

Preparation for Ministry

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Mark 1:9-13

Let's turn our attention to our text for this morning. Mark, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens the following words:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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." The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Mark 1:9–15

Brothers and sisters, the grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

I. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS (v.9-11)

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

Mark opens verse 9 telling us, "Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee." This is the only mention of Jesus' hometown in the gospel of Mark. Nazareth was a small, obscure village in Galilee that wasn't mentioned in the Old Testament nor was it mentioned by the well-known Church historian, Josephus in later writings.¹ It's safe to say that coming from Nazareth didn't do much for Jesus' reputation. As a matter of fact, for some, Jesus was just as obscure as the town He came from - simply a nobody from nowhere. But nothing could be further from the truth. For out of Nazareth comes the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

¹ John D. Grassmick, *Mark* (The Bible Knowledge Commentary; ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck; 2 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 2:104.

Mark tells us that Jesus came from Nazareth to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. Remember the mass “exodus” we saw last week as all the country of Judea and Jerusalem were going out to be baptized (cf. 1:5)? Jesus was among the crowd.

Jesus has been living in Nazareth for the last 30 years according to Luke 3:23, after being born to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. He had been working as a carpenter (cf. Mark 6:3), a τέκτων. But now, Jesus leaves Nazareth. The time has come. He closes the carpenter shop door and heads out to meet John the Baptist, right on schedule. He is about to go public.

The baptism of Jesus was the inaugural event of Jesus’ public ministry. This is interesting. Why was Jesus baptized? He was the sinless Son of God. For what reason was Jesus baptized? Matthew colors in a little context for us in Matthew 3:13-15 when he writes “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?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.” Here again we see the humility of John. John sees himself as being unworthy to baptize Jesus. His attitude is, “Who am I?” Remember, John saw himself as unworthy to even stoop down and untie the sandals of the Messiah (1:7). In his estimation, he should be baptized by Jesus. But notice Jesus’ response. He said, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

To say that Jesus’ baptism was a baptism of repentance would be contrary to the teaching of the entire New Testament. Jesus had no sin of which to repent. But there certainly are definite reasons Jesus came to be baptized. Though He Himself was without sin, He came to identify Himself with sinners who received the baptism of repentance. Let me suggest three reasons Jesus came to be baptized by John:

- A. It was an act of obedience.
- B. It was an act of self-identification.
- C. It was an act of self-dedication to His messianic mission, signifying His official acceptance and entrance into it.

Look at verses 10 and 11. Mark writes, “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.” These verses are bursting with imagery. First notice the word “immediately.” This is the first of 42 occurrences throughout Mark’s gospel. Three things set Jesus’ baptism apart from all others who were baptized.

A. He saw heaven being torn open.

Mark uses the forceful verb *σχίζω*, which is translated “split” or “torn open”. Matthew and Luke use the less forceful, simple verb “opened”. Mark is interested in highlighting the fact that God is breaking into the human experience to deliver His people. Mark uses the same verb one other time in at the crucifixion of Jesus when the centurion confesses that that Jesus is God’s Son and the temple curtain is “torn in two from top to bottom”.

B. He saw the Spirit descending on Him like a dove.

The dove imagery likely symbolizes the Spirit’s powerful creative activity. Moses wrote in the creation account, “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” Genesis 1:2. The dove is also symbolic of purity, meekness, gentleness, and sacrifice.

It’s noteworthy that while most of our English translations say that the Spirit descended “on” Jesus like a dove, the Greek preposition that Mark uses is *εἰς* “into”. Literally, the Spirit descended “into” Jesus like a dove. What does this mean? How are we to understand what is taking place here? In order to understand, we need to remember that Jesus is theanthropic. He is *theos* = God and *anthropos* = man. He is the God-man. He is 100% divine and 100% human. At no point in His life does His divine nature eclipse His human nature or His human nature eclipse His divine nature. Jesus possessed the Spirit in His divine nature as He grew up. The Spirit descending “into” him like a dove is to be understood as the Spirit coming in a unique way to empower Jesus for the earthly ministry that lie ahead.

In Old Testament times, the Spirit came on certain people to empower them for service. The coming of the Spirit “into” Jesus empowered Him for His messianic mission. Luke, in Acts 10:38, tell us, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” It’s interesting to note that Jesus never performed a miracle until after the Holy Spirit descended on Him in this special way.

C. Jesus heard a voice from heaven.

Prior to Jesus’ baptism God had been silent for centuries. This is the first time in 400 years that God has audibly spoken. And God Himself confirms what Mark has already told us: Jesus is indeed the Son of God who pleases His heavenly Father and is beloved. The imagery here is one of a coronation. God the Father is expressing His unqualified approval of Jesus and His mission. It should be understood that the first words God speaks to inaugurate the New Covenant would be incredibly important. Let’s look at God’s declaration to His Son.

THE FATHER'S DECLARATION OF THE SON

- A. The first declaration, "You are My Son," affirm Jesus' unique sonship with the Father. Jesus' baptism isn't your ordinary baptism. It is a coronation. The significance of the Father's words hark back to Psalm 2:7 where God enthroned the anointed King as His Son.
- B. The second clause, "My beloved," is either a title ("the Beloved") or a descriptive adjective ("beloved" Son). As a title it stresses the intensity of love between God the Father and the Son. As an adjective, it can be understood in the Old Testament sense of an "only" Son. This would highlight the eternal sonship of Christ. Abraham's deep love for his Son Isaac when he was called to sacrifice him on Mt. Moriah is the clearest prototype for this aspect of God's heavenly declaration of His Son (cf. Genesis 22:2). The Father's divine proclamation, "You are my Son," expresses the steadfast love of God for His Son as well as their essential unity.
- C. The final phrase, "With You I am well pleased," points to the kind of kingly Son Jesus was to be in His earthly mission. There is an allusion here to Isaiah 42:1. God says through the Prophet Isaiah, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations." It's interesting to note that the verb "well pleased" in verse 11 is actually in the past tense ("I was well pleased"). What are we to gather from this? Timeless in force, it is rendered in English in the present tense to indicate that God is pleased with His Son at all times. God's delight in His Son never had a beginning and will never end.

What does this mean for you and me? J.C. Ryle notes that there is immense comfort for us found in the Father's words to His Son. He says, "There is a rich mine of comfort in these words, for all of Christ's believing members. In themselves, and in their daily doings, they see nothing to please God. They are 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. He sees no spot in them. He beholds them as "in Christ." Clothed in His righteousness, and invested with His merit. They are "accepted in the beloved," and when the holy eye of God looks at them, He is well pleased."²

It's important to note that Jesus' baptism didn't change His divine status. He did not become the Son of God at His baptism. Neither did He become the Son of God at His incarnation. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. From eternity past Jesus has been the second member of the Triune Godhead. His baptism served to show the far-reaching significance of His acceptance of His messianic vocation as the suffering Servant of the Lord as well as the Davidic Messiah.³

² J.C. Ryle, *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 5-6.

³ John D. Grassmick, 2:105.

Jesus' baptism is a keystone in His life and ministry. The empowerment of the Spirit to be God's Servant, and the declaration from heaven saying, "You are my Son," enable Jesus not only to speak and act for God, but as God. This is demonstrated by His forgiveness of sins (2:5), acceptance of sinners (2:15), calling of tax collectors into discipleship (2:13), healing the sick (1:40ff) and casting out demons (1:24), recovery of the true intent of the Sabbath (2:28), and challenge to the Jewish religious establishment (7:1ff), the temple (11:12ff), and the Sanhedrin (14:61ff). It is no coincidence that when Jesus is later confronted by the Sanhedrin asking, "By what authority do you do these things?" He drives His questioners back to His baptism (11:27-33). What Jesus does as God's servant ultimately has meaning only because of who He is as God's Son.⁴

II. THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS (v.12-13)

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

Notice again that our story moves along very quickly. "Immediately" after the highpoint of Jesus' baptism, the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Heaven had just opened before Jesus, now Hell opens with all its fury. Look at verses 12 and 13. Mark writes, "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him."

Compared to Matthew and Luke, Mark's account of Jesus' temptation is brief. Mark says nothing about the temptation's content, its climactic end, or Jesus' victory over Satan. Rather, Mark's concern was that this began an ongoing conflict with Satan who kept attempting through devious means to get Jesus to turn aside from God's will.

The verb used to describe the action of the Holy Spirit here is ἐκβάλλω. The NASB translates it "impelled". It means to be "cast out," "driven away," "thrust out," or "forcefully sent". This language doesn't suggest in any way that Jesus is unwilling or afraid to face His adversary, but rather is Mark's way of expressing the intensity of the events that will follow. No sooner was the glory of the hour of Jesus' baptism over than came the battle of temptation. No time was spent basking in the glory of the heavenly voice or the presence of the heavenly dove. Jesus had a task to perform and he moved toward it speedily.⁵

⁴ James R. Edwards, *PNTC – The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 38.

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Matthew – Galatians, The Bible Exposition Commentary NT vol.1* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1989), 111.

Jesus was “being tempted by Satan”. “Tempted” is the Greek verb *πειράζω*, which means “put to the test,” “scrutinize,” or “prove” in order to discover the kind of person someone is. It is used either in the good sense of God’s testing (cf. Hebrews 11:17) or in the bad sense of enticement to sin by Satan. Both senses are involved here. God put Jesus to the test (the Spirit led Him to it) to show He was qualified for His Messianic mission. Satan, on the other hand, tried to draw Jesus away from His divinely appointed mission. Satan and his forces are in constant, intense opposition against God and His purposes, especially Jesus’ mission. Satan tempts people to turn aside from God’s will, accuses them before God when they fall, and seeks their ruin.

We should also note that Jesus’ sinless nature does not mean that He wasn’t actually tempted. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, “He himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted” Hebrews 2:18. Jesus’ temptation bears witness to His true humanity. His victory over sin bears witness to His true divinity.⁶

THE FIRST TEMPTATION (Matthew 4:3-4)

We first need to note that his temptation was intensely real. Satan is cunning, crafty, and wise. Matthew tells us that it was after fasting for forty days and forty nights that the tempter came to Jesus – who was undoubtedly hungry – and said, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” Notice what Satan does here. He attacks the very declaration that the God the Father made about Christ at His baptism. Remember, God said, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Satan’s tempts Jesus to prove Himself. But if Jesus bit the hook and proved Himself, He would have demonstrated distrust in His Father’s word. History proves that we sinfully love the Father’s bread more than we love Him. But that wasn’t the case for Jesus. Jesus’ food was to do His Father’s will (cf. John 4:34). For Jesus, and we would do well to learn from Him, honoring the will of His Father meant more than the temporary pleasure of food. Doing God’s will should mean more to us than our physical well-being or even life itself. Jesus lived out the Psalmist’s words, “Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips” Psalm 63:3–5. Jesus employed the Word of God and responded to Satan saying, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” But Satan wasn’t finished with Jesus.

THE SECOND TEMPTATION (Matthew 4:5-7)

This time, Satan brings Jesus to the highest point of the temple and again attacks God’s Word. He says, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot

⁶ John D. Grassmick, 2:106.

against a stone.”⁷ Again, Jesus is tempted to use His power apart from His Father’s will. It was as though Satan said, “You have shown your trust in the Father in response to my first temptation, now show the world how much you trust Him by throwing yourself from the temple rafters. After all, the Scriptures promise you’ll be safe. Good things will certainly come from this.” But Jesus doesn’t bite the hook. He knew that the Father had not commanded Him to jump and He wasn’t about to sidestep His Father’s Word. Jumping from the temple is never justified, even if the results “appear” to be profitable in some way, if God has not ordered it. External prosperity is not a good measure of God’s approval. God approves of obedience. Notice again that Jesus used God’s Word to combat Satan’s temptation saying, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

THE THIRD TEMPTATION (Matthew 4:8-10)

Satan’s third attempt to dissuade Jesus from His mission comes in verses 8-10. Matthew writes, “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’” Satan presented Jesus with a vision of the world in which the nations stood ready to disband their man-made idols and fall at His feet in worship. In other words, Satan falsely offered the crown apart from the crucifixion. He tried to woo Jesus with the fact that He could win the world without the rejection, without the pain, without the agony of the cross. The temptation was to take the easy route to kingship - to sidestep the cross. But the cross was the Father’s will and Jesus wouldn’t take a single step away from what His Father had ordained – even if it cost Him his life. Jesus sends Satan packing when He declares, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.”⁷

It was God’s will that the wilderness be a testing or proving ground for Jesus. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” Hebrews 4:15. Just as the Israelites went into the wilderness for forty years and failed, Jesus is sent into the wilderness for 40 days and succeeds. Now, having triumphed over the enemy, Jesus can now go forth and call people to share in His inheritance. Because of our solidarity with Jesus, we too can have victory over sin. This is the good news we preach and must believe. Jesus is triumphant in my stead.

In this Genesis 3 fallen world, it’s impossible to escape the assault of temptation. At times, it seems as if temptation comes from every direction. Peter reminds us, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” 1 Peter 5:8. But you’re not left without sufficient defense. In Christ we have the Spirit of God, the Word of God, and prayer. These are our God-ordained weapons of defense in the moment of trial

⁷ Thoughts from R. Kent Hughes, *Mark – Jesus, Servant and Savior vol.1* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 29-32.

and temptation – but you must employ them. Martin Luther, in perhaps his magnum opus hymn, penned these familiar words:

*And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

Mark highlights an additional detail that isn't found in Matthew or Luke's account of Jesus' temptation. Mark adds, "And He was with the wild animals." There are a couple things to note here. First, the mention of wild animals serves to emphasize the dangers associated with being in the wilderness. This is undomesticated territory. Jesus was sent out into a hostile environment. Secondly, there may be some allusion here as well. Remember the garden setting? God placed Adam in the midst of a beautiful and peaceful garden over which he exercised a priestly reign and dominion. But he lost that privilege because of his sin. Jesus, on the other hand, is sent into a dangerous, uninhabited wilderness and emerges victorious over temptation and sin and thus reestablishes the Kingdom of God on earth. In Christ, the dominion that Adam lost has been restored for all who trust in Him. The picture here is also one of a future peace and righteousness when Jesus returns and establishes His Kingdom.

Lastly, take note that angels were ministering to Jesus as he faced the onslaught of Satan's fiery temptations. There are divine reinforcements in the hour of trial. You might remember the story in 2 Kings 6 of Elisha and his servant when they were surrounded by their enemies in Dothan. Jeremiah records the story, "When [Elisha's servant] rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see." So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" 2 Kings 6:15-17. Here is the reality, brothers and sisters. Jesus wasn't left to fight the battle of temptation alone, and neither are we!

CLOSING BENEDICTION

As we bring our corporate worship to a close this morning, hear this benediction from the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:14, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." And all God's people said, "Amen!" Go in peace!