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Jesus came out of the wilderness **more** than a survivor. You can be more than a survivor too!

Key Verse: Mark 1:9-15

Key words: wilderness, temptation, Satan, survivor, beloved, victorious, dangerous, angels

Message for February 21, 2021

**More than a Survivor**

Have you ever been lost in the wilderness? \*\*Picture yourself lost in the middle of a forest where everywhere you turn, it looks the same. \*\*Imagine you’re in a desert with no road to follow, the sun is scorching your skin and parching your throat, and no one in sight. \*\*Or perhaps your boat is washed out to sea or caught in a storm and you lose sight of land and your bearings. Any of these situations could be very, very frightening.

\*\*Here in BC’s lower mainland, we regularly hear of hikers losing their way in our local mountains and needing rescue. Last month this 21-year-old decided to snowshoe in Cypress Provincial Park by herself. Tragically, she got lost and did not survive the night in the wilderness.

\*\*There’s a fascinating attraction to the untamed wilderness, where all our human ingenuity and technology and money can’t stand against nature. These natural landscapes can be breathtakingly gorgeous, yet lethally dangerous.

\*\*Did you realize that there are dozens of different reality survivor shows you can choose to watch—from survival competition series like Survivor—which is now into its 41st season--to survivalist documentaries. Our family has enjoyed watching many of these shows from the comfort of our couch in our nice, warm house.

\*\*Jesus, too, found himself in the dangerous wilderness. As we’ll discover today, he was MORE than a survivor. We can be too.

Our Bible text for this message is found in the Gospel of Mark 1:9-15. Let’s read it in the English Standard Version:

*\*\*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*

*\*\*The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 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.*

*\*\*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*

With Mark’s usual bullet-point brevity, Jesus appears, is baptized, goes to the wilderness to wrestle with the devil, starts his ministry and then calls his first disciples all in the first half of the first chapter of his book.

\*\*But in the middle of this bullet-point list, Mark takes a moment to show us the disturbing image of Christ alone in the desert among the wild animals. Jesus is in that wilderness place where there is little or no shelter, where the harsh environment and its creatures could devour him in a moment.

The other gospel writers Matthew and Luke describe Jesus’ wilderness interaction with Satan at length, taking nearly a dozen verses. Mark gives us a sentence and a half. That’s only 26 words! But these 26 words are packed! We’re going to break down this verse into its parts and see what we can learn from Mark’s account of Jesus meeting Satan on his turf—the dangerous wilderness.

Being alone in the wilderness like Jesus was can be one of the most frightening experiences, as we’ve already discussed. But before we start to feel sorry for Jesus, let’s reread the first part of our passage in Mark. You see, Jesus was PREPARING himself for this trip into the wilderness. Preparation is indeed a key to survival in any wilderness.

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:9-11 ESV)*

Jesus comes to the Jordan River and asks John to baptize him. Other Gospel writers share more details than Mark does, but we’re going to focus on what happened when Jesus rose from that baptism.

*Immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. (Mark 1:10 ESV)*

\*\*Right away we realize this is no ordinary baptism, and this is no ordinary person being baptized. Jesus saw the Spirit descending on him. We can only speculate if any others saw this, or if Jesus just told the disciples what he saw. And this is only **PART** of the experience…

*\*\*And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11 ESV)*

What affirmation! “You are my beloved Son.” If there had been any doubt in Jesus’ mind (and I’m not saying there was), it would have disappeared at the sound of this voice from heaven giving this amazing message of affirmation. “You are my beloved; I am delighted in you.” We can only imagine what this declaration did to Jesus’ confidence. It was with these words ringing in his ears that he came out of that river—full of the knowledge of his identity, and confident in his Father’s love. What happens next?

*\*\*The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. (Mark 1:12 ESV)*

I find it interesting that we see the words “drove him out into the wilderness.” Other translations say the Spirit compelled, sent, impelled, or **LED** Jesus. The implication is **NOT** that the Spirit **FORCED** Jesus to go against his will, it is that the Spirit was **LEADING** Jesus to a divine appointment.

Have you ever felt the Spirit leading you to a divine appointment? \*\*Some appointments might be quite dramatic, like being at a certain time and place to save a person from injury or even losing their life. I’ve never saved anyone’s life, but I have felt the lead of the Holy Spirit when \*\*visiting or contacting the sick, the needy, the lonely. I’ve looked back and marveled at the words He’s given me to say—sometimes in person, sometimes in telephone calls, \*\*writing cards, messages or emails. It’s a humbling and awesome experience because sadly there are many times when I have ignored the Holy Spirit’s lead instead of participating with Jesus in his life-giving work.

\*\*May our eyes be wide open and our hearts be ready to follow the Holy Spirit into these divine appointments.

Jesus going to the wilderness and being tempted by Satan was no accident—it was part of the plan. It was a divine appointment. Back to our 26 words:

***\*\*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. (Mark 1:13 ESV)*

Unlike today, much of the world as they knew it in Bible times WAS what they would describe as “wilderness”—untamed, dangerous, and sometimes lethal--even while being beautiful. Most of us would be scared to go into the wilderness for an extended period of time. But we cannot assume that of Jesus.

\*\*He went into the wilderness full of confidence. He had just heard the voice of the heavenly Father confirming his identity and affirming his love. We also know that the Spirit led him to the wilderness and the Spirit never leaves us or forsakes us. \*\*It is like us going into the “wilderness” of the post-Christian world to fulfil the great commission to preach the gospel make disciples.

We go with the confidence that we are made new in Jesus and our identity is in him.

We go knowing that we too are deeply loved.

We go with the encouragement that Jesus has been given all power and authority in heaven and earth

and

We go in with the assurance that he will be with us always because we’re partnering with him in the work he’s already prepared for us to do.

\*\*So what was Jesus doing in the wilderness? He was hanging out with the Father--his Abba, his Daddy—preparing for his ministry and defeating the enemy.

*\*\*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. (Mark 1:13 ESV)*

It catches our attention when the biblical writers include details like this, especially numbers. Jesus passes through the waters in his baptism and then goes to the desert to wander for 40 days. Does this sound familiar? \*\*Jesus is replaying the story of Israel here, a nation that passed through the waters of the Red Sea and wandered in the desert for forty years before entering the promised land.

You will see this several times through the Gospels—Jesus replaying the story of Israel, only this time it ends in eternal victory. The story of Israel started with Abraham, then Isaac and Jacob, but the extended family became Israel in the desert. \*\* Their identity as God’s people was solidified in that difficult time in their tents in the middle of nowhere.

God’s sacred geometry was coming together—our inadequacy and need for him was proven in the desert once, and the need was fulfilled in the desert again. Jesus redeems the journey through the wilderness. \*\***Israel spent 40 years wandering because of unbelief in who God was and what he was doing for them. Jesus spends 40 days knowing who he is and knowing God is for him.**  **He rewrote the story of God’s beloved.**

Have you seen that in your own life? Jesus steps into your story—he doesn’t destroy it and start over—he rewrites it. One example close at hand is the apostle Paul. \*\*After receiving the best training in writing and speaking and arguing, Saul found himself suddenly meeting Jesus. God rewrote Saul’s story. He then used all of Paul’s gifts for writing and speaking and arguing, for his glory and for the gospel. He is rewriting your story because you are his beloved.

*\*\*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. (Mark 1:13 ESV)*

Jesus heard a familiar voice as he walked out there in the wilderness—it was the enemy. The enemy of God, God’s plan, God’s people, and of course, God’s Son. But Mark doesn’t spend any time detailing the temptations—he just makes a summary statement—Jesus was tempted by Satan. Some like to depict this as a battle between Jesus and the devil, but it wasn’t really a battle. Jesus was in control from the very beginning. He was the beloved Son of God, Satan was the self-proclaimed enemy of God.

There was no ensuing battle where we would wonder who would win—Jesus or Satan. This was simply a matter of Jesus putting the enemy in his place. Mark is looking back on this event and concisely states the obvious: Satan tried and failed, end of story.

*\*\*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. (Mark 1:13 ESV)*

Here again, Mark uses just a few words to convey a powerful reality. The wilderness of Palestine was full of wild animals. \*\*These might have included boars, jackals, wolves, hyenas, leopards and maybe even lions. Normally one would be terrified to spend 40 nights where there are dangerous predators. But Mark likely had a different reason for mentioning these wild animals; he was showing that Jesus had been protected. Jesus went into the wilderness knowing who he was and how much his Father loved him. As a result, he trusted his Father for protection from all the elements of the wilderness.

\*\*When we know our true identity as beloved children of God—and we know that God HAS US in his hands—we can face our own wilderness experiences in FULL confidence that God is always in control. We can face temptation with the faith of Jesus.

*\*\*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****. (Mark 1:13 ESV)*

And here’s the last piece of this brief description. \*\*Jesus is tended to by heavenly power through this ordeal. He is cared for and watched over. He is never out of the Father’s eye.

Note also that he is not taken OUT of the situation. The wild animals and the angels are both there with him—like death and resurrection, like joy and pain, like life. Like Jesus, we are never alone in the desert. We may be surrounded by wild animals at times, but we are also ministered by angels, letting us know God is always with us. Let’s move on to verses 14 and 15 in Mark 1

*\*\*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-15 ESV)*

Mark ends his concise synopsis and gets to the point: After Jesus came out of this wilderness experience, his ministry began. \*\*He started proclaiming the good news. He started sharing his love and life with others. He picked up the work of redemption, restoration, and reconciliation.

The Spirit led him into the wilderness to prepare for ministry. He went in with full confidence and assurance; he came out with mission and purpose. Jesus was MORE than a survivor; and he was ready to get to his Father’s work!

What’s the lesson for you and me? \*\*Perhaps you feel like you’re in a personal wilderness right now—lonely, vulnerable, exposed, tempted. Satan and his team of wild animals are a constant threat. \*\*May YOU feel the lead of the Holy Spirit, the protection and love of the Father, and the ministering of the angels. May you go in with the full confidence and assurance of the Father’s love, knowing the victory is yours in Christ. Because of Jesus, you are MORE than a survivor! May you emerge from your wilderness with renewed mission and purpose. \*\*Because it’s time to get to work—the only work that counts!