

“BAPTISM & TEMPTATION”

By Rom A. Pegram (3/10/19 – 1st Sunday of Lent)

Today, on the 1st Sunday of Lent, we begin to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Here, we'll learn how he related to God the Father and how we need to as well. So, where are his footsteps taking us? We begin today where his ministry began, at *the Jordan River*...

One of the favorite places people love to visit when going to the Holy Land is the Jordan River, especially when they get to be baptized or renew their baptismal vows at that very special place. And *not even the frigid cold water of the Jordan in January seems to slow people down from wanting to be immersed in its waters*. Why? 'Because it's a very holy place. It's where Jesus decided to align himself with humanity, to begin to 'stand in the gap' for us before God, and where his ministry began, as well.

So, we're going to the Jordan River ... and then we follow Jesus' footsteps into the Wilderness of Judea (near Jericho)—a place that's still 'wilderness' today. And there Jesus is tempted ... just as you & I are. Listen, now, to our Bible story from Mark, Chapter 1, and verse 9...

One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. ¹⁰ As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.” ¹² The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, ¹³ where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him. – Mark 1:9-13 (NLT)

I don't know about you, but I just can't seem to get over some of the 'why' questions:

- Why did Jesus, of all people (one who was 'sinless'), have to be baptized (an act of repentance from sin)? And...
- Why did Jesus, of all people, have to spend 40 days in the wilderness of Judea being tempted (it seems the Son of God could have got an exemption from this)?

Have you ever asked yourself those questions? Today, we're going to ask them together, because I believe in the midst of answering these questions we're going to learn *why* these realities were important in Jesus' life ... are why they're important in our lives today! Let's begin with the first question:

WHY JESUS' BAPTISM? Verses 9-11 tell us: “One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. ¹⁰ As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice from heaven said, ‘You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.’”

You know, even in the first century, Christians were a bit unsettled by John's baptism of Jesus; they wondered, just as I have (and maybe you, too), why one who 'knew no sin'

went through a baptism, which basically indicated a repentance from sin. Let me see if I can explain some of this by describing what all Jesus' baptism has come to mean...

Baptism, itself, has come to mean many things. For instance, its here in this story we begin to see the first glimpse of what Christians have come to know as '*the Trinity*': The *Son* came to be baptized; the *Father* spoke; the *Spirit* descended. For Jesus, in particular, his baptism was *an absolutely defining act*:

- In that moment, he voluntarily chose to 'get his hands dirty,' so to speak; by stepping into the water of baptism, he identified himself, personally, with sinners...
- In that moment, he also heard an affirmation from God the Father; Jesus was God's beloved Son...
- And finally, in that moment, Jesus received/was filled with ... the Spirit's power!

All of this marked the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus' baptism was an ordination in which he was set aside and empowered for his ministry of drawing people to God, inviting them into God's kingdom, demonstrating God's will, and ultimately laying down his life for humanity ... so that God's plan for us would be fulfilled!

And *for us*, as Christ's followers, baptism is *also* meant as a defining act: Through our baptism...

- We're claimed by God, anointed with the Spirit, and set aside for God's purposes (made 'holy')...
- Our brokenness is recognized, and God's grace is promised...
- We're initiated into—become a part of—God's covenant community, the Church!

We're meant to remember our baptism every single day! Did you know that? For it's in remembering our baptism that we also remember God's promise of forgiveness for our sins, our call to ministry, the Spirit that resides in us & empowers us, and that we are—in fact—God's children...

Several years ago, there was a church who wanted to help people remember their baptisms, so they offered some help. They prepared a simple prayer, printed it on a plastic card, then attached a rubber band to it for hanging. Then they invited their folks to hang the prayer in the shower, so every time they stepped into the water, they'd remember. Here's how it goes:

Lord, as I enter the water to bathe, I remember my baptism. Wash me by your grace. Fill me with your Spirit. Renew my soul. I pray that I might live as your child today and honor you in all that I do. Amen.

Just as Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his life/ministry, it should be in ours, too. Don't forget God's forgiveness, your life of ministry, the Holy Spirit who fills you with love, and that *you're* God's kid! Don't ever forget that! Now...

WHY JESUS' TEMPTATION? Let's jump to Verse 12 where it explains: "The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, ¹³ where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him." Jesus' baptism must have been a very pivotal event because ... *immediately* ... Jesus was 'compelled' (that's more than 'nudged') by the Spirit to head toward the wilderness. That's where we follow Jesus' footsteps next...

I want you to know today that **the number '40' is significant here**: '40' is the length of time Jesus was in the wilderness—a period of time used by God to prepare Jesus for ministry...

Did you know that '40' is also the number of days during *the season of Lent* (less Sundays)? This is the season where God prepares *us* (through repentance & self-examination) for the ministry of our lives—to be ready for all he calls us to. So, each year when we go through Lent, if we're truly allowing Lent to be about repentance & self-examination, we too are following in Jesus' footsteps...

It was in the Judean wilderness that Jesus was 'tempted' for 40 days and 40 nights; *that's a lot of temptation, isn't it?* Now, we don't know all the temptations of Jesus those 40 days; we DO KNOW, however, at least *three* ... because Jesus shared these with his disciples; and I believe he shared these particular ones because he knew this is where we'd 'wrestle with the devil' someday, too...

Jesus 1st TEMPTATION was all about FOOD; *'anyone ever been tempted there?* It's actually happened throughout biblical history: Adam and Eve were tempted by ... the apple. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of ... stew. The Israelites, at one point in their wandering, wanted to trade their manna for cucumber sandwiches back in Egypt! And, today, we too struggle with temptations related to food, don't we? We're tempted to overeat or eat wrong. And, folks, Jesus was tempted to break his fast, giving in to the hunger he felt, but he didn't; instead, *he showed us we can trust God for the most basic of necessities in life!*

Jesus 2nd TEMPTATION called him to be 'EVEL KNIEVEL' ('Anyone remember him?!')! We all have a tendency to desire the affirmation and affection of others by doing crazy things sometimes, don't we? However, *God called Jesus to 'win friends and influence people' not by a foolish stunt, but by bearing a crown of thorns in an act of sacrificial love...*

Jesus' 3rd TEMPTATION was all about WEALTH & POWER! This temptation is the one that so many fall to; they allow the enticing draw of wealth & power to actually become LORD of their lives! Jesus could've gone this way, but he didn't; *he stayed on God's path and saved you and me!* Most of us have struggled with the temptation of material wealth or power, but are we trusting God today for every need?

Folks, **the 'wilderness' itself is also significant** in today's story... I've been to that Judean wilderness a few times (and this is what it looks like)! Some people think of a

lush, green jungle setting when they read this part of scripture, but it looks more like our desert Southwest than a jungle—a place of desolation...

When I've been there, I thought of these biblical connections to this wilderness: Elijah, the prophet, fleeing from Queen Jezebel who sought to kill him; David, who fled from King Saul, and lived amongst the caves (Ein Gedi), writing psalms such as, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?" Then there's Moses, living in the wilderness of Sinai for years—a fugitive running from Pharaoh's hand...

All these stories, folks, have one thing in common: *God met each of these people as they spent a time of their lives ... in the wilderness!* And what was true for them ... is true for us today! All of us spend some time during our lives ... in the wilderness, don't we—times in our lives that leave us feeling hopeless and all alone. Yet, when we pay attention and listen, *God comes to us and uses the wilderness to strengthen us and bless us...*

Just as Jesus faced the Tempter and countered him with God's word, so we need to learn to do the same (but we need to know God's word better too)! *Scripture is always a good place to start when we're feeling tempted...*

For me, however, this is the most powerful thought from this part of Jesus' journey in ministry: *It is so comforting to know ... Jesus felt the pull of these temptations ... just like you and I do!* God's word reminds us of that (Heb. 4:15-16):

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Walking in Jesus' footsteps begins with baptism but will inevitably include temptation at some point. The Way of Christ includes resisting temptation (and we're empowered through the Spirit to do just that). But if we do fall to temptation, we know that, *as God's kids*, we can 'come boldly to the throne of our gracious God ... [and] there we'll receive mercy.' *Lord, help us to walk in the footsteps of your Son, Jesus...*