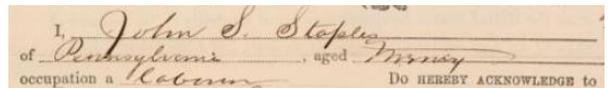


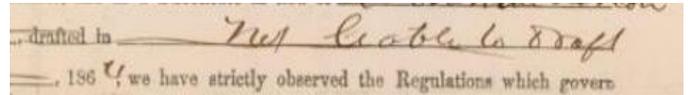
Mark 1:12-13 Jesus is... your substitute/holiness & your strength

He was 5 feet 3 inches tall. Blue eyes. Brown hair. Twenty years old. His name was John Summerfield Staples.



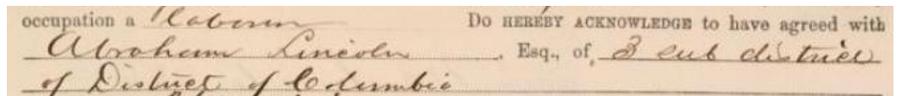
He was escorted into the house where another man, much taller, lived. The difference in height, eyes, hair and age didn't matter. He would serve well.

A document, held in the National Archives, tells what took place. The 2nd man was – as noted on this document - “not liable to draft.” He was exempt from



having to go to war. He was too old. His position would have exempted him as well. He didn't *have to* pay for a substitute to take his place, as many others did rather than fight themselves. But he *wanted to* send a substitute. So he paid John Summerfield Staples \$500, and John went off to war in his place.

The date? It was Oct. 1st, just over 150 years ago. The Civil War was raging. And where did this substitution take place? Washington D.C. The identity of the 2nd man was... Abraham Lincoln.



Καὶ εὐθὺς τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτὸν ἐκβάλλει εἰς τὴν ἔρημον. καὶ ἦν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ Σατανᾶ, καὶ ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι διηκόνουν αὐτῷ. – Mark 1:12-13

We don't know his height. We have no record of his color of eyes or hair. But the document we have in hand – the Gospel of Mark –tells what took place. It all unfolded in real time, real history, about 2,000 years ago. A substitute was sent off to war in your place.

“What did Jesus do to save you?” The most common reply I hear to that goes: “He suffered and died on the cross, to take away my sins. He suffered the hell my sins deserved – he took that punishment in my place. He died for me in the effort.” Yes, all that, and...

Today we are reminded to include: he lived for me, in my place fulfilling all the requirements of God's law, never falling to temptation. Do you think about – do we remember to talk about – this part of Jesus' saving work as often?

We start off Lent with a laser-like focus on this truth. Jesus spent a *lifetime* as my personal substitute.

Jesus' war effort began much earlier than the day recorded here in Mark ch.1. His time of service started from the first day he took on human flesh. Think about this for a moment. Kids, you know what kind of temptations you face every day. What is the strongest?

- Is it that selfish flash that yanks the toy away or yells at a brother, sister or friend? Or is it the grumbling that erupts toward parents or teachers?
- Tweens, for you is it the temptation to lie to your parents about doing your chores or to cheat instead of doing your own homework? Or is it to simply not do your work, and not even care, ignoring the gifts God has given you and disregarding the instructions of those whom he has placed over you?

- Young adults, is it the temptation to lust? Older adults, is it to worry or covet? Or do I have that reversed? Young to worry and covet, older to lust?

That's probably enough by way of example. Here is the truth about Jesus' years: *"He was tempted in every way just as we are – but he remained without sin."* Hebrews 4:15

Jesus, after 30 years of war in our behalf, was now entering into a final 3 year culmination. And the first steps took him to...

A new battlefield – the desert. He faced a retargeted attack – for 40 days. We might be surprised by the brevity with which Mark records the battle. If your attention drifted for a moment earlier, you might have missed it. *"At once"* – this is following Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, which we studied earlier this year – *"the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him."*

On another occasion, we can look in greater detail at a few of the temptations Jesus faced. Matthew and Luke record three of them. But for today, we benefit from honing in on the isolated details the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to record.

The Holy Spirit sent Jesus into the battle. There's a lot of action in those few words. *"Sent"* has force behind it – action wrapped in it. There is no indecisiveness here. The Holy Spirit directs. And Jesus charges into the battle.

Why? He goes to do what any warrior sets out to accomplish on the field of battle: he is there to face the enemy head-on, and come away with a victory. In this case, Jesus knew this would not be the final battle in the war. He would fight on and press forward until the battlefield where a cross and a tomb would be left empty... and the enemy's head left crushed. Many of you know that site well. We treasure the sight of it.

But getting back to the site we have before us today in Mark: What do we learn – and what should we treasure – about this desert battle?

Jesus was far from any human support. How alone was Jesus? Our awareness of this is heightened by Mark's description: *"he was with the wild animals."* This was no wildlife zoo outing. Mark doesn't tell us *"he was with the wild animals"* as if to indicate: there was something to help make the time pass by more quickly – "Oh, look, he's got some animals to watch." There were no fences to confine the predators. This brings us face to face with the fact: Jesus' only security throughout these days was the Father in heaven. Jesus perfectly trusted the Father: he trusted the Father to protect him; He trusted the Father to provide for him; He trusted the Father's good plans for him.

He lived the holiness that every one of us lacks.

We're told *"the angels came and served him."* But their service was not to aid him in his battle. Their service came after his battle was through. For the battle...

He was alone. The wild animals were with him. And so was... the old foe, Satan. Mark tells us: *"Jesus was in the desert 40 days, being tempted by Satan."*

Mark doesn't describe a single, specific temptation. But that doesn't mean Mark isn't detailed in his description of the battle. This is the detail God wants us to take home today: Satan bombarded Jesus with

temptations for 40 days. Relentless. Dogged. Fierce. There are no time outs on record. We know just this: one-on-one combat occupied the days.

So now we've got the facts Mark records for us. Let's talk about what that means for us.

Every temptation Jesus turned away was counted as a win for you and me. When Jesus went to war against Satan, it was as if each of us were there. For he went to this war as the substitute in place of you and me. He took your place and mine under God's law. He lived the holiness every one of us needs credited to our record.

- Romans 5:17 & 19 – We receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness through the one man, Jesus Christ. Through the obedience of the one man the many are made righteous.
- Romans 3:20 – Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (Romans 1:17, 10:4)
- Romans 8:1 & 4 – The righteous requirements of the law are fully met in us. There is now no condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus.

Let's carry forward with us two uses of this good news: 1) it is assurance of my forgiveness and right standing before my God. It is not based on any actions from me. Jesus' time of service is substituted fully in place of my life. His perfect service is counted as my record. Jesus is your substitute. He is your holiness before God. You are not required – nor are you permitted – to try to pay him for his service. Jesus does not live as our substitute and then turn to us and say: "earn this" (like in the movie *Saving Private Ryan*). God's message is: Jesus' life – Jesus' death – Jesus' resurrection – this is his gift to you. Everyone who trust in him has the eternal life he fought for and won.

The next outcome of this good news is: 2) It works in us the will and the strength to trust God and serve him. Christ's love moves us (2 Cor. 5). We see God's love to us, and we want to offer ourselves to him (Romans 12:1). The grace of God gives us the strength to say "no" to temptation, to ungodly passions and behavior (Titus 2:11-12).

Put the two together and what does that look like in our lives? We can live without fear, and also with purpose. We have forgiveness for the times we fall to temptation; but we don't use that as an "I'll just give in to temptation." What Jesus has done for you gives your reason and your strength to fight temptation.

There was a good point made on this topic in the interactive online Bible Study on Judges (archived at: new.livestream.com/interactivefaith). To just give in to sins that are prevalent in culture with a "That's just the way it will be"... or, to say about a pet sin "it's not that bad – I'm not really hurting anyone – and I can't beat it, so why even try?"... That is just underestimating the truth: "*Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" - Galatians 2:20.

So don't underestimate the power of who lives in you.

Remember the name **John Summerfield Staples?** He was strolling down Pennsylvania Avenue with his father the day Lincoln sent to find a substitute. "I am looking for a young man to represent the president in the army as a recruit. Will you accept?" "If my father consents," Staples replied. His father nodded. It was settled. lincolnstudies.blogspot.com/2007/10/lincolns-substitute.html

John Summerfield Staples served his 1 year. He took home his \$500 substitute signing bonus, plus the regular pay earned by a soldier. He had it relatively easy, history records: serving the year as a clerk and a guard. He returned home. He died years later.

Jesus did not serve as your substitute for any gain for himself. His only motive was love for you and me. Jesus did not get off relatively easy. HisStory records the temptation he suffered through throughout his life and the hell he endured before his death. Despite all that... God the Father consented to the substitution. God the Son came. God the Holy Spirit directed. Jesus battled. He won victory. Victory for you and me, for everything he did he did as your substitute – my substitute. This is our joy. This is our peace. This news gives us hearts – and strengthens our hearts – to trust God, to listen to His Word, and to delight in his commands. Amen.