

Notes for the Ones Called–Out to Meet

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Firmly Facing the Opposition

by Dan Trygg

“And it came about in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.¹⁰ And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him;¹¹ and a voice came out of the heavens: ‘You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.’¹² And immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness.¹³ And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.”
Mark 1:9-13

One of the characteristics of Mark’s gospel is the rapid movement from one event to another. One of his favorite words is “immediately”. It serves to raise the level of intensity, and dramatically pushes the reader along to new parts of the story. In the passage, **we are specifically told that immediately after His baptism, the Spirit impelled** (Lit., ‘He cast out’) **Jesus into the wilderness.**

Jesus’ baptism had been His dedication to a new life consecrated to God. It represented His death to His old life of “Jesus the carpenter” and a commitment to a new adventure, serving God in a transient public ministry. His commitment was received and affirmed by His heavenly Father through the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him, and by a voice that came from heaven, as He was coming out of the water, “You are My beloved Son. In You I am well pleased.” This interaction was seen and overheard by John the Baptist, and fit with the signs that God had told Him to look for. **From that day onward. Jesus lived a life more visibly committed to the mission that God had prepared for Him, and John the Baptist also began to publicly refer people to follow Him** (Jn. 1:29-37). Jesus had known that He was called to “the Father’s business” many years earlier, but He had remained in relative obscurity, learning, preparing, deepening His intimacy with God, all while maintaining His carpentry business (Lk. 2:42-52). Now it was time to leave all of that. He was leaving the comforts of home, His friends, His family, and the stability of the business which He had known since childhood as His primary source of income. He was leaving behind His entire way of life, and the routine which He had developed over 30 years. **He was leaving behind His former persona.** He had been the relatively quiet carpenter, who, though respectable, was not given to draw attention to Himself or dazzle crowds of people with tricks, miracles or clever teaching. No. When He began to preach, perform miracles, and cast out demons, His fellow townspeople exclaimed, “Where did He get all of this! Is not this Jesus, the carpenter, whose father and mother we know, whose brothers and sisters are here among us?” (Mk. 6:2,3). **The Jesus who emerged after the baptism and the time of testing in the wilderness, was very different than the carpenter of Nazareth.**

It may seem a bit curious that **the first act of the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ ministry life was to lead Him away from the crowds and notoriety to the most desolate, deserted place around, ...the wilderness of Judea. He was to spend time alone with God to sort out the boundaries of His new life.** Specifically, He was to be tested by the Adversary (Satan). Mark does not give us many details. To read his account, it would appear that Satan was tempting him throughout the forty days, and that the angels were serving him during that time, also. The comment about being there “with the wild beasts” also has no further explanation, except to imply that he was defenseless in an area that was known to be dangerous, inhabited by lions, bears, poisonous snakes, etc. He was really on a “retreat”, camping out in the wilderness alone, with no other compatriots. He was gone for nearly a month and a half, talking with no one during that time, eating nothing, and spending His time in prayer, meditation, and in dealing with the spiritual warfare that was set against Him. **He was challenged by the opposition, who tried to manipulate Him into disqualifying Himself from being able to carry out His calling.** We know from Hebrews 2 that Jesus had to be made like us in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest, in order to make an effective sacrifice on behalf of the people. Part of that preparation process included both temptation and suffering (Heb. 2:10,18; 4:15;5:7-9). He had experienced temptation many times in the first 30 years of His life, and had never compromised (Heb. 4:15; I Jn. 3:5; Jn. 8:46). These temptations are not your average, run-of-the-mill, everyday temptations. **These were an out-and-out assault of spiritual warfare against Jesus in response to His consecration to God, and His mission.**

What can we learn from this glimpse into Jesus’ life?

(1.) The enemy often will assault us strongly shortly after, or immediately before, a spiritual advance in our lives. This time of testing was the next major event in Jesus’ spiritual life *after* His baptism/consecration to ministry, sandwiched in *immediately before* He returned from the wilderness to actually begin to preach and take on some disciples. **Such attacks are strategic,** either to rob our joy and delight in what God has been doing, or to discourage us so that we would not persist in following God’s will. If the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10), then discouragement or distraction is an attempt to *sever* our source of strength.

(2.) The devil often waits until a time of vulnerability. Jesus was *physically depleted* after 40 days without food, and He became very hungry. There was no food at hand, however, so the enemy came with his suggestion that Jesus “make” a little lunch out of some stones. He appealed with a lust of the flesh *at the time* His flesh was the weakest. If we will pay attention, we will begin to see the same kind of principle operating in our lives. If we are *lonely*, he will bring into our lives someone who may bring us company, but will also be an avenue to lead us into sin or divert us from God’s plan for our lives. We need to be especially on guard when we are *emotionally weak* or *tired*.

(3.) Satan suggests ways to “shortcut” the plan of God. According to Matthew 4:1-10, Satan’s suggestions to Jesus appeared as “*quick-fix*” *kinds of solutions*, ...ways that *appeared* to fulfill legitimate needs or wants, but in ways that were not in sync with God’s ways of doing things. What’s wrong with eating bread? ...or gathering disciples? ...or becoming King of the planet? Weren’t these the very things God *wanted* to do with and for Jesus? They appeared to be, but in reality, of course, they were not at all. We see the same strategy at work in Gen. 3. **In truth, only God’s way leads to God’s ends. The ends do not justify the means. God’s ends grow out of God’s means.** If you want *God’s will* for your life, then you have to travel *His road* with Him. If you take another road, even though it might claim the same destination, you will find that it does not actually lead to the same place. Or, another way to come at this is to observe that *there are important skills developed, and character built, by following God’s path, which the “short cut” will cut short.* We will *not* be the same for following the short cut, ...aside from every other consideration.

(4.) Satan can quote Scripture, too. Paul tells us that Satan can appear as an “angel of light”, and his servants appear as servants of righteousness (II Cor. 11:14,15). They become evident by their actions, especially in how they treat people (II Cor. 11:15-21; Matt. 7:15-20; 25:31-46). Religious talk and appearances do not necessarily mean that a person is trustworthy. Sometimes religious people will be the mouthpiece of the devil. Their counsel is worldly, not scriptural. What does *God* want? What does His word say, ...in context? Test out all things: hold fast to the good.

(5.) Jesus demonstrated the importance of staying calm and quiet while under attack. Satan would love to get us upset and into an argument. When we get emotionally distraught, it is very easy to fall back into old fleshly ways of trying to convince someone else, or keep their accusations at bay. Notice that when Jesus was under attack by His enemies, He was very quiet, ...so quiet that they were amazed that He didn’t defend Himself (Matt. 26:12-14; Prov. 10:19). Paul tells us plainly to avoid quarrels. It is not necessary for us to quarrel, but to respond with kindness, patience and gentleness, praying for the other person to see the truth (II Tim. 2:23-26; Jas. 1:19,20).

(6.) Jesus showed us the importance of standing firm in the revealed truth of God. He did not try to reason things out, or argue with Satan. He simply *applied what God had said* about this particular situation, and stood firm on that. **Jesus’ tests were all about trusting in God, His timing, His ways. The verses He stood on kept God in focus, not the problems.** The enemy was unable to deceive Him because He unyieldingly focused on God.

The Greek word for “test” and “temptation” is the same. The word, *peirazō*, and related terms, also mean “to try, to examine, to make an attempt, to make proof or trial of”. The word itself is neutral. It can be positive or negative, depending on the context. **A temptation or test is an occasion which reveals the character or ability of the person who encounters it,** and must respond to it in some way.

(a.) It is clear that God does, at times, lead us into temptation. God tested Abraham (Heb. 11:17), the Israelites (Ex. 15:25; Jdg. 2:22; 3:1), and even “led Jesus up to be tested”. In the same way, **God will test us, and allow us to be tested.** Because the word “test” is neutral, we must understand what God’s motives or intentions are.

(b.) Since He is good, any tests He may lead us into are meant for our benefit and/or His glory, ...either to reveal to us an area of self-deception or weakness (2 Chr. 32:31); or to more deeply establish and strengthen our character and walk with Him by our successful obedience in the face of such a trial (Heb. 5:7-9; Rev. 2:10).

(c.) The Bible clearly tells us that God does not test us “toward evil” (James 1:13). James’ point is that God has no evil motives, and thus is “untemptable with regard to evil”. Consequently, He Himself tests/tempts no one *to evil*.

(d.) Every temptation is human (I Cor. 10:13). That is, because it has to do with a human choice or response to some stimulus, **it is within our power how we will choose. That is the essence of a test or temptation. It is an opportunity for human expression, either for good or ill.** The “humanness” of temptation also implies that other people have experienced the same *kinds* of things we face. The scenario might not be the same, but the general avenues of temptation have been experienced by others (I Pet. 5:9).

(e.) The root of temptation is our own strong-desire in conjunction with our will (Jas. 1:13-15). We are “drawn away” and lured/enticed by our own *strong desires*. A temptation is rarely a cold, clear, rational choice.

(f.) God gives us two very important promises regarding the “humanness” of our temptations: 1.) He will not permit us to be tested beyond what we are able; and, 2.) He will provide “the way of escape” together with every test, so that we might be able to endure (I Cor. 10:13).

(g.) Finally, God is able, and is faithful, to give us victory, ...if we will trust Him and obey His counsel (Jude 24; II Cor. 2:14).