



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 1:1-13

Mark

“Intro\_ Baptist, King and the Devil”

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning. This morning as I think I announced last week, we’re going to begin a series in the Gospel of Mark. So if you have your Bibles, turn to Mark chapter 1, and this morning we will look at verses 1 through 13.

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Now you’ll notice, at least if you have a New American Standard Bible that there’s a marginal note there which states many manuscripts omit “the Son of God.” And that’s true, but many also have that expression and its omission can be explained as a scribal mistake and the fact that Mark does make frequent mention of Our Lord as the Son of God supports the editors of this version in including it in the text as original, and I think that that is correct, and so we will read it as correct and teach it as such.

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

‘BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE,  
WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY;  
THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS,  
‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD,  
MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.’ ’

“John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of

Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. John was clothed with camel's hair and *wore* a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. And he was preaching, and saying, 'After me comes One who is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. I baptized you with water; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

"And it came about in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: 'Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased.'

"Immediately the Spirit impelled Him *to go* out into the wilderness. 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." May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study together. Let's bow together now in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we praise You and thank You for the time that we have together this morning, a time to open the Scriptures to study them. And we thank You that in Your providence You've led us here to consider this passage at this time in our lives. We pray that as we do so, You would bless us richly. In praying, Father, we not only give thanks to You and praise to You, but we in doing so recognize our need of You and need of Your many blessings in all aspects of our life. We pray Your blessing upon us with our physical needs. We have many. Our congregation has many. Friends of our congregation have many.

We think of the names that are listed on the prayer requests. Betty Davenport. We ask that You might relieve her of her difficulty, that you might extend mercy to her in her suffering. And Karen Armstrong, we pray that You'd give a good diagnosis of her condition. So many others, Father, whose names we don't have time to mention, but You know their needs. You know the needs of all whose names aren't listed, and that we have many needs of a physical nature. We pray that You'd give healing if that please You. But we also know, Lord, that that's not always according to Your will. But we would pray that in the midst of affliction You might give encouragement and enable those who are afflicted to look to Christ, the author and perfecter of faith and be greatly encouraged by Him and built up in the faith. Pray for those who are without employment.

Thank You for answering the prayers of some and we praise you for that. Pray that You would continue to do that, make provision for those in need. We are a people with many physical needs and we are a people with spiritual needs. If we enjoy good health, that comes from You, but we are never in a position where we can take that for granted and never in a position where we can take for granted our spiritual health. We pray that we would not do that, Lord, and You would remind us that we are in constant need of coming to You in prayer and seeking Your blessing of building us up in the faith. Pray that for us at this present time that You would teach us and instruct us, and through the Holy Spirit, minister Your truth to us and fit us for a life of effective, consistent, diligent service.

We thank You that there are many in this congregation who teach Your Word and we pray Your blessing upon them. Bless them as they teach our children. Bless them as they teach us, the adults. Pray that we would be built up in the faith through their ministry and You would give encouragement to them and, with our young people we pray that we would see young lives come to faith and grow in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord. Pray that those who have come to faith will continue to increase in that knowledge and effectiveness. Bring us to a greater degree of maturity that we might be effective servants for You.

Pray for our nation. We pray that You would bless our leaders, bless them with wisdom. We pray that You would carry out Your will in this land. We pray that that would be for our effective use in Your service. And pray Your blessing upon this country. Pray Your blessing upon us, not only at this time, but this evening as we gather together again to remember Christ and His sacrifice on our behalf, and anticipate His coming again. We pray that You would bless our meeting and bless us this morning and tonight that we would be prepared well for the week to come, and we pray that Your blessings would be on each of us, that as we go out throughout this city, throughout the land, that You would protect us, and use us, and give us a heart for service.

Bless us now, Lord, as we look into the Scriptures. We pray that You would be glorified in all that we do and the name of Your Son might be exalted and that each of us would be edified. These things we pray in Christ's name, Amen.

As we said, this morning we begin a series in the Gospel of Mark, which is the shortest of the four gospels and of that reason has historically been the most neglected of the gospels. And yet, that's no measure of its worth. Mark contains sections not found in the other gospels and

details which add to our understanding of the other gospels. And further, its conciseness has great value. A.T. Robinson, the Baptist and Greek grammarian of a generation ago wrote, "This gospel is one for children to read first and is the one that we should use to lay the foundation for our picture of Christ." And that will be our goal in the weeks and the months ahead, to lay a good foundation in our thinking of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now, we know this second gospel as the Gospel According to Mark. That's the title that has been attached to it by the church, and yet you can read all 16 chapters and you will never come across his name. There are unidentified persons on the gospel that some have sought to identify with Mark. The young man of chapter 14 who fled naked from the garden the night of our Lord's arrest is one example of that. But nowhere is Mark explicitly identified. His name is not found. And yet, there is strong support for the early tradition that Mark, in association with the apostle Peter, was the author of this gospel. Eusebius writing in the early part of the fourth century quotes an individual he calls "the elder," who many take to be the apostle John, as saying that Mark became Peter's interpreter, writing accurately all that he remembered of the things said and done by the Lord. And so there's good reason to believe that Mark wrote this gospel through the eyes of Peter guided by the Holy Spirit.

Tradition also has it that he wrote this second gospel in Italy, perhaps even in Rome, with a Roman audience in mind, and there's good support for that, as well. The Gospel of Mark has more Latin phrases and idioms than any of the other gospels and explains Jewish customs, which would suggest that he was writing to a non-Jewish audience, a Gentile audience. Also, the manner in which Mark pictures our Lord suits the character of the Romans. They were men of action. They were the conquerors of the world. And the Gospel of Mark is well known for its vivid details and fast moving pace. One feature that underscores that is the frequent use of the word "immediately." We find it in our passage this morning. In fact, it's repeated numerous times throughout this first chapter. And so it has well been called "the action gospel."

The emphasis of this gospel is on Christ's works rather than His words. It's on His deeds rather than His teaching. We do find His teaching in this gospel, but not to nearly the extent that we find it, for example, in Matthew. He emphasizes the Lord's deeds. As one writer states, "The Gospel of Mark pictures Christ in action." So to the active, conquering Roman, Mark pictures Christ, to quote William Hendrickson, "as an active, energetic, swiftly moving, warring,

conquering king, a victor over the destructive forces of nature, over disease, demons, and even death.” All of which would have been particularly interesting to the Roman, to a people known for power and conquest. But as Hendrickson goes on to say, “to them, Mark pictures a king who excels any earthly conqueror. His kingdom is far more extensive, His armor far more effective, and His rule far more enduring than anything originating here below. His victories, moreover, are far more honorable, for He causes the conqueror to share in the glory of the conquest.”

Mark’s king is the Savior King and that theme of the Savior King is reflected in the first verse of the first chapter, which is probably the title of the book. “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” It’s the gospel. It’s the good news about Jesus Christ, the good news announcing victory in Christ. The word “gospel” is a very familiar term to us, but it was also familiar to the inhabitants of the Roman empire, particularly those who are associated with the emperor’s cult. Familiar to them in a way different than it is familiar to us, of course, because when an heir to the throne was born who was considered to be a god, the announcement of his birth was given as “good news” as the “gospel.” And so Mark may be making a deliberate contrast between the pagan usage of that word and the Christian usage in order to say, “Regardless of the claims of men and their false claims to deity, the true gospel is that which announces the true king, the true God, and heralds His kingdom, heralds His victory. It’s the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Jesus, as I’m sure you know, is the Greek name of the Hebrew “Joshua,” which means “the Lord is salvation.” And what an appropriate name that is for our Lord. Jesus is able to bring that salvation because He is the Christ. He is the anointed. He is the Messiah, the One who is imbued with the Holy Spirit. And not only that, He is the Lord who saves. He is that Lord who brings salvation because He is the Son of God. All of that in verse 1.

So taking verse 1 as the title, the book, then, opens in the desert with John the Baptist preaching the message of Isaiah the prophet. It seems like an abrupt way to begin a book, but each gospel has a different starting point. Both Matthew and Luke begin with the birth of Christ, though they begin in different ways. Matthew introduces our Lord’s birth with our Lord’s genealogy, and Luke with the birth of John the Baptist. They begin in time, while John begins in eternity with our Lord’s preexistence with the Father. Mark, however, begins with our Lord’s ministry. He really begins at the end of His life, taking up the gospel at the outset of His ministry,

and he traces out His life, or traces out His ministry in two great movements: His ministry in Galilee from chapters 1 through 9, and His last week in Jerusalem from chapters 11 through 16. Chapter 10 introduces Him, perhaps something as a transition, as He comes into Judea. But the Jerusalem ministry really begins in chapter 11.

Verses 1 through 13 of chapter 1 form the prologue or the introduction of the book, and that is probably what Mark is referring to in verse 1 when he speaks of "the beginning of the gospel." The events recorded in verses 2 through 13 are the beginning events of the saving acts of our Lord. They are something of the prelude to His ministry with His introduction by the Baptist, His anointing as the King, and then His testing by the devil. So these events from the beginning of the gospel, but while they are the beginning, they are also connected to the past. As verses 2 and 3 show, John's ministry has its roots in prophecy and is the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3. We read, "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.' ' ' "

Isaiah chapter 40 is a chapter of comfort for the nation in captivity in Babylon. And it speaks of deliverance, it speaks of a voice announcing the coming of God to release His people from captivity. And that finds its fulfillment in John because that's just what he did. There was a Roman captivity going on at this time, but that's merely illustrative of the greater captivity, the spiritual captivity in the hearts of the people. And so he comes as that voice in the wilderness announcing the coming of the King. And he went out into the wilderness clothed as a second Elijah, wearing a garment woven of camel's hair and fastened together with a leather belt. For food, he ate "locusts and wild honey." He was an arresting figure, to say the least, but not a weird figure.

Let me illustrate what I mean by that. A few years ago, I was in Vienna sitting at a sidewalk cafe across from Saint Stephen's Cathedral in the center of town and I noticed not far from me a young man standing in the midst of the people who were going into that cathedral. He had a Bible in his hand and he was speaking about Christ and about God. You couldn't hear him very well because he wasn't speaking very loudly, but he kept kind of repeating some words. And

one reason I noticed him, he was very difficult to miss because of the way he was dressed. He wore a burlap sash across his chest and he was filthy, to say the least.

Well, I watched him for a few minutes and then I went over to him and I struck up a conversation. He could speak in broken English and we were able to converse, and through the conversation he informed me that he was from eastern Europe and he had come west on some kind of a mission. Well, in the course of the conversation, I offer him some money for food. He looked like he needed it. And he refused. I pressed him a bit on it, but he was adamant. He would not take the money because he didn't need it. He found all the food he needed in the trash cans. And sure enough, the next day I was sitting in a different location but in the same area, and he comes walking down this large pedestrian street lined with beautiful shops, and he was searching through the trash cans.

I don't know if he's looking for locusts and wild honey, but it occurred to me at the time that he was trying to imitate John the Baptist. Well, he was not doing a good job because while John was a stark figure, he wasn't strange. There's nothing artificial about John. His clothing was that of the wilderness. It was intended to evoke the image of Elijah, who dressed in the same way. And while his diet may seem odd to us, it's really not an odd diet. It's the diet of the wilderness, the diet of Bedouins, those who live out in the desert. His life was austere because it reflected his detachment from worldly things. It reflected his devotion to his prophetic mission, a mission of preparing the way for the Lord, which he did by preaching and by baptizing.

And it's the baptizing that John singles out particularly. It was a baptism of repentance, he writes. Which means something like a repentance baptism, baptism characterized by repentance of the forgiveness of sins. Now the word "forgiveness" is not to be connected with baptism, as if baptism obtained forgiveness. That would be contrary to the whole Bible. Scriptures do not teach that we are saved by any kind of ceremony of that kind. There is a baptism that saves, but it's spiritual baptism. It's the baptism that Paul describes in Romans 6:4, baptism into Christ's death. Identification with his sacrificial death which we make through faith and faith alone. Outward signs and ceremonies do nothing in and of themselves. Now, they are proper. It's not that we can ignore baptism.

This is not Christian baptism, but apply it to our situation. Christian baptism doesn't save. The Lord's supper does not save, but they have their place, and we are commanded to be obedient

to them. But of themselves, they don't save. In fact, if the act itself is not answered by the heart, that is if it doesn't reflect the heart, then it can be a danger. Signs, ceremonies that we engage in, are to be a reflection of inward realities, and that's where they have their value. And in this case, the baptism indicates repentance that has taken place in the heart. And that's what forgiveness is to be linked to, not to baptism, but to repentance. It is repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Repentance very simply means "a change of mind." The Old Testament equivalent is the word *shun*, which means "to turn back, to return." It has the idea of turning to the Lord and trusting in Him. That's what repentance is. It's the negative of believing. Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. In fact, we see that in John 1:7, where John's mission is described as bearing witness that men might believe. And that's what he was doing with his message of repentance. He was preparing men to believe in the King who was coming. He was pointing them to that King that they might receive Him through faith.

What must have struck many as strange was the fact that John was baptizing Jews for repentance. Now Jews practiced baptism before John, but they baptized Gentile proselytes, Gentiles who converted to Judaism. And here, John comes on the scene, not baptizing Gentiles, but baptizing Jews and in doing so, he was treating the Jewish nation as though it were Gentile. He is treating Jews as though they are pagans who needed to repent, who needed to confess their sins, and turn back to God. And of course, that is exactly what they did need. And it's a reminder that regardless of one's national or ethnic origin, that in and of itself means nothing. There's a great privilege to being a Jew. Paul tells us that in Romans chapter 9. But that doesn't save. And all men, regardless of their background, regardless of their family or their national origin, are born into this world the same: fallen, sinful men who need to turn to the Lord, who need a Savior.

And many came. And many were baptized. Verse 5 states they came from "all the country of Judea" and from Jerusalem. That gives us some idea of the great excitement that John caused in the nation. He was somewhere on the east side of the Jordan river. Jerusalem is about 20 miles from the Jordan and about 4,000 feet above it. To get to John, the Jerusalemites had to come a long way. They had to cross rough terrain. They had to pass through the Judean desert. And yet they came. Mark says all the country of Judea came, "and all the people of Jerusalem" came. So large numbers came long distances to be baptized.



In fact, the excitement was so great that many were thinking that John himself might be the Messiah. And so, as they came, John distinguished himself from the Lord and put his mission in its proper perspective by preaching the message of verses 7 and 8, "After me comes One who is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." One of the greatest characteristics of John the Baptist is his humility. Some of the greatest words spoken by man were spoken by him. The words that he spoke of himself in relationship to the Lord when he told his disciples recorded in John chapter 3, when they came to him disturbed by the fact that everyone was beginning to go to this new person, Jesus, the One whom John had born testimony to. And they didn't like the fact that men were beginning to turn away from John, who had enjoyed such popularity. And so he says to them, "He must increase, but I must decrease." He was not in the ministry for any self-aggrandizement. He was not in it as a self-promoter.

That's very common in the ministry. I'm sure it's common everywhere because all men are basically selfish and we are self-seeking. That's the reality. But you would expect it to be less so in the ministry than other places, and yet it's present there because we're all made of the same stuff. And yet, when you look at John's ministry, you don't find it because he knew his purpose. It was to point others to Christ. He was a path builder to Christ and was content to diminish in importance. In fact, he knew that he was doing his job, that he was carrying out his mission by the fact that he was diminishing in popularity.

But he's amazing for that reason, and he's quite an example. And that is a result of the work of God within his heart. As you know from Luke's account, he was a man filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. He was an unusual man, to say the least. But we shouldn't take that and then dismiss him as an anomaly, as unique, as an exception to the rule. John's humility and his devotion to the Lord and to his service in the Lord was in large part due to his theology, to his understanding of himself and his understanding of the One that he served. He knew that he served God, that the One he was introducing to the nation was as different from him as the infinite is from the finite, as the eternal is from the temporal.

As popular as he was, he knew that those crowds that had come to him were from the Lord. God had sent them. He didn't draw them because there was something within him that just attracted people. He knew he could take no credit for that. And he knew that all that his apparent

success, for all of that, for all of the public acclaim that he had received, he was nothing more than a creature and the One he was heralding was his Creator. That's clear from the two ministries that are described here, from their different baptisms. John could administer a ceremonial washing, but Jesus would give the Holy Spirit, who accomplishes a spiritual washing, a purification of the heart. Only God can do that, and so John was anticipating the coming of His Lord and His God. It's that understanding that produces the humility that's reflected here in his statement, "I am not even fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals."

We get some sense of the significance of that statement from the rabbinical writings. One of the ancient rabbis is quoted as saying, "All services which a slave does for his master a pupil should do for his teacher with the exception of undoing his shoes." Untying sandals was slaves' work. It was degrading work. And John says that even so, he's not worthy to even do that, to even do the most degrading of services for our Lord. And of course, none of us is. Christ is no mere man. He is God and He is our Savior. And when a person has the understanding of John, an understanding of himself, an understanding of the Lord, that he or she is unworthy of God's grace, unworthy of one good thing that we have, unworthy to serve Him, and yet we are near to Him and near to His people because in His grace, His unmerited favor, He has brought us close to Himself. When we understand that and our understanding of it grows in its depth, then we will have the attitude that John has, and that understanding will offset the pride that's within us in our concern for self. And then we will be more concerned about Him, and His glory, and His name being magnified, and more concern for one another.

And so John preached this message, called men to repentance, and baptized them day after day anticipating the coming of the Lord. Then one day, He appeared. Mark writes in verse 9 that "Jesus came down from Nazareth." That insignificant town in the hills of Galilee, where He had grown up in obscurity, developing in His humanity until the day of His Self-disclosure. He came to the Jordan, probably with a crowd of people, and entered the water to be baptized. Why He was baptized is the question that we naturally ask. He didn't need to repent. He was sinless and yet He submitted to John's baptism of repentance.

We're puzzled by that and John himself was puzzled. Matthew records that when the Lord approached him, John said, "I have need to be baptized by You." Well, a number of explanations have been given for this. Perhaps the simplest and most obvious is found in the Lord's reply to

John in Matthew 3, "Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." As an Israelite, He had moral and spiritual obligations. As a man, He had to be obedient to the law. Paul tells us in Galatians 4:4 that He was "born of a woman, born under the law," and He had to be obedient to all that was right, and it was right to identify with John's ministry.

And so we can find the explanation in that. But in finding it there, we also, I think, find a deeper explanation for His baptism, and that is that in it, He was identifying Himself with the nation. And specifically, He was identifying Himself with sinners as their substitute, as the One who would die a sacrificial death in their place. It wasn't long after this that John sees Jesus coming and told the crowd, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." So with His baptism, our Lord was stating His resolve to undergo the baptism of death on the cross for His people.

And that decision to identify Himself with the people in baptism received the full approval of heaven. Mark writes that "immediately, upon coming out of the water, the heavens opened." Literally, they were torn or rent open, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove. This was His anointing as King, His inauguration into His Messianic office. You remember in David's experience when Samuel visited the house of Jesse to find the king that would replace Saul, he finally finds his youngest son out with the sheep, finds David. And this is the one. And so what does he do? He anoints his head with oil.

He anointed him as king, and that is what we find happening in this occasion. Heaven was anointing Christ into His Messianic office, and the event recalls the prophecy of Isaiah 42:1, "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights." And we'll see that again in a moment, "*in whom* My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him;" And so He is equipped in His office as the Messiah, as the King.

And then a voice from heaven sounded, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased." It was the Father's confirmation of our Lord's mission. It's as though He ripped open the heavens in order to show His approval of Christ's identification with sinners for their salvation, and in order to testify that the man Jesus is also the eternal divine Son of God, fully able to accomplish that mission.

And you'll notice it's a saying that involves the whole Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three in agreement in the mission that is designed by the Father, carried out by the Son, under the enablement of the Holy Spirit. So there is complete agreement in this mission of salvation that the Lord came to accomplish. And there's great encouragement in this unity of the Godhead, because it indicates that not only the Son loves us, but the whole Godhead, the Father and the Spirit. The whole of God is in agreement and Its love is toward us. All of God's infinite power and perfection were and are working on our behalf. No wonder Paul could tell the Philippians, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." The whole Godhead is working for us, and God cannot be frustrated in His work. That's why Paul can express such confidence that God will not be frustrated. He can't be frustrated. The Godhead is united in this work of salvation. He can't be frustrated, and that becomes very clear in the next verses.

John has prepared the way for the King. Heaven has given approval of the King and equipped Him for service. And now Satan enters the scene to test the King with temptations that end up proving His qualification as King and Savior. Mark writes that "immediately the Spirit impelled Him *to go* out into the wilderness." He didn't bask in the glory of the moment, but immediately went out to meet His adversary, the devil, in a colossal conflict. And again, John uses vivid terminology that characterized his gospel to describe the event. Matthew says that the Lord "was led up by the Spirit." But Mark says he was "impelled," literally "cast out into the wilderness." Now the sense of that is not that He was forced against His will to go out into the wilderness, but rather He was under strong compulsion to go out into the wilderness. And what a fitting place to meet the devil in this conflict, because the wilderness is a place that is associated with demons and it is a place of death.

Well, was this conflict that the Lord was to engage in a conflict that He could possibly lose? He was without sin, but was He able to sin? Was defeat a possibility? Well, the answer to that is no. And we think of what has just taken place and the Father's testimony, and I think that underscores the fact, because the father has just testified that He is His beloved Son. He is, to use the theological term, a theanthropic person. That is He is the God man, two natures united in one person in a union in which the divine nature controls the human nature. And in that union, His divine nature could not allow His human nature to sin. In theological terms, this is called Christ's impeccability. That is His inability to sin. It is impossible for Him to commit a sin. And that

follows from the nature of the case. To overcome our Lord's human nature with temptation, Satan had to overcome His divine nature, which is omnipotent. That is, it's all powerful, and so it could not be overpowered. It's omniscient. It's all-knowing. So it could not be deceived. An infinite person cannot be overcome by a finite person regardless of how great that finite person is, his greatness, his power, his ability to deceive pales in significance to the infinite power of God.

Well, what's that say, then, about the temptation? If our Lord was not able to sin, was the temptation genuine? After all, what kind of temptation, we might ask, is it when the one who is tempted can't sin? Well, the answer to that is yes, it is a genuine temptation. His human nature was susceptible to temptations from without, not from within, but from without. He was. He was human. He hungered. And so when Satan tempts Him to turn stones into bread, that had an effect upon His hunger, His human nature. But His divine nature kept His human nature steady in its resistance.

William G.T. Shedd, the 19th century Presbyterian theologian, wrote on this point and illustrates it this way. He writes that "an iron wire by itself can be bent and broken in a man's hand. But when the wire is welded onto an iron bar, then it can no longer be bent and broken. Now that wire still receives pressure, if one seeks to bend it, and it's genuine pressure. But the pressure cannot overcome the bar that holds it."

As Dr. Johnson has written, "an invincible army may be really attacked. And our Lord was really attacked with temptation. The temptations were real. Our Lord felt them. But He could not yield to them." What that means is when Christ went out to meet His tempter, when He went out to meet the devil, He was invincible. And what that means for us is our Savior, who is our representative, could not fail. Now that's good news, because Adam, our first representative, when He was tempted in the garden, failed and plunged the whole race into ruin and into the arms of Satan. But the last Adam, Christ, our representative, was tempted in the wilderness, and I think we're to see something of a contrast between the first and the last Adam in a garden and in a wilderness, a desert that was caused ultimately by Adam's sin. But in that wilderness, in that much harsher environment, in that much more difficult condition, He prevailed, and because He prevailed, we prevail.

And so He was "in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan;" Satan means "adversary." In the other gospels, he is referred to as "the devil," which means "slanderer,

accuser." But Mark refers to him as "Satan," refers to him as "adversary," probably to underscore the nature of the temptation, to underscore it as a conflict, as a struggle. As our Lord's adversary, he used his temptations to entice Jesus to turn aside from His appointed path, to abandon His mission. Three times He was tempted according to Matthew and Luke, and while we might think that His impeccability, His inability to sin made the temptation easy, the opposite is actually the case. In fact, His impeccability ensured that He would feel the full intensity of Satan's temptations.

Again, Shedd illustrates this with a battle, and he makes the point that in a battle the heaviest guns and armaments are thrown against the strongest fortress. They don't throw the weight of the battle and the heaviest artillery that one has against a weak fortress, but you do against a strong fortress, and the stronger it is, the greater the force is brought against it. And that was the case with our Lord. Satan applied the full force of his attack against Him. He was made to experience the full severity of Satan's test, and made to feel it in a very difficult place, because Mark adds, "He was with the wild beasts." So in addition to Satan, He was with the hyenas, and the jackals, and the lions, and all of the predatory animals of the desert. In other words, he was in a dangerous place physically, as well as spiritually. And He was without any human help. He was there alone. But our Lord triumphed. Satan left Him and Mark writes, "the angels were ministering to Him." Probably supplying Him with food, perhaps with protection, but also their presence signified the divine assurance that He had triumphed over the devil. Where Adam had failed, He had succeeded.

Mark deals with the temptation very briefly. Matthew gives 11 verses to it; Luke, 13; Mark only 2. But the reason for Mark's brief treatment may be, as one writer has suggested, to emphasize that Jesus' entire ministry was one of continuous encounter with the devil, not just an encounter that took place over a period of 40 days. And from the wilderness, Mark records our Lord continuing the conquest of Satan's fortresses throughout Galilee by preaching, and healing, and casting out demons. What the temptation proved was that the man whom John had baptized was Israel's King and qualified to be King. His loyalty was not to Himself. His loyalty was not to Satan. His loyalty was to God. And the temptations also showed that He was morally qualified to be Savior.

He was, as He demonstrates, without sin. He is the spotless Lamb of God. And success over temptation qualified Him also to be our sympathetic great high priest. This is what the author of Hebrews writes in chapters 2 and 4 of his book, in which he majors on the high priesthood of Christ, His priestly ministry. And in chapter 2, he writes, "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted and that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted."

Chapter 4, he writes beginning with verse 15, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin." He could not sin. "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." And the One who sympathizes is the One who can come to our aid because He's invincible. He cannot fail. That is why we can draw near to Him with confidence. Not only is He sympathetic, not only does He understand our temptation and our needs far more than we do, He can help.

What are your struggles? We all have them. We all struggle. But maybe you've found that they're far too great for you. You're overcome by them that the world, the flesh, the devil have too great a hold on you. Well, then look to the Lord. Turn to Him. Turn to Him daily. Turn to Him hourly. He not only sympathizes, but He does give help. If you're in Christ, if you've believed in Him, then reckon yourselves to be dead to sin and seek His strength, and He will give it. You may think, "Well, but mine are too great. I cannot overcome them. They're too great for me." And that's true. They're too great for all of us, but they're not too great for Him. He is the eternal Son of God. He's infinite in His power and not only the second person of the Godhead, but all three persons of the Godhead are working on our behalf.

And so we're to turn to the Lord. We will fail along the way. We will succumb to temptations, unlike our Lord, who did not. We'll succumb. It's a daily struggle. It's an hourly struggle. But He has overcome and He will supply enablement and help. But first, you must recognize yourself as a sinner in need of forgiveness of sins. And you may be here this morning and that is what you need to do first of all, to seek the most fundamental of help. The message of John still has relevance today. That of repentance of the forgiveness of sins. And so if you're here this morning and you're without Christ, turn to Him. Believe in Christ as the Son of God who

became a man to die in the place of sinners. Trust in Him who has been punished in the place of sinners. And in doing so, receive the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. If you're here, you don't know Christ as your Savior, may God help you to see your need of a Savior and to turn to Him. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the truth that we are reminded of in this passage, that You have sent Your Son into the world. He is the Son of God. He is the Savior of men, and He has demonstrated that He is qualified to be Savior, that He is the spotless Lamb of God. We thank You for the gift of life that's in Him and we pray that if there be any in attendance that don't know Christ that You may open their hearts to the need of their Savior. And for those who have believed, may we be strengthened and encouraged by the fact that we have a sympathetic High Priest and that we have the entire Godhead working on our behalf to complete the work that You have begun. Encourage us with these thoughts and prepare us for the week ahead, that we might be effective servants for You. We pray these things in our Savior's name, Amen.