

“A Savior Who Identifies With Us”

Mark 1:9-11

Back in the third century, a devastating plague swept through the Roman Empire, killing thousands every day. Families abandoned the sick, bodies were left in the streets, and even physicians fled in fear. Their natural instinct was self-preservation. However, early Christians responded differently. According to a third century writer, Dionysius of Alexandria, many Christians stayed behind when others fled, nursing the sick, feeding the dying, and burying the dead—often imperiling their own lives. What made this mercy remarkable is that they did not care only for fellow Christians, they cared for pagans as well, people who might have despised or persecuted them. They did not merely send help, but they entered the contagion by opening up their homes, risking infection, and embraced the suffering that others avoided. Many Christians died—but many others were saved, and the witness of embodied mercy profoundly influenced the credibility of the church. Historian Rodney Stark said that this willingness to enter suffering was one of the decisive factors in Christianity’s growth during the Roman world’s darkest moments.

Why has Christianity been marked by such a willingness to enter the misery of others? Because at its core, it is about a Savior who entered our misery on a mission of rescue. It is a message of One who descended into our situation and has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows, was pierced for our transgressions, and was crushed for our iniquities. It was Jesus who walked into the wilderness wasteland of our lives, having become one of us, so that He might die for our sins and then raise us to new life with Himself. He is a Savior who identifies with us. And that is what Mark writes about in these verses that I want us to read this morning. (Read)

All four gospels record the baptism of Jesus, and so the monumental importance of this event in the life of Jesus is something to be understood. When Jesus was presented as the Savior, He came with no fanfare, no glowing halo over His head, there was no pomp and circumstance. The Bible simply says He began His ministry by being baptized by John. As the thousands of people had come to where John had been baptizing in the wilderness, one day John looks up and sees Jesus in line. To the crowds who were present that day, He would have looked like any other man who had come. Had we been there on the riverbank, we wouldn't have singled Him out from any of the rest. We would not have known that this One who had slipped in line had spent the past thirty years of His life in obscurity, and had grown up in the home of a simple carpenter from Nazareth. And yet this is how the Bible says that Jesus is presented as our Savior. I think we miss the significance of this scene because it has become so familiar. "So Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. What's the big deal?" The truth is that everything about it is a big deal. If it were not important, the Holy Spirit would not have wanted it to be included in the Scriptures.

We've seen how the ministry of John the Baptist paved the way for the earthly ministry of Jesus. In many ways, his ministry was intended to be like a bulldozer preparing the way for Jesus' coming. John was preaching a message of repentance, and there in the wilderness, people came from everywhere. As they confessed their sin, he would baptize them as a symbol of their repentance. To repent means to change one's mind about their sin, to change direction.

Those John baptized first came and confessed their sins and understood their need for repentance. And it brings up the important question—Why exactly was Jesus baptized? If John's baptism demonstrated the need for repentance, then why did Jesus who was sinless and perfect come to him to be baptized? Well,

that's the question that I want us to consider for our time this morning. I want to give you a few reasons it was necessary and what exactly it meant:

1—It involves a PLAN from heaven (1:9)

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”

Nothing that Jesus ever did was accidental or incidental in nature. Everything that Jesus did in His life, even to the smallest detail, was part of the divine plan. His life was in perfect agreement with the Father's agenda. There wasn't a single second of His life that was ever lived outside the will of God. He said in:

John 8:29—“I always do those things that please Him.”

Thus, there was no insignificant detail in His life, including His baptism. It was intentional on His part. Verse 9 says that Jesus came all the way from Nazareth in Galilee to be baptized by John in the Jordan. Matthew 3:13 says it this way, “Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.” There is a purpose clause. Jesus intentionally came all the way from Nazareth in Galilee to where John was in the wilderness, a trip of about 70 miles. He came for the specific purpose of being baptized by him.

The humility of Jesus

Can you imagine the scene? John has been preaching, and tons of people have been coming to hear him. He baptizes those who confess their sins. He's telling the multitudes that the One who is coming after him is much greater, for He will baptize people with the Holy Spirit.

John 1:29-31—“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is He

of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who ranks before me, because He was before me.’ I myself did not know Him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that He might be revealed to Israel.”

So by his own admission, John didn't know that Jesus was the Messiah until it was revealed to him by God in that very moment as Jesus comes to be baptized by him. We're so familiar with this scene that we forget just how common and ordinary it all unfolded. One day as John is baptizing, Jesus slips into the line without attention, no fanfare. Don't you find it interesting that He does not cut in line and say, “I need to be first.” As in, “Don't you folks know who I am?” Sort of like a celebrity or something. Someone who has their name engraved on the sidewalk, who expects to be treated like a star. I read somewhere that King Louis XIV of France insisted on a massive daily ceremony for waking up and going to bed. He demanded that nobles fight for the honor of handing him clothes, public audiences while he ate was considered a privilege. People attended dinner with the King like it was a live performance or something.

But it is worth mentioning here that Jesus is not a celebrity. ‘Celebrity’ is a word that we associate with personal fame or ambition, or a strong desire to be in the limelight. Jesus was not a celebrity in that sense. Though He truly is the most famous Person in eternity, the God-Man, One who is deserving of our praise and worship, He is not a celebrity and He never conducted Himself as one. Here He doesn't demand celebrity treatment, there's no red carpet, no glitz or glamour, no paparazzi cameras. He simply comes to be baptized, presented among the ranks of others, and as the Servant of Jehovah, He comes to take His place among us as our Substitute. It speaks of His humility.

The hesitation by John

Matthew's account tells us John is dumbfounded by the fact that the Son of God is coming to be baptized by him! As the Messiah, He ought to be given the royal treatment. There ought to be some grand and spectacular event or announcement that lets everyone know just who He is. In the plan of God, that announcement would be His baptism. And John is the one who is given that privilege. But notice that he hesitates:

Matthew 3:13-14—“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?’”

The idea of Jesus being baptized is almost as hard for us to understand as it was for John. For not only did John know Jesus' human identity, he also knew full well Jesus' divine identity. He knew Him to be the sinless Son of God. We tend to get starstruck when we're around well-known or otherwise famous people (my dad meeting the president). I get the impression that John was sort of like that here as he is left speechless in the presence of One who is greater than himself, dumfounded by the fact that Jesus is coming to be baptized just like everyone else. (See Heb. 2:17)

John, though well-intentioned, tried to prevent Him. He understands the fact that Jesus is perfect, while recognizes his own personal sense of need—“I need to be baptized by You, and yet You come to me?” It didn't make sense. How true it is that all too often, we don't see things from God's perspective. We have in our mind an idea of how we think things ought to be, but they don't often line up with the will of God. We want certain things, expect certain things, and we're shocked when they don't go our way. It could be that God wants to do something unexpected. It was necessary for Jesus to be baptized, but John could not grasp

this truth because he couldn't see the bigger picture. It reminds me of what God says in:

Isaiah 55:8-9—“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

I think part of John's hesitation came from the fact that his baptism was a baptism of repentance from sin, and he knew full well that Jesus had no sin that He needed to repent of. John had right motives. His intentions were in the right place. It was because he was committed to the truth of Christ's deity that he tried to prevent the baptism. However, even though we often have good motives, we can still be far from the heart of God. Just like Peter who meant well when he tried to prevent Jesus from going to the cross, but was opposing God's will (Matt. 16).

John recognized his own sinfulness, and his baptism was for those who had turned from their sin and were living in anticipation of the coming Messiah. And he recognizes that Jesus is the sinless, spotless Lamb who had come to take away the sins of the world. Though the Bible says that Jesus was fully man, it also shows Him to be fully God and without sin. He was sinless in attitude, in word, and in action. There was not a single split second in the Lord's life that He was guilty of sin. Were He not without sin, then He would not have been qualified to be our sin-bearing Substitute. As a sinful man Himself, He could never die in the place of sinful men.

2 Corinthians 5:21—“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Hebrews 4:15—“For we do not have a High Priest, who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

1 Peter 1:1-9—“...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

1 Peter 2:22—“Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth.”

1 John 3:4-5—“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.”

Why would the sinless One who takes away sin go through with an act that represents confession and repentance from sin? Why would the sinless Messiah be baptized? Listen:

Matthew 3:15—“But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteous-ness.’ Then he consented.”

John tries to talk Him out of it. John doesn't get the whole picture. Jesus says that it was to be done in order to fulfill all righteousness. It was necessary in that sense.

Wayne Grudem—“...through the thirty-three years of His life, Christ obeyed God the Father in our place and as our representative, thus succeeding where Adam had failed, where the people in the wilderness had failed, and where we had failed.”

As our representative, it was necessary for Jesus to be baptized by John. It involves a plan from heaven, and then notice a second reason it was necessary:

2—It illustrates a PICTURE of salvation (1:10-11)

“And when He came up out of the water, immediately He saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.’”

As Jesus is baptized by John, He is identifying with those He came to save. And that symbolic act of being plunged into the waters of Jordan was a picture of what He came to accomplish. Remember, John had declared of Him:

John 1:29—“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

This was a reference that pertained to the Old Testament sacrificial system. The lamb that was slain on the Day of Atonement had to be a lamb without spot or blemish. A blemished lamb could not serve as an atonement for sins. John sees Jesus as the fulfillment of this. Again, that helps to explain the hesitancy on his part. Why would the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world need to go through with a baptism for sinners? Because it involved a plan from heaven, and it illustrated a picture of salvation. His baptism is a picture of salvation in several ways:

It is a picture of death

Jesus was plunged into the muddy water of the Jordan in a way that identified Him with the very ones He came to save from their sins. It was a picture of what He had come to do as our Savior who was plunged into death and judgment in our place by bearing our sins upon the cross. So that by submitting to baptism, Jesus was submitting to death. And in that sense, it foreshadowed the reason for His coming—He came to die.

It is a picture of burial

Verse 10 mentions that fact that Jesus came up out of the water, which was an indication that He had been put under the water. In fact, that's what 'baptism' means. The word 'baptize' literally means to fully immerse or to dip. It is a transliteration of a word that means to be immersed. To be 'baptized' is to be fully immersed in something. To be fully immersed in the water was a symbol of death and burial, a symbolizing of judgment being carried out. Jesus said:

Luke 12:50—“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is My distress until it is accomplished!”

On one occasion, two of the disciples asked to sit at His right and left hand in glory. Jesus responded:

Mark 10:38—“You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

It was a metaphor to describe the suffering that He would face on the cross. His 'baptism' is an image of an event that will engulf Him as He drinks the cup of divine wrath upon sin in the sinner's place. Which is what baptism in water is a symbol of—the judgment of God carried out on Christ in the sinner's place! He was plunged into the water of Jordan, just as He will be plunged into death in our stead and buried in a grave.

It is a picture of resurrection

But Jesus will not remain in the grave! Verse 10 says that He came up out of the water. To be immersed in water is a symbol of His death and burial, but to be brought up out of the water is a picture of His resurrection.

The fact that Jesus' baptism was part of the plan of God is further seen in the affirmation given in verses 10-11: "And when He came up out of the water, immediately He saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.' After His baptism, the text says that the heavens were 'torn open.' That's the same language used later when the veil of the temple is torn from top to bottom when Jesus dies on the cross (Mark 15:38). He is the One who has opened up heaven to sinners who come to Him in faith! Notice that all three members of the Trinity were present—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God the Father quotes from the Old Testament:

Psalm 2:7—“I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’”

Isaiah 42:1—“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”

The same words that the Father says at Jesus' baptism are also the words that He will declare later at the mountain of Transfiguration:

Matthew 17:5—“While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’”

For the Father to say that Jesus is His 'beloved Son' is a reminder of the way Abraham saw Isaac, the son he was called to offer up as a sacrifice (Gen. 22:2). And so John hears this declaration. This was not merely his opinion of Jesus, but it was a divine revelation and a declaration that this is indeed the sinless Son of God. And that's important because the whole crowd would have been under

the assumption that Jesus had come to be baptized with the baptism of repentance for the same reason that everybody else was coming—because they were sinners in need of God’s forgiveness. But it was by divine revelation that it was clear that Jesus was different, for He’s the only One who can actually do something about our sin. And so the Father’s affirmation of the Son is heard, and the Spirit’s anointing of the Son is seen in what Mark describes as descending on Him ‘like a dove.’ It reflects some similar language that we find in the opening verses of Scripture:

Genesis 1:1-2—“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

At the dawn of time, there was the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was into the wilderness wasteland of those watery depths that God’s creative Word brought forth light and life. And those same three Persons are present here at Jesus’ baptism—The Father who is the voice, the Son who is the Word, and the Spirit who descends and hovers like a dove.

Timothy Keller—“*Mark is deliberately pointing us back to the creation, to the very beginning of history. Just as the original creation of the world was a project of the triune God, Mark says, so the redemption of the world, the rescue and renewal of all things that is beginning now with the arrival of the King, is also a project of the triune God.*”

3—It indicates a PATTERN for us to follow (1:11)

“*And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.’*”

In His baptism, the Savior was identified with sinners so that through our baptism, sinners could be identified with the Savior. In His baptism, Jesus sets the example for His followers and thereby provides a pattern that we are to emulate. There came a day when the carpenter laid aside His tools, bid farewell to Nazareth, and walked 70 miles to where John was baptizing in order to be baptized by him. That means we better never call something ‘unimportant’ which Jesus walked 70 miles to do. Baptism is important and is an essential part of one’s discipleship. Though it isn’t necessary for our salvation, it is necessary for our obedience. Jesus now calls upon those who trust in Him for salvation to be baptized.

In many ways, the meaning of baptism has been obscured in the church today. It is much more than a ceremony or a ritual. It is more than a ‘photo opp.’ Baptism is a picture of death, burial, and resurrection. The believer’s immersion in water is symbolic of a decisive turning away from yourself and your way of life, including any dependence upon your heritage, your self-righteousness, or your self-reliance in life. Baptism indicates that you are relying exclusively on the mercy of God. It is an honest confession that there is nothing you can do to save yourself from your sins, but that you need the Lord Jesus to do that. Just as a person is immersed in water, signifying death and burial, the person is raised up from the water, signifying his resurrection. We have been brought into union with Christ in His death and resurrection. The outward symbol of water baptism points to the inward transformation that Jesus brings.

Romans 6:4—“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life.”

Disciples are commanded to be baptized and to baptize others who believe. The Great Commission says:

Matthew 28:19-20—“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Some people make the following wrong responses to baptism—some try to depend upon it for salvation, others will disregard it altogether, and then some delay it until a later time. Biblically, a person is to follow through with believer's baptism when they repent of their sin and turn in faith to Jesus. Their baptism is their public declaration of faith in Him. Jesus' baptism involved His identifying with those He came to save, and our baptism involves publicly identifying with Him.

Isaiah 53:12—“Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Luke 19:10—“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

When Jesus was baptized, He was identifying with sinful humanity. The One who had no sin came to take His place among those who had no righteousness. When we are baptized, we are identifying with our Savior. We who have no righteousness have come to take our place with Him who has no sin. Isn't that awesome?

Before we finish, let me give you some closing lessons by way of application:

- **Not recognizing Jesus in our midst doesn't mean He isn't there.**

Jesus comes as any other man, though He is far more. He doesn't namedrop. He doesn't flaunt anything. He simply steps in line and takes His place among those He came to save. Here is the Servant of Jehovah, the beloved One in whom the Father is well pleased, come to fully obey His Father's will. It serves as a fitting reminder to each one of us that there are no 'big shots' in the kingdom. It doesn't matter if you have a seven figure income, live in a house that cost more than the GDP of a small country. It doesn't matter if you're famous or know famous people.

Will you remember that when some promotion comes your way, when you're making a six and seven figure salary, or when things start going in your favor, will you remember that you still have to put your pants on one leg at a time? You're no big shot. You too are tainted by sin, plagued by shame that you are powerless to remove. Jesus is the Savior in whom you must trust! And just as He came and was numbered and unnoticed with the crowd, you may not always see Him in your situation. But you must trust Him as One who is sovereign over it.

- **Not understanding the big picture doesn't mean we shouldn't do our part.**

John says, "I need to be baptized by You! Yet You are coming to be baptized by me?" John didn't see the big picture, and often neither do we. But we can do what the Lord has simply asked us to do. And Jesus says, "That is the way it has to be for us to fulfill all righteousness, and these people need to know that I am one of them." God's Son had come to take His place among us. And the big

picture involved Him carrying out the redemptive plan that had been set in motion from all eternity. John was just a small part of a much bigger plan.

- Not being of the world doesn't mean that we shouldn't be in the world.

In His baptism, Jesus identifies with sinners that He came to save. Otherwise, He could not have saved those with whom He did not identify. He was made like us in every respect, though He was without sin. He didn't remain in His ivory palace, but entered into the muddy waters of a world in need. If we as Christians live out our faith in an ivory tower apart from a lost world that Jesus died to save, then we've failed to understand our Savior's heart for sinners. The love and good news of Jesus Christ cannot be brought to the world around us if we are not willing to be immersed into the world as Jesus was. Our life is in Christ, but the world is our mission field.

- Not hearing God's voice of affirmation today doesn't mean He isn't well pleased.

Though He knew no sin, had no sin, committed no sin, Jesus is fully human. He is undiminished deity without question, but He is also true humanity. That's why the Bible says in Hebrews that He is a High Priest who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. He knows what it is to suffer. And as we will see next time, He knows what it is to be tempted. Yet He is victorious over it all, and He was obedient to the Father through it all. The perfect obedience of Christ is imputed to you and to me when we put our trust in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21 – “He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Philippians 3:9—“...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but the righteousness of God which comes through faith in Christ.”

When Jesus died on the cross, God treated Him as if He had lived your life. He judged Him as if your sin was His sin. And now, because of that, He treats you as if you lived Christ’s life. Christ lived a perfect life of perfect obedience to everything God commanded in order that His perfect life could be credited to your account. When God looks at the cross, He sees a sufficient sacrifice.

When He looks at you, He sees Christ covering you with His righteousness. He did everything that God said to be done because He was perfectly righteous, perfectly obedient, and it is that perfect righteousness that has been credited to you as if you lived it.

God puts our sin on Him, God puts His righteousness on us. That’s why, when we fail, we never hear from heaven, “Shame on you!” The reason is that His righteousness is given to you as one who trusts in Christ. And so now, the Father’s declaration over the Son is also yours in Christ—“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Not because of anything that we might have done to earn that declaration, but because of the fact that you are in Christ.

J.C. Ryle—“*There is a rich mine of comfort in these words, for all Christ’s believing members. In themselves, and in their own doings, they see nothing to please God. They’re daily sensible of weakness, shortcoming, and imperfection in all their ways. But let them recollect that the Father regards them as members of His beloved Son Jesus Christ and He see no spot in them.*”

Ephesians 1:6-7—“...He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

Jesus received what He did not deserve so that we might receive what we do not deserve. This is the basis for our identity and security as believers. The gospel is all about an exchange so that in Christ, sinners can now become sons.

Romans 8:16-17—“For the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.”