

Mark 1:12-15. ¹² *At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert,* ¹³ *and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.* ¹⁴ *After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.* ¹⁵ *“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”*

Live in the Victory that Christ Provides.

1. God sent a champion to defeat the devil for us.

2. The news of victory is sent out to us.

After a long and exhausting span of things not going one's way, after days and weeks of stress and frustration, a person might utter the phrase, "I just need a win." After succumbing to a certain temptation, having acted in a selfish and regrettable way, a person might shake their head while muttering a similar phrase - this time said in a much more mournful way - "I thought I needed a boost, a win, but things are even worse now after what I did." In such times of exhaustion and weakness, in such times of weariness and regret, the devil readily comes to tempt or pile on. He comes with his lies trying to convince us that we would be better off with him. He comes with his accusations as he seeks to drive us away from God's assurance, cut us off in isolation, and run us deep into hopelessness and despair. He not only wants us to lose to his temptations once or twice he wants us to be lost forever. Our foe is wicked and wily, he is savage and deadly, how could we stand a chance? Who will save us from temptation and from our own weariness and weaknesses? Who will rescue us from condemnation and despair?

The Spirit of God sent Jesus out into the desert to be our champion and he defeated the devil for us! Jesus willingly went up against the devil to give us the win we needed. In Christ, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Even when hardship and trouble, sin, and regret surround us we know that those who are in Christ Jesus are victorious. We are rescued from the jaws of defeat and blessed with the ultimate win that Jesus gives. We are blessed by the truth that God gives to us in his Word that combats and conquers the devil's lies.

Dear, friends live in the victory that Christ provides. For nothing that is going on in the world around us, nor any deception of the devil, nor anything going on in your personal life, can change the truth that God sent a champion to defeat the devil for us. And by his grace, God has sent the news of victory out to us.

By faith in God's most excellent word, we are able to say with full confidence that we are more than conquerors *in Christ Jesus*. For victory over sin and Satan, certainly does not come from within us. *No one is righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10). All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).* All save one.

The Lord God would provide his own Son to be the innocent Lamb of God sent to

be our stand-in - our all-atoning sacrifice and substitute. The one who emerged from Jordan's river under the Spirit's presence and the Father's approval would head straight from the stream to the wilderness to take on our foe in our place. This is why he came. The reason the Son of God came as the Son of Man was to destroy the devil's work. Thus, he was cast out into the desert by the Spirit so that we would not be cast out of paradise forever. Sent out by the Spirit, our champion would take on that serpent that had deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden.

Consider the home-field advantage the first Adam had. He was surrounded by the beauty of creation, the animals that God had led before him and he had named, bountiful sources of food and nourishment, supported and strengthened in every way and yet the serpent still slipped in and deceived Adam. The first man and woman fell, and all mankind fell with him. Defeat, even death, suddenly closed its awful grip on everything. But our God came swiftly with his promise of powerful grace. God made a promise that he would most certainly keep. One born of the woman would come to crush the serpent's plans.

And so when Jesus comes as that promised second Adam, the devil seems to have the upper hand. There was no home field advantage for Jesus, as he doesn't even seem to be on a neutral playing field. The Second Adam, Jesus, is not supported and surrounded by the beauty and fulness of God's creation. He was sent out into the desert. This was not a land filled with countless options of trees and shrubs with nourishment hanging from them at every turn. The land was desolate, and the Savior was weary and worn with hunger. Friendly animals named and gathered neatly in the paradise of Eden have been scattered as fear and death are all around. Now wild animals lurk in the shadows and these creatures known to strike fear into the hearts of men were the Savior's closest earthly companions. Jesus was threatened on every side, in every way, to take on the devil in our place. He was sent out to take on the devil by himself for all of us, isolated and alone, but he would not be defeated nor was he forgotten. Remember this was God's plan. The Spirit had sent him out into this spot, and the Father had sent angels to be in his corner, to attend to him, having gone round after round with the devil.

Mark puts it in these simple terms. ***12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, 13 and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.*** According to God's plan, our champion would go out into the desert, take on this epic 40-day battle, surrounded by threats in every way, and he would win. The angels would attend to him. And then Jesus would go out and proclaim his victory for all to hear. "The kingdom of God is near! Repent and believe the good news!"

While Mark keeps it extremely simple, the other evangelists record for us a few specific highlights of this grueling battle. We recall from the book of Matthew chapter 4 that familiar series of strikes that the devil fails to land. Picture a weary fighter heading into that last and deciding round. Once more Jesus successfully answers the bell for us. Satan slinks in to engage our stand-in and much as he did in the garden, he comes with

a simple friendly temptation. *If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread* Satan tries to tie up our champ and lull him into submission. Follow me and I will take much better care of you than God the Father, the serpent seemed to hiss, but Jesus would not falter, rather he found his footing in God's nourishing Word. ***Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*** The word of God sustained and resuscitated his strength and energy so that he could deliver a devastating body blow to our adversary. Then that dastardly deceiver took Jesus to the highest point of the temple, and he tried to use Jesus' strength against him, and so he quoted Scripture and told him, *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."* But Jesus was able to brace himself for this sneaky reversal and using Scripture *correctly* he fended off this attack. Jesus answered him, ***It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."*** Then the devil reeling with desperation lunged at our hero with a final flail as he took him to a very high mountain and appealed to Jesus to take the easy way out. Jesus, the God-man, was already exhausted and hungry and tired and in pain - and we ought to remember that this was near the very beginning of his public path to the cross - and so the sly one tried to skip to the end of the line and pretend that he could make this bargain that he could not make, but stilled the cheater tried. And so Satan somehow showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. *"All this I will give you, he said, "if you bow down and worship me."* And our champion dodged this jab and threw Satan staggering into the ropes and clear out of the ring, ***Away from me, Satan!*** ***For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."*** For forty days Jesus our Savior went out and took the devil's best shots, and in the end, he stood his ground for us. Satan was sent reeling. God the Father, pleased with this body of work, sent his angels to attend to our champion so that he could soon take on the next challenge, spreading the good news of his power over sin, death, and hell.

Hear and believe the good news fulfilled and proclaimed by Christ Jesus! Remember this victory won for you when the devil drags out your sins and throws them in your face. Remember this victory when Satan tries to stand in our way or throw us down into a pit of despair. Jesus won the victory over Satan for us. Jesus went alone to do what we could not.

There is comfort in knowing that this is not some sort of team win. The victory comes through Christ alone. We could never do enough. We could never do anything to help achieve our salvation, even our righteous acts are nothing but filthy rags. We could never do anything to contribute to our salvation, instead, our many sins and the countless times we lost to the devil's schemes should cost us. But because of our Savior's victory, our sins do not disqualify us from heaven, our struggles and our setbacks do not change the outcome made eternally secure for us by our champion. As Luther was known to say, *When the devil throws your sin in your face you can answer. I admit that I deserve death and hell, but what of it? For I know One who has suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is,*

there I also shall be. That is the confidence, the good news of victory, that we have, in Christ. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Saved from eternal isolation and suffering, paradise and full and eternal life with God is reopened to us through Christ our conqueror. We are thus strengthened by our Savior's Word of truth to live in the peace and the confidence that he gives to us. We are shielded by God's power and set free to repent and turn from sin and to live in thankful obedience to God as we delight in the victory that Christ has won for us.

Remember Jesus wins. Remember this when things look bright and when things look bleak. Mark tends to include things that other gospel writers leave out, or he takes on a slightly different approach or angle to things. It is thought that Mark's original audience were the Christians in Rome at a time when first-century believers were under attack. Under the rule of vicious anti-Christian emperors, the whole Roman government would for a time have it out for the Christian Church. We remember the chilling tales of Christians being used as gladiators, thrown into the arena to fight against wild animals and die for sport. We remember also the powerful imagery that the book of Revelation uses talking about the beasts that surface and emerge to harass and persecute the Church on earth. The presence of such wild animals both literally and figuratively, may be cause for serious concern, but in the end, remember who wins. Who reigns as champion over Satan and the beasts of this world that howl and annoy? Jesus wins. Jesus came to crush the serpent for us. Jesus stands out among the beasts and he endures the worst that our enemies can bring and yet he is victorious still. He is sent by the Spirit, to stand in our place. No power or force past, present, or future can change the fact that Jesus stands in as our champion to win the victory for us.

And in love, he speaks. His Word and his victorious kingdom come near to attend to us. God's Word comes and attends to us when we are surrounded by the devil's lies and his temptations. God's Word comes as messengers of grace attend to us with God's Words of promise and his good news of forgiveness, the good news of God's steadfast love for us is our mighty shield and weapon. Scriptures clearly teach that our champion Christ came and won the victory for us. He stood perfect and spotless in our place. He went toe to toe with our adversary and did what we could not do so that we could join with him in the spoils of victory.

The ultimate win is ours, not because of anything we have done, but because of the one who is sent out to crush the serpent for us. In these days of Lent let us commemorate the price our Savior paid! With awe-struck reverence let us lift up the cup of salvation and proclaim his name and the great things that our Savior has done! Jesus has defeated the devil for us! He was sent by God to be our sacrifice and substitute and he was perfect in every way for us. Christ our champion would go to the cross and his innocent death would be the blow that would crush the serpent's head for all eternity! His glorious resurrection proved it all the more! Nothing could nullify this win that Jesus won for you. Turn from the empty lies of sin and Satan and live in the victory that Jesus brings! Be refreshed by the Word of our champion and Savior. "This kingdom of God comes near! Repent and believe the good news!" Amen!