

Mark 1:12-15 Jesus Gives Hope in Our Spiritual Battles! February 18, 2018

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God's grace and peace are what we need through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior to fight temptations. We read from the Gospel lesson for today from Mark 1:12-15

These are Your Words heavenly Father; that we may stand in the strength of Christ. Your Word is truth!

Dear Soldiers of the Cross in Christ,

Today we're going to talk about war. The word "war" brings to mind armies and battles. There are often casualties with soldiers being wounded or dying from bombs and shootings. War is a terrible thing. The word "war" can be used in other ways, like our country has declared war on illegal drugs. They do so because sadly too many people are dying or are injured for life. Overdosing is at an epidemic level. Our country must do all it can to fight the use of harmful drugs. Then there's another picture of war. It happens at a spiritual level. The devil and his evil forces are trying to attack and overcome believers. We are in a serious struggle for eternal life. If anyone in this room thinks that he or she is safe from attack or harm, it time to rethink things. If the devil was bold enough to attack Jesus while He lived on earth, we cannot avoid his schemes and attacks. But, we are gathered to hear the good news about the war:

Jesus Gives Hope in Our Spiritual Battles!

1. Jesus faced real temptations just as we do. Mark wrote, "*At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert.*" (v.12) What a contrast to the devil's temptation of Adam and Eve! He tempted them in paradise and their failure brought death to the world. Jesus was tempted in the desert in order to win paradise for us! He was urged by the Holy Spirit to go there. Jesus did not relish the battle, yet He went willingly.

He was "*in the desert forty days being tempted by Satan.*" (v.13) Some people may ask why Jesus was tempted? In order to defeat the devil, He needed to enter the battlefield of temptation just like us, but without sin. Jesus didn't eat for 40 days. God kept him alive; but that didn't mean He wasn't hungry. He was affected by the heat or cold of the desert. Mark tells us that "*He was with the wild animals.*" (v.13) Jesus must have been in a desolate place with no people to give shelter. In His weakened condition what could a lion do to Him? Yet, His greatest danger was from the worst prowling lion, the devil's attacks for 40 days. Jesus needed to be on His guard by watching with God's Word and constantly praying to God.

Although there must have been many temptations, three are specifically mentioned in Matthew and Luke: 1. to be selfish and turn stones to bread to feed Himself, 2. to jump off the high point of the temple and tempt God to keep Him safe while living foolishly, and 3. to worship Satan in order to advance in the world. During these 40 days of temptations, Jesus was not defeated. He remained sinless throughout His life so that He could become for us the perfect sacrifice to take away all our sins. We can be sure that the devil was tempting Jesus while He hung on the cross. But, in that worst situation, Jesus won the war for us!

The devil and his wicked angels lost against Christ, but that doesn't mean they have given up the war against believers in Christ. He and his army of demons are ready to strike fear in people or to harm them if possible. The devil is the great Deceiver. He doesn't know everything because he isn't God. But he has studied human nature for 1,000's of years and he knows our vulnerabilities so he can attack our faith. As he tried to do with Jesus, the devil tries to build up our sinful pride so that we think we can fight against him without Jesus. He also tries to give us mis-placed priorities putting work, play, or sports ahead of Christ. We need to realize that we desperately need to remain with Christ because we are like lambs and the devil is like a wolf in sheep's clothing or a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. His goal is for us to lose the war and experience spiritual death forever. Our eternal life is at stake!

2. Jesus can help us! Mark wrote, “*Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’*” (v. 14-15) Now is the time for us to receive strength for our faith. We don’t know what tomorrow may bring. The devil and his demons will not take vacations from attacking us. Too often we fall right into the traps of the devil letting our sinful natures lead us into serious trouble. We dare not neglect the means God gives to help us. After Jesus’ victory in the desert, He traveled throughout Galilee with the good news. We too should be hearing and living in the good news and telling everyone of His victory!

Jesus’ victory on the cross is the greatest example of how God will always accomplish His good purpose. Yet, it is so easy for us to doubt God’s help when times get tough. It is easy to look for our own solutions to problems without turning to God for guidance. Jesus calls to us: “*Repent and believe the good news.*” (v. 15) Turn from doubt! Turn from shame. Turn from a life that will not fully trust in God’s promises. God gave His Son to completely overcome the devil, the sinful world, and death. And He gave His Word for us so we can depend on Jesus especially when we are going through trials and temptations.

It states in James, “*Submit yourselves God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts.... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.* (James 4:7-8, 10) The Bible promises, “*God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*” (1 Corinthians 10:13) God provides us with His powerful Word! Will we use it or neglect it? Paul encouraged the Ephesian Christians, “*Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*” (Ephesians 6:13) Make use of God’s Word for guidance so we can know the truth and will not be deceived by the devil. Know the Gospel so that we when fall into sin in weakness, we immediately turn to Jesus to confess our sins and receive full forgiveness. It is through the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments that God will pick us up and help us stand for the battles of another day.

We also are to remember the Lord’s Prayer where Jesus taught us to say: “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*” (Matthew 6) These two petitions remind us that temptations are real and they can be deadly to our faith. The most dangerous thing we can do is think that we’re beyond being tempted. These petitions also remind us that we can’t resist temptation by our own power. If we ever think that we have enough will-power to fight temptation on our own, the devil has already overcome us. We’re thinking too much of ourselves and not enough of our need for God’s grace in Christ. The battle is lost!

We need to take to heart the Gospel that Jesus preached. It tells us that only by God’s grace can we overcome the temptations of the world, the wickedness of our own hearts, and the power of the devil. In life we will never be perfect in our spiritual fight. That is why we should daily value that Jesus fought in our place. He met the devil and the world’s temptations head on, and overcame all of them for us. As we trust in Jesus to save us, God credits all Christ’s victory to us. This is God’s Word that we must believe if we are to remain in the faith and win the victory in Christ. God has allowed us to remain in this world not only so that we hold to God’s Word; we are to proclaim it just as Jesus did. So many in the world are lost or spiritually wounded. God help us to tell the Good News of Christ’s victory in the desert over the devil, His victory on the cross over sin, and His victory in grave over death, to offer all people the victory of eternal life. Amen.