

**PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY**  
**Mark 1:9-13**  
**August 13, 2006 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

Last week, in looking at verses 1-8, we noted both the person of the gospel, Jesus Christ (v. 1) and the preparer of the gospel (vv. 2-8). The main character in that narrative was the preparer, John the Baptist and Mark's emphasis was on his actions as the forerunner of Jesus. In our text this morning, Mark shifts the spotlight back to the central character in this gospel, Jesus Christ – and Jesus never leaves the scene. Jesus is the focal point of every narrative in Mark from this point forward. While there are other characters, it is Christ's action towards or with these others that is of greater interest to Mark.

However, before the narration of the events of Jesus' ministry, Mark shares this account of Jesus' preparation for His ministry as Messiah. What we see this morning is that *the baptism and temptation of Jesus was necessary to confirm His ministry, both publicly and personally.*

**I. The Baptism of Jesus (1:9-11)**

Mark begins his narrative on the baptism of Jesus, **“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”** **“In those days”** indicates that at some point in the ministry of John the Baptist, whose ministry was to prepare the way for the Messiah by preaching a baptism of repentance, Jesus came to be baptized by him. Luke indicates that Jesus' baptism occurred at the height of John's ministry (Lk. 3:21) and the apostle John places it the day after John the Baptist's statement of unworthiness (Jn. 1:28-29). In Mark's account we notice three things about the baptism of Jesus.

**1. The humility of Jesus' baptism (v. 9)**

Jesus' humility is seen first of all in the place from which He came. Jesus' humble *beginnings* are covered in much more detail by Matthew and Luke, both who elaborate on the birth of Christ to Joseph and Mary, two relatively unknown people. He was born in Bethlehem, not a city of great renown. His birthing room was a stable because there was no room found for them in the inn. And His first crib was a feeding trough. The events surrounding the birth of Christ would not be what one would expect to find with the birth of a King.

Mark chose not to give any detail, of Jesus' birth or childhood but simply notes, **“Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee.”** Like Bethlehem, Nazareth was no thriving metropolis. According to one source,

Nazareth occupied only sixty acres, with a population of only about 500. In his writings Josephus (the notable Jewish historian) named some 45 Galilean towns but never once mentioned Nazareth, and neither does the Talmud, which names 63 Galilean sites. The insignificance of Nazareth provoked disparaging comments already in Jesus' day, such as Nathanael's retort, “Can any good thing come from Nazareth (Jn. 1:46)?” [*Archaeological Study Bible*, 1623]

We might add to this that Nazareth is never mentioned in the Old Testament either. And yet, according to Matthew (2:23) and Luke (2:39-40) this is where Jesus spent His childhood and early adult years, working as a simple carpenter with his legal father Joseph. He remained in Nazareth until the beginning of His ministry at the age of thirty (Lk. 3:23). So we see the rather less than ordinary life of this Jesus from Nazareth.

But we also notice Jesus' humility in submitting to the baptism of John. We must remember the fact that John's baptism was "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (1:4). Yet Mark says that He "who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), the "One who was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15), *willingly* "**came from Nazareth**" and "**was baptized by John in the Jordan.**" This was an act of His own volition. He voluntarily came to John to be baptized. At this point the question might arise, "Why was Jesus baptized?" We will attempt to answer that question in a moment when we look at the purpose of Jesus' baptism. But one of the reasons for His baptism was that He might identify Himself with sinful humanity. There is no greater humility known to the human race than Jesus, God of very God, becoming flesh and dwelling among us and identifying with us as man. One of the ways he did this was by submitting to the baptism of John.

So Mark demonstrates the humility of Christ both in the place from which He came, the town of Nazareth, and in His submission to John's baptism.

## **2. The confirmation of Jesus' baptism (vv. 10-11)**

Three signs we see in these verses confirm the baptism of Jesus. First, Mark says, "**Immediately coming up out of the water**" Jesus "**saw the heavens opening.**" The word here translated "**opening,**" is the Greek verb *schizō*, which literally means "to rend; to tear asunder." It is much stronger than the verb *anoigō*, the word used by Matthew and Mark that simply means "open." Mark shows a significant event of cosmic proportions taking place the moment Jesus comes up out of the water. The heavens are literally split and Jesus is able to gaze into the glory of heaven. Many see this as a fulfillment of Isaiah's request in Isaiah 64:1, "Oh, that You would rend the heavens *and* come down." The significance of this fulfillment is shown by Edmond Hiebert, "The event implies the start of a new era of open communication between heaven and earth" [*The Gospel of Mark*, 32]. I believe he is correct. Remember, God had been silent for 400 years. There was no prophecy, no evident work of the Spirit, no communication from God. Now God bursts onto the scene once again through Jesus Christ!

The second sign that Jesus saw was "**the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him.**" The descent of the Spirit upon Him again is seen in the prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; <sup>2</sup> To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn" (Is. 61:1-2). The Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus at this moment is universally accepted as the Spirit's anointing Jesus for the specific ministry He had as Messiah. However, the Spirit's appearance in the form of a dove brings all sorts of speculation. Some connect it with Genesis 1:2, where the Spirit is seen brooding over the waters at the Creation. Others think of the dovelike qualities of gentleness and peace. Some point to the dove as the bird of sacrifice for the Jews and Jesus sacrifice on their behalf. Still others relate the dove in this scene to the dove in the account of the flood in Genesis 8. Some of these have more warrant than others. The truth of the matter is that we really cannot be certain. The importance here is that the dove serves as a visible representation of the Spirit's confirming work of Jesus.

The third sign is a verbal sign. God the Father speaks! "**And a voice came out of the heavens: 'You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.'**" While the voice is not clearly identified in this pronouncement, there can be no doubt as to who it is. God the Father is pronouncing His Son's baptism satisfactory. He does so by bringing together the thought of two Old Testament prophecies. "**You are My beloved Son**" reflects the great coronation Psalm 2:7,

“I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’” These words focus on the authority granted to Jesus the Son as King. **“In You I am well-pleased”** echo Isaiah 42:1, “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights.” Isaiah 42 is the first of Isaiah’s great Servant Songs of which the most popular is Isaiah 53. Isaiah sets forth the Servant, Jesus Christ, in whom God delights. So we see in the Father’s confirmation of Christ the outline of this gospel, Jesus’ authority in who He is (chaps. 1-8) and Jesus’ ministry as Servant in what He does (chaps. 9-16).

### 3. The purpose of Jesus’ baptism

“Why was Jesus baptized?” I often asked myself the same question in reading this text when I was younger. It is certainly a valid question given Jesus’ sinlessness and the purpose of John’s baptism. John himself seemed a bit shocked by Jesus’ request to be baptized as well. Matthew tells us, “John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?’” (Mt. 3:14). There are four purposes for Jesus’ baptism that will help us answer the question, “Why was Jesus baptized?”

The first is found in Jesus’ response to John in Matthew 3:15, “But Jesus answering said to him, ‘Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us *to fulfill all righteousness.*’” In this we see Jesus’ baptism as a legal and ceremonial act to fulfill the Law. He was under the same Law as all men and this act of baptism was in fulfilling the righteous demands of the Law. As one writer states, “‘All righteousness’ is a reference to God’s plan and purpose for Jesus. Part of that plan was the complete identification of Jesus at the very outset of his ministry with man and sin. This he did by submitting to baptism” [Walter Wessel, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Mark*, 623]. Thus the first purpose for Jesus’ baptism is deliberately identifying Himself with sinners. Kent Hughes notes,

Because Jesus was sinless, he needed no baptism of repentance. But in his baptism he associated himself with us sinners and placed himself among the guilty – not for his own salvation but for ours – not for his guilt but for ours – not because he feared the wrath to come, but to save us from it. His baptism meant the Cross! [*Mark*, vol. 1, 24]

Which leads to a second purpose of Jesus’ baptism, to set forth visibly the ministry that He came to accomplish at the Cross. Baptism is a picture of His death, burial, and resurrection. This is why we believe that baptism is by immersion. These verses alone warrant such an understanding. Jesus was **“baptized”** by John in the Jordan River. This is a form of the Greek word *baptizo*, which means “to plunge or to dip.” Further, Mark says that Jesus came **“up out of the water.”** This also indicates that John immersed Jesus. As one writer notes, this “almost certainly refers to *from beneath the water* rather than *upon the bank* [James Brooks, *NAC: Mark*, 42-43]. So Jesus baptism by immersion by burial in the water and coming up out of the water is a picture of His death, burial, and resurrection.

This leads to a third purpose of His baptism, to serve as an example to all his followers. Baptism by immersion is a normal response of faith by those who have come to faith in Christ. We will baptize one here in a moment. In this baptism, she will be professing her faith in the accomplished work of Christ on her behalf. Baptism is an outward response of an individual that demonstrates that they have identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. That is why when we baptize we do so with the pronouncement, “Buried with Christ in baptism. Raised to walk in newness of life.” It is an outward expression of an inward reality.

A final purpose for Jesus’ baptism was to serve as an inauguration of His ministry. It is here that He is anointed by the Spirit for the work to which He was called. We mentioned the Greek

word *schizō* earlier, “to rent or tear asunder.” Various commentators note that Mark uses the word on only two occasions, here and in Mark 15:37-38, “And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. <sup>38</sup> And the veil of the temple was torn in two (*schizō*) from top to bottom.” Thus, the word *schizō* serves as bookends for the beginning and the end of Christ’s ministry on the earth.

The baptism is the keystone in the life and ministry of Jesus. The empowerment by the Spirit of God to be God’s Servant, and the declaration from heaven, ““You are my Son,”” enable Jesus not only to speak and act *for* God but *as* God. [James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 38]

So the importance of the baptism of Jesus was to establish His authority as the one and only Son of God, endowed by the Father and empowered by the Spirit to act as God in all things. In it, He identifies with His people. And His people, when they are baptized, identify themselves with Him.

## II. The Temptation of Jesus (1:12-13)

Mark writes, “**Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness.**” Mark highlights the close relation between Jesus’ baptism and temptation by use of his characteristic word “**immediately.**” Not only is Jesus humility shown in His baptism but in His subjection to these temptations of Satan in the wilderness. Again, Mark is brief. He does not go into great detail as to the specifics of the temptations and the victory over Satan as do Matthew (4:1-11) and Luke (4:1-13).

### 1. The Spirit sent Jesus into the wilderness (v. 12)

The same Spirit who came upon Jesus at His baptism immediately drives Him out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. The Spirit, having come upon Jesus, at once took control. Matthew 4:1 specifically asserts, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness *to be tempted by the devil.*” Jesus did not wander into the wilderness on his own. He did so under the compulsion of the Spirit. The significance of this event is captured well by one writer, “God’s Son Meets God’s Adversary” [Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 39].

But what was the purpose of these temptations? Geoff Thomas gives a wonderful description of God’s intention in these temptations.

We are told that it was the Spirit of God that sent Jesus into the wilderness. He had just been baptized in the Jordan. He had heard the voice of God, and the Spirit of God had come upon him and remained on him. From such a peak redemptive experience he was taken by the same God off into the desert to deal with Satan. In other words, the temptations of Christ were all determined by God. One day he would take Jesus into a far worse wilderness called Golgotha. The temptations of Job were similarly planned by God. When Paul was troubled by a thorn in the flesh he tells us that it was a messenger of Satan, but also that it had been given to him by God. So here we have a God who takes the initiative in bringing trials into the lives of every Christian: God tests and tries his children... *Christ's victory in the wilderness resulted in increasing confidence throughout his entire ministry.* [[www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk/sermons/mark4.htm](http://www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk/sermons/mark4.htm)]

These temptations served then to strengthen Jesus in His ministry on this earth. Further, these temptations were in “**the wilderness,**” the place of preparation and calling of prophets in

the Old Testament. It was a place of isolation. We would refer to it as “out in the middle of nowhere.” There were no people around. There were only “**the wild beasts**,” the ministering angels, Jesus, Satan, and we must not forget, the Spirit. Never forget the Spirit’s work in this event. Luke tells us that Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit” and “led around by the Spirit in the wilderness” (Lk. 4:1) for a period of forty days.

The believer has the same power to overcome as Jesus did because he, like Jesus, is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We have the promise of Paul 1 Corinthians 10:13, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” We have the promise of John, “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 Jn. 4:4).

## **2. The temptations of Jesus were real (v. 13)**

Last year I was asked to preach on “The Impeccability of Christ.” *Impeccability* concerns Christ’s inability or incapacity to sin. It deals with the question, “Could Jesus Christ have sinned?”

Theologians through the centuries have been divided on this question. Some hold that Christ was *peccable*, or able to sin. They concede that as God, Jesus could not have sinned, but they attest that as man, He could have. One bible professor put this to a jingle, “Jesus could not have sinned if He would, and would not have sinned if He could.” Those that hold this view typically go to the temptation of Christ in the wilderness as their primary proof. For them, if Jesus was unable to sin, or *impeccable*, then the temptations were really meaningless. They were not real temptations. However, this drives a division between the deity and humanity of Christ.

So if Jesus was impeccable, not able to sin, then why the temptations? If Jesus could not succumb to the temptations, then what was their purpose? The answer is to prove His sinlessness. A.W. Pink elaborated on this idea:

Probably there were many reasons why God ordained that His incarnate Son should be tempted by men, by the Devil, by circumstances. One of these was to demonstrate His impeccability. Throw a lighted match into a barrel of gunpowder, and there will be an explosion; throw it into a barrel of water, and the match will be quenched. This, in a very crude way, may be taken to illustrate the difference between Satan’s tempting us and his tempting of the God-man. In us, there is that which is susceptible to his “fiery darts”; but the Holy One could say, “The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me” (John 14:30). The Lord Jesus was exposed to a far more severe testing and trying than the first Adam was, in order to make manifest His mighty power of resistance.

Pink’s statement concerns the nature of Christ as man. Unlike us, Jesus had no sin nature. There was nothing for Satan’s fiery darts to grab onto. In other words, Jesus’ temptations were from without, not within. To this some might say that the temptations were not real because Jesus was protected and morally pure and therefore there is no real struggle that took place by which He can sympathize with us. To this I ask, “Which is easier, to succumb to temptation or to withstand it?” His withstanding and fighting against these temptations enhanced Jesus’ struggle. It was magnified even more by the fact that absolute wickedness was up against the backdrop of absolute holiness. Because of our sin nature there are many temptations and sins that go by unnoticed. We are often spiritually numb to the wickedness around us. Not so with Jesus. He, being at all times full of the Spirit, was acutely and keenly aware of the evil and wickedness around Him. This is the battle He fought and withstood. He never sinned!

## **Conclusion**

- 1. Baptism serves as an outward expression of our identity with Christ.**
- 2. Temptation should be expected by the child of God.**
- 3. We have been given everything we need to overcome temptation (Spirit/Word).**
- 3. When we fail, we should repent.**