Text: Mark 1:9-15

**Introduction**

Anyone who picks up the Bible and starts to read ultimately gets to the question of why are there four gospels. Different parts of the church in wildly different times have decided that 4 was three too many and set about harmonizing them. The Syrian church for centuries read from something called the Diatessaron. It was a harmony of the four gospels produced by a man called Tatian in the late 2nd century and was used until the 5th century. It impacted Persia (modern day Iran) and the Arabic world. It might have had an impact on Mohammed and Islam. We no longer have a copy of the original, but only quotations and translations. There was a boomlet of harmonies in the early 20th century. None of them were as influential as Tatian’s, but it was one response to the original critical scholars. While the critical scholars were busy taking apart the texts of the four gospels. Searching for the words of the historical Jesus and declaring large chunks of the canon to be the work of editors and redactors who added stuff. It was as if the harmonists said, “no, we won’t allow you to atomize the story of Jesus, we will through a heroic effort tell THE STORY.” The greatest story ever told.

**Text**

The reality is that the Holy Spirit inspired four very similar but slightly different witnesses. And each witness has their own purpose in retelling what they saw. John, who so often weaves around the stories told by the other three, doesn’t have a temptation narrative. The temptation of Jesus doesn’t matter to John. If I’m taking a guess it’s because John’s Jesus is so always in control of everything the idea of Jesus being tempted just doesn’t rate. John’s Jesus is the one who says “I lay down my life and I pick it up again (John 10:17).” Matthew and Luke alike are interested in the temptation, but they are interested in the particulars of it. They are the one who give us Satan’s offers and Jesus’ answers. For Matthew it is Jesus recapitulating Israel, but successfully. Where Israel failed in the wilderness, Jesus – Israel reduced to one – succeeds. Luke has the same temptations, but changes their order slightly. The final isn’t the temptation to worship someone other than God, but to test God. Luke emphasis is being guided by the Spirit. The baptized Jesus is anointed with the Spirit. Guided by the Spirit refuses to test God. And then he returns to his ministry in the power of the Spirit. Being sustained in trial being the proof of the Spirit.

Mark has his own purposes. And I think those purposes are less about apologetics of who Jesus is, and more about the nature of temptation itself. Because Mark doesn’t relate to us any of the specific temptations. Reading those others, I think we are all tempted to take Jesus simply as our pattern. If we can only know the appropriate scripture to hurl at Satan in that moment, we too can beat Satan. And sometimes I think it might even be taught that way. Even thought Jesus would elsewhere say “don’t worry what you will say in those moments, it will be given to you (Matt 10:19).”

No, Mark reduces the entire temptation to two verses. And I think there are three things that Mark wants us to understand about all temptation.

**Christology.**

“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.”

You’ve probably heard me say this before, because I think it is an important reality that we forget. In the biblical languages the word for testing and temptation is the same word. How we translate it depends upon our judgement of the purpose of the one behind it. A teacher gives a test hoping that you’ve studied and you pass it. A tempter offers you something bad hoping you can’t resist it. A test can also be a temptation. In fact that is what would have been assumed.

The Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness. Yes, it is a time of testing. “He was in the wilderness for 40 days.” But, there are at least two things we can take comfort in about the test. First, God is in control. He knows what he is doing, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The desire of the time of testing is that we come to know the love of God for us. Notice the connection. The voice from heaven says, “You are my beloved Son.” And the Spirit drives him out to the test. It is through that test that one moves to a deeper understanding of the love of God.

The second thing that we can take comfort in is that the tempter – Satan – has been defeated. “Jesus was driven our by the Spirit…and what being tempted by Satan.” And this was always Satan’s go to. Let me grind him, and he’ll curse you. Let me tempt him and you’ll see what he truly worships. And the temptation that begins here continues on the cross. Save yourself they taunted him. But Jesus had come to save the world. Jesus had come to demonstrate the steadfast love of God. And that love is such that even the one who fails the test, gets another chance – 70 x 7. And those who are in Christ, Satan has no power over. He can no longer accuse us – it doesn’t stop him from trying – but his words are lies, because Christ has broken him. Jesus passed the test as true man and so we all can find ourselves past the test. By the love of God in the grace of Christ.

The temptation in within the test. And the Spirit controls the test.

**Moral**

Yes, Satan has been defeated, but what is that time of testing and temptation like?

“He was with the wild animals.”

Satan in powerless, but the world and our own flesh can tare at us.

When you are in that crucible it is the struggle against our natural selves and the ways of the world, and the call of Christ. The way of the wild, red in tooth and claw, taking what you can when you can. Or the way of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness…self-control. Do we act on instinct, or do we recognize the test and listing to the Spirit that lives within us?

Christ was with the wild animals. He handed himself over to the wild animals. We know the danger we walk through all the way. Like a roaring lion, a hungry pack, the demands of the body and the fear of death.

Do we settle for a temporal separate peace, or do we know those animals are there, but trust the shepherd to lead us?

**Eschatological**

Because the last picture of of the temptation Mark gives us is the promise. “the angels were ministering to him.”

I had us sing our opening song, because it walks this path down to the depths. But then it starts the climb. We walk with angels all the way. We might not always know, but the chariots and horsemen of Israel are there. They shield me and befriend me.

And one day they will be there to take me home.

Right now, even right now, you might be with the wild animals. But God has you and them surrounded. His Spirit has brought you there so that you might know Him better. And the Angels are tasked to minister.

Satan, the world and even our own sinful flesh are no match for the love of God. The Kingdom of God is at hand. The Spirit in you. The Angels around you. And Christ has defeated Satan. Repent and believe the good news. Amen.