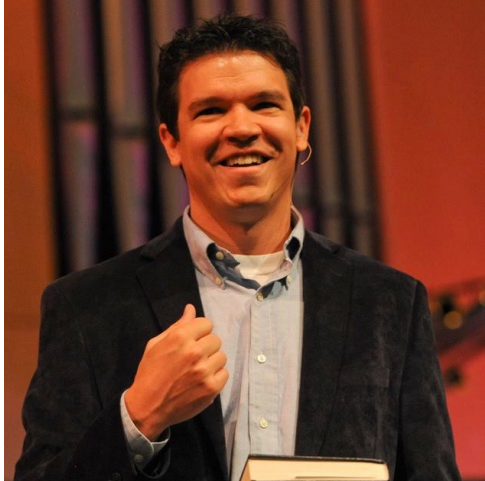


#InstagramJesus

Weekly Devotional

A ministry of Chapel Hill
chapelhillpc.org



Written by Larry Hackman

Executive Associate Pastor at Chapel Hill. Theology nerd who also loves big, dumb blockbuster movies, dinosaurs (no kidding, I *love* dinosaurs), and classical music. What do these things have in common? They all point, in their own way, back to a big, beautiful God.

Saturday through Friday January 26–February 1

LifeGroup Guide

Head

Jesus was baptized, and yet was without sin. Spend time discussing why Jesus was baptized. What is the significance of his baptism?

How does today's passage help us to understand the humanity of Christ?

The Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness where he is tempted, and during that difficult time the angels minister to him. How does the presence of God in the midst of suffering help us wrestle with the difficult question of suffering and God's sovereignty?

Heart

How can you relate to the emotional ups and downs of Jesus' early ministry days?

Jesus is commissioned for service by the voice from heaven. When have you experienced a sense of calling or commissioning? If you felt it was from God, how did you know his voice?

Challenge yourself to take an honest look at what tempts you. When you experience temptation do you lean into the support of others or hide?

Hands

Today's passage encourages us that even while Jesus was being tempted, and was in the wilderness, God took care of him through the ministering of the angels. Spend time lifting up those in your group who are going through a really tough time. How can you practically support that person this week?

Is someone in your group experiencing some sort of significant new beginning? A new school, new home new relationship, new child, new job, new home-life situation? If this is something to be celebrated, find a way to do as a group! If this is hard, make time this week to check in with each other about how things are going.

Consider the role that the Holy Spirit plays in your life. Have you invited him into your new beginnings, or your tough times? Do you experience his presence with you? Spend some time inviting him into these circumstances in prayer.

DAY 1 – Monday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 1:5,9; Hebrews 4:14-16

Ask

Jesus was baptized, and yet was without sin. Spend time discussing why Jesus was baptized. What is the significance of his baptism?

Reflect

For only being one verse, Mark 1:9 sure does pack a lot of subtext into it. First of all, you can't just gloss over the fact that John baptized in the river Jordan. This was the same river, after all, that the entire nation of Israel had miraculously crossed over hundreds of years before to claim their promised land. John's choice of location harkened back to that history, and hinted at a future promised land that could only be gained entrance by repentance... and a Savior.

That Savior, Jesus, is further contrasted with the many who came to John in v. 5. If you've already compared v. 5 and v. 9, you might have seen that "all" come from Judea and Jerusalem, but only one comes from Galilee. Mark seems to be highlighting that Jesus represents the "no-shows," the ones who really need repentance. And in that sense, Jesus represents all of Israel, and all of us, waiting to cross the waters of the Jordan.

Finally there is the significance of baptism itself, not only an image of cleansing water, but of submission to death, and from that death: rebirth. Add all these pieces together, and you have a rich foreshadowing of Jesus' ministry: Jesus, the sinless one, identifies with the "no-shows" and rebellious, crossing the Jordan into the eternal Promised Land on their behalf, facing death for the ultimate prize of resurrection.

Which brings us to Hebrews 4:14-16. Jesus' baptism poignantly shows us that he doesn't rise above the riff-raff, he becomes one of them (and by riff-raff I mean us). That revelation should fill us "with confidence [to] draw near to the throne of grace." Take this moment to praise God, and to marvel at his grace.

DAY 2 – Tuesday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 1:10a; Isaiah 64:1-2

Ask

How can you relate to the emotional ups and downs of Jesus' early ministry days?

Reflect

I don't know if you've ever tried to tear a clothes item, but if it's not already prepped for ripping, it's really hard. I had an old t-shirt that was ready to retire once, and in the spirit of Macho Man Randy Savage I thought it would be fun to rip it off my chest. Well, cotton is tougher than it looks, and surprisingly I'm weaker than Macho Man Randy Savage, so what I hoped was a dramatic bust-out instead looked like frustrated tugging and grunting.

If a t-shirt is that tough to tear, just imagine rending the heavens. I use my silliness to highlight that tearing is a difficult, even violent thing. The substance of reality itself was rent in two, no small deal... but why? Why didn't the Spirit simply serenely appear as a dove? Why did He have to come through a tear in the heavens?

The answer lies in Isaiah 64. The context of that passage is a cry for justice, that God would "rend the heavens and come down" so that he could become "known to [his] adversaries." Isaiah hoped and cried for the day when God would reveal himself to those who did wrong. In other words, he hoped for the day that God would right what is wrong, and do so visibly and powerfully.

If you've ever felt the injustice of being wronged, you can identify with Isaiah's cry. That yearning for justice can feel violent, and it should be a comfort to us that it is met with matching urgency in Jesus' baptism. The heavens are rent, for the sake of all that is wrong being made right in Jesus.

Are you wrestling with an injustice today? Do you share Isaiah's cry that God would show up? In Jesus, he did. Take a few moments to share with him in prayer your own cry for justice.

DAY 3 – Wednesday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 1:10b; Isaiah 61:1

Ask

Consider the role that the Holy Spirit plays in your life. Have you invited him into your new beginnings, or your tough times? Do you experience his presence with you? Spend some time inviting him into these circumstances in prayer.

Reflect

I was surprised to find that the definition of “spirit” on Merriam-Webster’s website is quite extensive, 14 different entries in fact. You can drink spirits, you can be strong spirited, you have a spirit, and you can obey the spirit of something, among many other usages of the word. No surprise, then, that the Spirit of God is an oftentimes confusing subject.

We don’t have time to dive into the mysteries of the Spirit here, but suffice it to say that the Spirit descending on Jesus means good news for us. If the violent rending of the heavens meant justice had come, then the gentle descent of the dove means Mercy is on the scene too.

In another Gospel passage in Luke, Jesus uses Isaiah 61 to describe his ministry. It is precisely because the Spirit had descended on Jesus that he brings good news to the poor and binds up the brokenhearted. There is a partnership here that should not be missed.

When we fast-forward the story, we see in Acts 2 that the end result of Jesus’ ministry is that the Spirit comes down and visits the disciples the same way he does Jesus. In other words, Jesus’ ministry, powered by the Holy Spirit, has become the disciples’. And if you are a disciple, it has become yours through the Holy Spirit, too.

Romans 8:29 tells us that Jesus is the “firstborn among many brothers.” What is true of Jesus has become true of us too, including the incredible experience of his baptism. Today, I want you to consider that the same Holy Spirit who descended on Jesus is available to you. Have you invited him to empower you, to fill you, to commission you on that mission of mercy and grace? Spend time today inviting the Holy Spirit to do so.

DAY 4 – Thursday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 1:11; Romans 8:14-17

Ask

Jesus is commissioned for service by the voice from heaven. When have you experienced a sense of calling or commissioning? If you felt it was from God, how did you know his voice?

Reflect

My son's name is Reed. Well, that's what we call him, but actually his full name is Michael Reed. For a variety of reasons, we decided to call him by his middle name. But Reed is at the age (of three), where it has become appropriate to sometimes address him by his full name. Unfortunately, that's usually in a stern tone of voice when he's not responding to just plain old "Reed." Barking "Michael Reed" at him when he's in a rebellious mood is surprising effective! Somehow, he knows that when we address him with his full name, we mean business.

So it's telling that when the Father addresses his Son in Mark 1:10, there is no hint of reprimand or sternness. Instead, the words practically ooze with pride and love. There is a closeness there that is reminiscent of the best earthly familial relationships we have the privilege of witnessing. Later in Mark 9:7, the Father speaks to the Son in the hearing of others and says, "This is my beloved son; listen to him." This tells us that not only are the Father and Son close, but what the Son says the Father agrees with. Which effectively makes the Father-Son conversation in Mark 1 a commissioning. "I love you, I trust you, Son." And then what is implied: "Go for me." Because of their closeness, the Son represents the Father.

My own father passed away shortly before my teenage years began, so this passage resonates with me emotionally. We all yearn for a Father like this, who will speak words of love, yes, but who will also impart purpose. I'm grateful to have overheard this conversation between the Son and Father in Mark 1, but I'm especially grateful for the words of Romans 8 which say that I have been received into the family of God. I am a son too, and the same love and purpose that the Father imparts on Jesus has been imparted on me. And on you.

DAY 5 – Friday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 1:12; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Ask

The Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness where he is tempted, and during that difficult time the angels minister to him. How does the presence of God in the midst of suffering help us wrestle with the difficult question of suffering and God's sovereignty?

Reflect

I had a really great high school graduation. In contrast to a typical high school graduation ceremony, where hundreds of students parade past a podium to get their diploma, I graduated from a small Baptist private school with a class of only six other students. Part of the graduation ceremony included having me perform a recital of a Mozart piece I had been practicing throughout the year, and in addition I received an award I had not been expecting. It was quite a rush for 18-year-old me. After the evening was done, I got in a car with my Stepdad and my Mom, and my Stepdad (who was not a pleasant man, unfortunately) said, "Well, now that's over you'll have more time to help me around the house." Not, "Congratulations." Not anything else. Just... that. It was deflating, to say the least.

That's not an unusual scenario for many of us. Oftentimes, it seems like our mountain top experiences are closely followed by a journey through the wilderness. That seems to be the case for Jesus too. It makes it all the more interesting that it's the Spirit who drives him into that wilderness experience.

What we learn from Jesus' time in the wilderness is twofold. First, that he doesn't go alone; the Spirit is present with him. Second, that his experience is not without purpose because it was prompted by the Spirit. We may never fully understand why suffering happens this side of heaven, but we can at least translate from Jesus' experience that the same two things are true for us in our suffering.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, reminds us that one way that God gives purpose to our suffering is allowing us to comfort others who are suffering through the experiences we have had. As you read this passage today, take some time to think and pray on how your afflictions may be used to provide comfort for others.

DAY 6 – Saturday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 1:13a

Ask

Challenge yourself to take an honest look at what tempts you. When you experience temptation do you lean into the support of others or hide?

Reflect

Whenever Megan asks me to do the grocery shopping, she knows to expect one or two extra things in the bags. I consider it my reward for being a good husband. In fact, one of my favorite past times is perusing the snacks aisle and finding the most offbeat flavor to try. Yes, I am a junk food connoisseur. The other week, I came home with a bag of “Chirps;” chips made from cricket protein. I was delighted, Megan was not.

I don’t take it for granted that I’m able to drop by the store and pick out a random junk food. There was a time in our lives where that was not the case, and everything that went into the cart was carefully priced. I may have been tempted to indulge in some junk food, but I couldn’t afford to. I’ve been reflecting on this lately, realizing how indulgent my life, and indeed our culture, can be.

Which is why temptation can be an alien concept to us Americans. The American Dream has become more or less to indulge in whatever we want. Self-restraint and discipline have become more and more strange (except when it comes in the service of your own fulfillment, as in exercise).

Part of why Jesus went into the wilderness to fast was to be reminded, especially at the beginning of his ministry, that he was dependent on the Father and the Spirit. It’s telling that Satan’s aim in temptation, as made clear in the parallel Gospel passages in Matthew and Luke, was to get Jesus to go solo, or worse, to count on Satan for what he needed. Temptation, ultimately, is about the things that take us away from God.

Today, reflect on your lifestyle. How often do you decide not to indulge, to remind yourself of your need for God? Consider planning a day of fasting. Maybe it’s not checking your phone for a day. Maybe it’s not eating snacks for a time, or maybe it’s a traditional fast of food. Practice resisting temptation by pursuing this kind of discipline.

DAY 7 – Sunday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 1:13b; Psalm 139

Ask

Today's passage encourages us that even while Jesus was being tempted, and was in the wilderness, God took care of him through the ministering of the angels. Spend time lifting up those in your group who are going through a really tough time. How can you practically support that person this week?

Reflect

When I was 20, I gathered with a group of friends and spent a night in a tent in the woods of East Texas. Late into the night, we were all awakened by the distant howling of a pack of coyotes. Their baying grew closer and closer, until it got quiet. Then we heard their quiet yipping and huffing as they circled our tent, padding around us. Eventually they left. I've had a couple of other night time wilderness close encounters like that, from hearing the banshee-like shriek of a mountain lion downhill, to the almost demonic screeching of two possums fighting outside of my tent. Every time, it was at least a little harrowing.

Which is why it's no small detail that Mark mentions that Jesus was with wild animals in the wilderness. It highlights the danger, and more broadly, the evil that surrounded Jesus in his experience. I can imagine him alone, at night, shivering in the desert cold against a rock, seeing the eyes of some beast reflecting what light there was as it stared at him. Harrowing.

It mattered to me that in each of my night time encounters with wild beasts, I was not alone. I derived some comfort from the presence of friends, even if we all felt spooked. Jesus derived the same comfort, not only from the Spirit, but from the ministry of angels.

In our own experiences of life's trials, we have that same comfort. The Spirit goes with us wherever we go. But also, we have the family of God to lean on, our brothers and sisters. When the "wild beasts" of life surround us, recall that we are not alone.
