that test. Satan said, "Look, if you are the Son of God... if God is your Father, surely He wants you to have bread, right?" If God loves you, if you are God's child, just command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the Father." The temptation was to redefine God's love and what it means to be a child of God.

I once heard a preacher say, "Look, you are a child of the king." Then he spoke of how extravagantly the children of the king of Saudi Arabia lived. He painted a vivid picture of their beautiful clothes, fine jewelry, and how they travel all over the world in their huge yachts to places like Paris and Monte Carlo. Then he mentioned that as Christians we are not children of some desert king. He said that we are children of the King of Kings and wouldn't God treat His children better than the kings of Saudi treat their children? He then exhorted us to start claiming all the wealth, extravagance, and power that we could imagine. Satan used the same distorted logic on Jesus. But Jesus answered him by reminding him of love's values. And, that life is not merely about bread and the acquisition of things. It is about hearing God's word, feasting on that good word, obeying my Father, and pleasing Him. It's not just about being a slave to my every natural appetite. It is about being free to love God and others. Jesus valued the words of His Father more than the *appetites* of self-indulgence.

Then Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and said “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down and surely God will send his angels to save you.” But Jesus knew that Satan didn’t quote the passage correctly. God’s promise was to protect Him in all His ways and in the context, those ways were righteous ways, not just any way a person chooses. Jesus had no command from God to make such a display of power. Jesus never performed miracles as a display of raw power. This is mark of Satan. Jesus uses His power to help, to heal, and to teach. Satan wanted him to do a stupendous thing that would glorify himself with a display of God’s power for no redemptive or loving purpose. Beloved, be wary of those who are more interested in power than in the power to love and obey. Jesus said, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”

Then Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and offered them to Jesus instantly if He worshiped him. All He had to do was to put Satan first and He could have it all. No cross, no suffering, no rejection, and no pain; no physical sacrifice, no bearing the sins of the world, and no love for God and others. “Just put me first and you can have it all.” And Jesus said, “Get out of here. For it is written that you shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”

Gospel love is marked by counter intuitive values. Jesus valued loving God and the well being of others more than his own. More than bread, more than vain glory, and more than ease. Gospel love is marked by paradoxical values. Jesus said, He *loses* His life for my sake and the gospel will *gain* it. He who wants to be first must be last. He who wants to be the greatest of all must become the servant of all. This is the love that has characterized the Triune God from all eternity. Satan wanted Jesus and he wants us to think that the love of God is about acquiring wealth, glory, power, and ease. He wants you to pick up your prerogatives and make your wishes and ambition the center of the universe. Jesus said, “No, it is about obeying, sacrificing, and the liberation to love God and others.” Can a person, church, family, or nation with no higher mission than acquiring wealth, power, and prosperity, be worthy to be sustained?

### **Gospel Love & Mercy**

Finally, gospel love offers mercy over judgment. I think Mark is here contrasting the failure of the first Adam with the faithfulness of the second. Where Adam failed, Jesus prevailed. God tells the first Adam, “Obey me about a tree.” and he didn’t. Adam and Eve put themselves at the center of the universe and their relationship with God and others began to unravel. It was a failure of love. When we put our interests in the center, all relationships break down... political, social, between classes, family, between races and nations, in a marriage and in a church. Is this not why relationships are blowing up all around us? We all want to be little stars with the planets orbiting around us. But a system where every planet insists that all the others orbit around them is not a solar system; it is a solar cataclysm.<sup>1</sup> And a world where each says, everything must revolve around me is a world where love is not possible. Love will grow cold in a world like this.

But God, in His great mercy, has not left us there. God told the second Adam to obey me about a tree and he did. This time the tree was a cross. To Adam God said, “Obey me and you will live.” To the second Adam he said, “Obey me and you will be crushed to powder.” and He did. And in doing so He bore our sins forever and made it possible for us—in His mercy—to be friends with God. This love is the only thing that can break apart the lie of Satan in all of our hearts: that you must make yourself, your preferences, your ambitions, and your acquisitions the center in order to be alive. And to prove that His love was real life, God the Father raised Jesus up from the dead.

The love that makes loving God and others the gravitational pull of our lives cuts against almost every impulse and it will be costly. But it is good, and in the end to love God and others results in the most beautiful acts in the world and results in life. Love like this will be tested and it will be different than the ambitions of the world. So, where do you get that kind of love? Through faith in the Lord Jesus, the love the Father has for Him becomes ours. In His priestly prayer Jesus said, “May the love you have for me be in them.” The love the Father has for Jesus has now been promised to us. And He now says to us, “You are my beloved child and in you I am well pleased.” Being God’s beloved child is now our status in Christ. Being well pleased is the pleasure God took in Jesus’ sacrificial love on our behalf. Through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ you can have a love that knows both. No one can ever love you like Jesus. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> I heard this first from pastor Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian in NY.

