

Title: No Illusions**[Slide 1]****Text: Mark 1:1-13****Two Worlds****A 24/7 world:**

We are the first generation of human beings to live in a truly 24/7 world. For the first time in history, you can catch up on the news, watch your favorite program, connect through social media, go shopping, or research your term paper absolutely *any time you want to*.

The internet never shuts down for the evening. Amazon never closes its digital doors. CNN and Fox News never go off the air. Facebook is open for posts. Your cell phone is always connected. 24/7.

If you're bored, no problem: just swipe your phone and start surfing the net. If you're lonely, go "like" peoples' latest posts. Feeling like spoiling yourself? You can get a pizza online, delivered to your door. What a world!

All of this instant convenience comes with consequences: We can be so entertained, so busy, so informed, so convenience that we begin to think that this artificial, manufactured, tech-savvy world is the Real Thing. When that happens, this artificial world defines what we do, what we believe, and who we are. It determines what it means to be *human*. And in the end, we become people made in *its image, not in the image of our Creator*.

Alexander's world:**[Slide 2]**

In Jesus' time, the culture of Greece and Rome ruled the known world. 300 years before Jesus' ministry, a young king named Alexander set out to conquer the world. In just 11 short years he and his armies created an empire that stretched from Greece to India, and from Afghanistan to Egypt. Alexander was not content, however, with defeating his foes; he dreamed of creating a *world culture* based upon his own Greek values.

He introduced a more accessible form of the Greek language – Koine Greek – to the conquered territories. His armies settled in the conquered lands and built cities based upon the Greek city-state. When the Romans defeated the Greeks, they adopted and copied Greek culture, assuring that Greek art, language, philosophy, religion, architecture, and government would be the cultural norm for a thousand years. In fact, the New Testament was first written in Alexander’s Koine Greek because this was the common language spoken and read throughout the Roman Empire.

Two worlds:

The presence of Greek and Roman culture in Jesus’ world created the same kind of tensions and temptations that we find in our hyper-tech, 24/7 world. Then as now, this world culture insisted on defining what it means to be human. It established the winners and losers. Its message was simple: In me and me alone you find your life and meaning.

And it was in the face of a seemingly all-powerful world culture that Jesus issued a shocking choice:

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Matthew 7:13-14 NIV

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Each one of us faces this choice every day. Will we take the broad road offered by our dominant culture? Or will we take the narrow road that leads to our hidden life in Christ?

Desert Path

Man of the desert:

The story of Jesus begins with his cousin John the Baptist. Mark tells us that John became a “man of the desert” like Moses and the OT prophet Elijah. It was there by the Jordan River that John called Israel to come out into the desert to be re-born as God’s people. Just as Israel had left Egypt behind to take the Exodus journey to the Promised Land, now it was time for a new

generation of Israel to take that journey. Here was the call to find the hidden life far from the enticements of the world culture.

The journey required going into the desert. The desert represented the place where the old life died and the new life began. It was where Israel would once again meet God. It was a place of admitting the sins and failures of the past. It was a place of judgment, of the rendering of a verdict. But it was also the place where God had made Israel His Son. And John promised that God was about to do so again.

John called the people to do two things: repent and be baptized:

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Mark 1:4-5 NIV

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Wilderness/repentance/baptism all stood for the same thing: Getting ready to meet God in a brand new, life-changing way. It was in the wilderness that the Hidden Life was to be found. Going to the desert meant choosing the "narrow path" that led to eternal life.

The true penitent:

At the very heart of John's message was the announcement that God was about to come to His people and baptize them with the Holy Spirit:

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Mark 1:7-8 NIV

"After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Here, at long last, would be the Person in whom could be found the very Life of God: the Hidden Life. What a shock it must have been, then, that the Life Baptizer appeared in the desert so that He himself could be baptized for sins of all Israel!

As He came up from the river, the Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove and God spoke from heaven:

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Mark 1:11 NIV

"You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

So this was truly the Person John had promised would come. Hadn't the Spirit descended on Him? And God Himself had proclaimed Him His Son and long-awaited King. The New Exodus had begun, and the journey to God's final Kingdom was already underway!

Tested in the desert:

In that declaration from heaven was the greatest test Jesus would face: What kind of King would He be? Would He take the broad road of political power and world domination? Or would He take the narrow road – the road that led through the desert?

The answer came quickly enough:

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Mark 1:12-13 NIV amended

At once the Spirit cast him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted/tested by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

The King who deliberately turned away from the world and its power would be the King in the wilderness. The 40 days He spent there were symbolic of His entire earthly ministry: He was, like Moses and Elijah before Him, "a man of the desert."

Temptation and testing were the inevitable result. One commentator writes:

"Jesus' determination to repent, his abiding in the wilderness, is thus explained as a clash with the personified evil." (Mauser, Christ in the Wilderness, p.99)

The wild animals of the desert represented "the horror and the danger which faces man in the desert." (Mauser, p. 101) The Judaism of Jesus' time

thought of the desert as the abode of demons. They interpreted Isaiah's description of a fallen Babylon with these words:

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Isaiah 13:21 LXX

But wild beasts shall rest there; and the houses shall be filled with howling; and monsters shall rest there, and devils shall dance there.

Take the narrow road and you can be sure that the culture around you will do everything in its power to pull you back! It will do everything in its power to keep you from finding the Hidden Life – your true identity in Christ!

No Illusions

Attended by angels:

In this place of testing and danger, Mark tells us:

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Mark 1:13b NIV

...and angels attended him.

Another "man of the desert," the prophet Elijah, had been fed by an angel. God sent His angel in front of His people on the Exodus journey. Now, one again, the desert became the place of discovering Heaven's nourishment – a key to the Hidden Life.

This would be Jesus' resource throughout His earthly life. His journey into the desert was not just a brief visit before beginning His "real" work. This wilderness journey was a "parable" of the Hidden Life – the Life of Heaven present here on earth in the Person of our King.

No illusions:

God's Spirit used the desert as a place where Jesus came to terms with the many illusions this world presented. Would He be a king like all the other kings who have come and gone? Or would He be the desert King – the King who lived not by bread only, but by every word that comes from God? Would He bow down to the world culture and its evil ruler to get what He wanted,

or would he worship the Creator only? Would He trust that God alone be His validation?

It was only by “unplugging” from the world culture could He resist its temptation, and be nourished by Heaven.

The same is true for you and me.

No illusions.

Desert journey:

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We can take our “desert journey” in many ways. We don’t have to travel to the Sinai Peninsula or the Arizona Desert. We encounter God when we “unplug” from our 24/7 world and spend time with Him. During the 40 Days leading up to Easter, we are learning spiritual exercises that help us enter into His presence. I invite you to join this journey Wednesday evenings from 6:30 – 8:00 here at the church. Each week we are learning new ways to discover and deepen our experience of our Hidden Life – a life that is hidden with Christ in God.