

February 18, 2024

St. Mark 1:9-15:

## **Christ's Entrance into Our Vast Wasteland of Temptations**

- I. The Beginning
- II. The Entrance
- III. The Repentance and Believing

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 N. Oakland Avenue  
Decatur Illinois 62526

St. Mark 1:9-15

Dear Friends in Christ,

I want to recall a statement that was made by a former Chairman of the Federal Communication Commission by the name of Newton Norman Minnow. It was an observation he made to the National Association of Broadcasters on May 9, 1961, almost 63 years ago.

...I invite each of you to sit down in front of your television set when our station goes on the air (of course, now it's always on the air) and stay there for a day without a book, without a magazine, without a newspaper, without a profit and loss sheet or a rating book to distract you (now it's a laptop). Keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I assure you that what you observe is a vast wasteland.

When I go back to the 1960's I recollect a number of warnings regarding what would happen to this culture in light of Minnow's insight. It's been echoed by many in just the past ten to fifteen years. We're living in a wasteland of incredibly twisted morals, of lies and violence; a massive buffet offering every temptation to dying flesh. Can we see the consequences?

Our Lenten Journey begins with . . .

## **CHRIST'S ENTRANCE INTO OUR VAST WASTELAND OF TEMPTATIONS**

### I. The Beginning

Here's our starting point: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness (Gn. 1:26a).'" This would be the case for Adam and Eve. The Small Catechism of Luther explains: "The image of God was this: "Adam and Eve truly knew God as He wishes to be known and were perfectly happy in Him. They were righteous and holy, doing God's will (Small Catechism with Explanations, English Standard Version, CPH, St. Louis, 1986, p. 115)."

Scripture goes on to say, "...So God created man in his own image...male and female he created them... And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good (Gn. 1:27 & 31a)." Think of it: male and female - one of each. They knew God as He wished to be known. They were perfectly happy. They would never know suffering and death. They had a free will; God didn't make them robots. Yet, in one act of disobedience the everything that was very good was gone. And humanity has never really been happy, but has been wildly searching for perfect happiness since the fall; at best, its own version of happiness. How close are we? And here's the real hit in the stomach: the consequences of their sin would be passed on to their descendants; conflict, dying, and death!

Ayne Rand was a Russian/American novelist and philosopher. She died in 1982. She was once asked by a reporter, "What's wrong with the modern world?" Though she wasn't a Christian, she replied:

Never before has the world been so desperately asking for answers to crucial questions, and never before has the world been so frantically committed to the idea that no answers are possible.... To paraphrase the Bible, the modern attitude is, "Father, forgive us, for we know not what we are doing - and please don't tell us."

It's into this setting of man's vast wasteland of sin and death that Jesus would enter. We're told He "was baptized by John in the Jordan (v.9)." We're told that John's baptism was "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mk. 1:4)." Jesus' baptism would put the perfect, sinless Son of God with sinners; us. He would do everything necessary for our salvation, and so, we're told, "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 (vv. 10, 11).'" He was pleased because He so loved the world - us.

## II. The Entrance

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 (vv.12,13).

This is Mark's account of our Lord's entrance into the great Temptation. There is no doubt that Mark's account is a shortened version, but no less significant. "He was with the wild animals" is reflective of Satan himself as we recall the fact that he was the serpent in the Garden. We recall his deception and lies. We recall the most devastating lie: "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Gn.3:4,5). They would die, as God had warned. Their eyes would be opened to sin, dying, and death; to a world of struggle, dying and death.

It all comes down to this: Jesus would spend forty days being tempted in every way in a face to face confrontation with Satan, the monster of monsters. Recall what Jesus said to those who viciously opposed Him: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies (Jn.8:44)."

Let's make sure this is clear and straight with us and our children. Satan has one goal: to individually murder and drag each of us and all people to hell - any way he can. He is a murderer and a liar. All he can do is murder and lie. He is pure hatred and filth! And let's make sure the words of Paul are clear and straight with us: "...for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor.11:14)." He can make himself a very acceptable, lovely, and inviting presentation.

On our behalf, for forty days Jesus was confronted by the monster of hell to overcome what often drags us in the wrong direction: temptation to sin and excusing ourselves in a multitude of ways in order to eat one lousy piece of "forbidden fruit"! Jesus was there for one reason - well, actually for billions: humanity! It's this:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself (Jesus) likewise partook of the same things (but, without sin), that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery... (and here comes the part we can't miss - ever!) Because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb.2:14,15,18).

Those being tempted are us. Christ is talking our place. He is paying for all the falls and failures, the sorrows and regrets we receive from every temptation imaginable that leads to sin. And so, this is what follows . . .

## III. The Repentance and Believing

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 the gospel (vv.14,15)."

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession states,

In Mark 1:15 Christ says, "Repent, and believe in the Gospel." In the first part he denounces our sins, in the latter part he consoles us and shows us the forgiveness of sin. For to believe the Gospel is not to have the general faith that even demons have (James 2:19), but in the true sense, to believe

that for Christ's sake the forgiveness of sins has been granted us; this is revealed in the Gospel. You see that here, too, the two parts are combined: contrition, when sins are denounced; and faith, when it is said, "Believe in the Gospel" (The Book of Concord, edited and translated by Theodore G. Tappert, Fortress Press, 1959, 187:45).

The Gospel. We've watched *the Gospel* countless time being whipped and beaten and spit upon. We've watched Him sway and stagger under the load of the Roman cross. We've seen Him at Calvary - bleeding - dying - being punished for every sin of yours and mine. We've heard Him there, pronouncing forgiveness for every sin; speaking words of love for the unlovable; finishing everything necessary for our salvation.

P.E. Kretzmann wrote:

The Son of God, according to His human nature, surrounded by the majesty of the desert hills, with no living being to keep Him company but the wild beasts whose haunts He had invaded, attacked in every possible way, in every conceivable manner, by Satan, who endeavors, with all his devilish power and cunning, to hinder the work of redemption. But the Savior conquered, He routed the devil (Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament, Vol. I., p. 167).

You see, we live with a wonderful promise in this wasteland of sin and death; the words of Jesus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but passed from death to life (Jn.5:24)."

And that's worth inviting others to come and hear.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott