

Jesus Begins His Ministry: Mark 1:9-15
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What a blessing it is to study God's Word together, and to study the events of Jesus' life as we go through the Gospel of Mark. I do hope that you will be studying this book on your own during these months that we are studying it together. I encourage you to read through it on your own. Meditate on it. Over Sunday lunch, and at other times, discuss it with family and friends. I pray that God will give us a great excitement about this portion of Scripture and a great desire to understand who Jesus is and what He has done.

The passage that we get to look at this morning is Mark 1:9-15. Here Jesus begins His ministry, and there are three massively significant events that are recorded in this passage. Remember that Mark is the shortest of the 4 Gospels. Mark is concise and eager to move along in the narrative of Jesus' life. He loves the word "immediately." He uses it a dozen times just in chapter 1. And so we get these events in rapid-fire succession. First, the baptism of Jesus. Second, the temptation of Jesus. And then thirdly, the preaching of Jesus. In these events, Jesus begins His ministry.

The Baptism of Jesus (verses 9-11)

Last week we saw how John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord. There's the Old Testament quotation in verses 2-3, and then Mark identifies John as the fulfillment of those prophecies and tells us about John's ministry in the wilderness. He was baptizing and calling people to repentance. He was wearing the uniform of a prophet with his garment of camel's hair and a leather belt. He was eating locusts and wild honey. And his humble role was to point people to Christ and to prepare the way for Him. He says in verses 7-8, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Can you imagine the excitement and anticipation this must have stirred in the hearts of the people? Who was John talking about? Who was this person who was going to be so much greater than John—mightier than John and so much more important that John could not even untie His sandals? Who was this who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit?

John doesn't mention Jesus' name, but shortly thereafter Jesus makes His debut. Jesus was about 30 years of age by this time (Luke 3:23, "Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age"), and had lived in relative obscurity most of

His life. There was the excitement surrounding His birth, of course. And there was the astonishment of the teachers in the temple who talked with Him when He was 12 (we read of that in Luke 2:41-51). But other than that, as far as we know, Jesus was not a famous person through His childhood years or teenage years or during His 20s. It's at this point, around age 30, that He breaks onto the public scene and begins to preach and teach.

And it begins with Jesus' baptism, which is a profound declaration of who Jesus is. Mark began in verse 1 with the words: "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." And now Mark records this event at the beginning of Jesus' ministry which shows that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Verse 9 says, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." Nazareth was such a small town that many of Mark's readers would not have heard of it. So he has to say Nazareth of Galilee. This is in the north. Verse 5 said that all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to John to be baptized. Those were areas in the south, but Jesus comes from a tiny, unknown town in the north. This is not what people would have had in mind when they were thinking about the coming One who would be mightier than John.

And the fact that Jesus is baptized by John makes it even more astounding that this is the One John was speaking of. Think about the stark contrast between verses 8 and 9. It's paradoxical. In verse 8 John compares what he is doing to what this One will do who is mightier than him. Then in verse 9 Jesus comes to be baptized by John.

This is shocking. Jesus is supposed to be mightier than John, but He comes and submits to John's baptism. And this is not only shocking, it's even scandalous. Because what was the significance of John's baptism? It was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Does this mean that Jesus needed to repent and be forgiven for sins? Why did Jesus need to be baptized? Why did Jesus go out to the Jordan River and get baptized by John?

First let's be clear that Jesus did not need to repent, nor did He need to be forgiven for any sins. Jesus He is sinless. Why, then, did He do this? What was the meaning of it? John, himself, recognized the seeming contradiction in this. Matthew 3:14 records that John would have prevented Jesus from being baptized by him, and John said, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" John was saying, This isn't what I had in mind. This isn't the way I thought things would happen. This is backwards. You're supposed to be baptizing me, not me baptizing you. I'm the sinner, not You! You're sinless. So what does it mean?

At least two things are going on here. One is that Jesus is identifying with sinners. Jesus had no sin of His own, and therefore didn't need to be baptized as a sign of repentance. He had no sin for which He needed forgiveness. But Jesus' incarnation is about Him becoming one of us. He took on human flesh. And He did so in order to identify with sinners so that He might bear the punishment that is deserved by sinners. In Mark 10:45 Jesus says, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus became one of us in order to give his life as a ransom for us.

Jesus did not need to be baptized due to any sin of His own. He did not need to be plunged down under the water to signify death to the old self, or be brought up out of the water to signify new life, which are the things that Christian baptism signifies. Jesus did not need to die to an old self or become a new creation. But He did go to the cross and die for sinners and then was raised from the dead. And right here at the beginning of His ministry He already identifies Himself with sinners. He is fully human. He is one of us. And He submits to John's baptism, not because He needed to repent, but because He was fully identifying with those He came to save.

A second aspect of Jesus' baptism is that He is obeying His Father perfectly in order to fulfill all righteousness. This is what He says in Matthew 3:15 in response to John when John was trying to prevent him from being baptized. Jesus says, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus came to identify with sinners, but He also came to do what no sinner, what no human being, has ever done, and that is to live a perfectly righteous life. To obey all of God's commands. To fulfill all righteousness. This is what Jesus was doing. He was actively pursuing everything that the Father was requiring of His people.

And in this way Jesus becomes our righteousness. We are sinful and wicked and deserve God's wrath. But Jesus is sinless and righteous and deserves God's reward. And the amazing transaction that happens when a person repents of sin and trusts in Jesus is that our sin is laid upon Him on the cross, and His righteousness is credited to us. That's what it says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." God made Christ to be sin, even though he was sinless. That is, God made Christ to bear our sin on the cross, so that in Christ we might be counted as righteous. Our sin is forgiven and we are clothed in Christ's righteousness. This is amazing news, friends. Jesus has identified with sinners, and Jesus is our righteousness. He became one of us, and He fulfilled all righteousness. And this means He can go to the cross and die in our place, because He is one of us.

And He can really save us from sin because He is the perfectly righteous One. He takes our sin, and He gives us His righteousness. And we see both of these dimensions in His baptism. He is identifying with sinners, and He is fulfilling all righteousness.

What happens immediately following the baptism is a divine endorsement of Jesus' identity. To think of it in another way, it is Jesus' coronation as King. This is a glorious proclamation that the King is here. He is the One! He is the Messiah, the Son of God. 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.'"

There is a visible component to this event and an audible component. First the visible: the heavens were torn open. The verb that Mark uses here is *schizō*, and he only uses it one other time in this Gospel. The other place it appears is at the end of the Gospel, in Mark 15:38 where, following the death of Jesus, it says that "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." Both of these events reveal Jesus' supernatural identity as the Son of God. The heavens are ripped open at the beginning of His ministry, and the temple curtain is ripped in two following His death.

The statement about the heavens being torn open is also an allusion to Isaiah 64:1, which is a prayer for God to demonstrate His power and save His people. Isaiah prays, "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence." The arrival of Jesus is the fulfillment to that Old Testament prayer. The Messiah has come to save His people.

The heavens were torn open and the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. This is the other visible piece of this extraordinary event. The heavens were torn open, and the Spirit descended. Mark records it in terms of what Jesus saw, but we know that John saw it as well, based on his testimony in John 1:32. And we can assume that the others who were there saw this as well. This was a visible, public, glorious demonstration that Jesus is the Anointed One of God, the One on whom God's Spirit rests.

Jesus' ministry was done in the power of the Holy Spirit. John had just said that the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit. And now the Holy Spirit comes down from heaven visibly as a picture of how He would be present with and empowering Jesus in everything He was going to do.

Then comes the audible component of this event, this coronation, this divine confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah. Verse 11, "And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved

Son; with you I am well pleased.” The voice is the voice of God the Father. And the words that the Father speaks remind us of a couple of Old Testament statements that point to this relationship between God the Father and God the Son. In Psalm 2:7, in a Psalm about the Davidic King, the Lord’s Anointed, the Lord says, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” So this public declaration by the Father is a bold affirmation that Jesus is this Davidic King, the Anointed One which the Old Testament foreshadowed.

These words of the Father also hearken back to Isaiah 42:1, where the Lord says, “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.” And then the other moving story that this reminds us of is in Genesis 22 where the Lord tells Abraham, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” And that relationship between Abraham the father and Isaac the son is a profound pointer to God the Father and God the Son. The Son is the one Son, the beloved Son, of the Father. And the Father sacrifices His beloved Son, and then receives Him back from the grave.

These words that the Father speaks at Jesus’ baptism are poignant words. They are full of rich meaning and significance as the Father announces the arrival of His eternal, beloved Son. He is the One. He is my beloved Son. In Him I am well pleased.

Before we move on to the next verses I just want to make sure everyone sees that Jesus’ baptism is a Trinitarian event. The eternal Son, incarnate in human flesh, comes to be baptized by John. And as Jesus comes up out of the water there is a visible and audible confirmation of Him by the Spirit and the Father. The Spirit comes down as a dove. And the Father speaks from heaven. This is the God of the Bible. One God, existing eternally in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And in this amazing event we see the activity of all three Persons of the Trinity.

The Temptation of Jesus (verses 12-13)

What might we expect to happen after this glorious scene? After this coronation of the King? After the Son is baptized and then affirmed by the Spirit and the Father? It would seem that such an event should be accompanied by a celebration, a feast, a banquet. But that’s not what happens. Instead, verse 12 tells us that “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.” The Spirit *threw Him out* into the wilderness. This was not going to be a pleasant experience for Jesus, but it was something that was ordained for Him. This was a hard trial that God had planned for

Him. It was a necessary testing that He had to endure here at the outset of His ministry. This statement about the Holy Spirit driving Jesus out into the wilderness also shows us who is ultimately in control of what's going on here. Of course, it's Satan who tempts Jesus. But it's God who is sovereign over the whole thing. It's like what we learned in Job. Satan afflicts Job and wants Job to fall. But God is the One who is sovereign over Satan and allows these things for good purposes. It's Satan who is going to tempt Jesus, but it's the Holy Spirit that sends Jesus there to be tempted.

Jesus was already in the wilderness when He was baptized, because He had gone out to John the Baptist, who was in the wilderness. But now the Spirit casts Him out further into the wilderness. The Spirit drives Him out to a place where He is completely alone. He is in such a wilderness spot, in fact, that Mark tells us He was with the wild animals. The point is, there were no people there. This was a wild place, a desolate place, an uncivilized place, a dangerous place.

Verse 13 mentions the wilderness again and tells us how long Jesus was there. "And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan." Just like Israel was in the wilderness for forty years, Jesus spends forty days in the wilderness. But where Israel failed, Jesus succeeds. Where Israel sinned and was punished, Jesus resists temptation and proceeds from the wilderness sinless, demonstrating His perfection and His holiness and purity, proving that He is the One who will crush the head of the Serpent. He is the One who will triumph over sin and death.

There is much that Mark does not record about the temptation of Jesus. Matthew and Luke share quite a bit more. But what Mark wants us to see is the collision of Jesus' ministry with the destructive forces of the adversary, Satan. Jesus is baptized and affirmed as the beloved Son of God, and immediately He is cast out into the wilderness to do battle with the evil one. Jesus has the angels ministering to Him, and the Holy Spirit is guiding Him, but He is head-to-head with Satan himself. This shows the gravity of Jesus' ministry. This shows right from the start what He has come to do.

I'll mention three things that we can take from this as we consider what this means for our own lives. First of all, we see Jesus again identifying with sinners. Jesus Christ is fully God, but He is also fully human. His incarnation was not a masquerade. It was not a show. He really took on human flesh. He really became one of us. And He was really tempted by Satan. It should be a great encouragement to us that we have a Savior who can identify with us. As we face temptations we should remember that Jesus, too, faced temptations.

And that leads to the second thing that is so precious about this, which is the fact that He did not give in to the temptations. Jesus identifies with us in temptation, but He is able to save us because He did not succumb to temptation. Hebrews 4:15 says, “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.” That is our great hope, brothers and sisters. We have a savior who became one of us, but succeeded where each of us fails. We are sinners. We have a sinful nature. We are depraved creatures, and we are disposed to sin. Like Adam, we fall to temptation. But Jesus Christ, the second Adam, resists temptation and triumphs over sin. So in our battle to resist temptation we should be encouraged that we have a Savior who identifies with us in our temptation, and we should leap for joy because we have a Savior who resisted temptation and remained sinless and is therefore the only One who is capable of saving us. He is fully one of us so that He can stand in our place and take our punishment on the cross, and His sinless perfection makes Him a suitable sacrifice for our sin. This is so precious to us.

And then a third thing to remember in this event is the fact that Jesus is taking on God’s archenemy. This will be a key characteristic of His entire ministry, and it begins right here in the beginning. What Jesus is going to be about in His ministry and His death and resurrection is nothing less than a cosmic battle against Satan himself. This is our Savior. He didn’t come just to improve our marriages or make us better parents or better employees or better students. He didn’t come for some limited goal like physical health or material prosperity. He came to deal with the deepest problems of the universe, which are sin and Satan. He came to triumph over sin and to crush Satan. And He is worthy of our praise because He succeeded in these things. We have hope for the future because if we are in Christ by faith then our sin cannot damn us and Satan cannot drag us to hell. Jesus came to take on God’s archenemy, and Jesus won.

The Preaching of Jesus (verses 14-15)

The last verses we’ll look at this morning introduce the start of Jesus’ ministry in terms of what He was preaching. We’ve seen the baptism of Jesus in verses 9-11, the temptation of Jesus in verses 12-13, and now we’re given a glimpse of the preaching of Jesus in verses 14-15. Mark first gives us an indication of the timing of these events. He says, verse 14, “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee.” Mark 6 recounts the story of John’s arrest by Herod. John had been speaking out against Herod, saying that it was not lawful for him to have married his brother

Philip's wife. Remember what I said last week about John's preaching. He was not afraid to speak against sin, and it was for this that he was imprisoned and eventually beheaded.

Mark concisely gives us this detail of the timing of things as a way to show how the role of the forerunner ended as Jesus' ministry came onto center stage. John decreased. Jesus increased.

"Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God." The word for "proclaiming" is an important one. It's *kēryssō*, which means "preach" or "announce." It's the same word that was used in verses 4 and 7 of John the Baptist. He was proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (verse 4), and in verse 7 "he preached" about the One coming after him. And now Jesus comes proclaiming the gospel of God. John and Jesus were both preachers. They were heralds. John prepared the way by proclaiming a baptism of repentance, and now Jesus comes proclaiming the gospel.

The simplicity of this is a beautiful thing. Verse 15 records the content of what Jesus was preaching. He was saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." This is the gospel of God that Jesus was preaching. This is the good news that comes from God and is for hell-deserving sinners like us. This is the good news that was breaking onto the scene of history in the person of Jesus Christ.

The time is fulfilled. The arrival of Jesus meant a time of fulfillment. Old Testament promises were being fulfilled. The plans of God were coming to a culmination in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus. The time is fulfilled. And the kingdom of God is at hand. The kingdom is inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus. The kingdom is at hand because the King has arrived. King Jesus has arrived to usher in God's kingdom. The kingdom is present in the person of Jesus.

The required response to this news is simple and profound. Repent and believe in the gospel. This is what Jesus was preaching in Galilee after John the Baptist was arrested, and this is the same message that God's Word is proclaiming to us this morning. Repent and believe in the gospel. The time is fulfilled! The kingdom of God is at hand! The King is here! Therefore repent of your sins and believe in this good news.

Repentance, as we looked at last week in the preaching of John, is a change of mind that results in a change of life. It involves a decisive turning in one's life. It is turning away from a lifestyle of sin and rebellion against God. It involves grieving over that sin and despising it and wanting to fight against it. And then the other side of that coin is faith, trust, believing. Repentance is turning away from sin. Faith is turning to something else. The way Jesus states it here, it's turning to the gospel. It's embracing

the good news that Jesus is our Savior and King. Turn to Jesus. The following pages of Mark's account will reveal what is involved in this good news. It is the good news of Jesus' perfect life and His sacrificial death and His triumphant resurrection. And Jesus is proclaiming here at the beginning of His ministry that to be part of the kingdom of God one must turn away from sin and turn to Him, resting on His righteousness, resting in the forgiveness we have through His atoning death, resting in the fact that He triumphed over the grave through His resurrection. This is great hope for us today.

This is the great hope of the Christian faith, a hope that is centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ, a hope that is utterly unique and distinct from all other religions. This is the message of the Gospel. Repent of your sins and believe in the gospel. Oh, how I pray that we will love this good news and cherish it in our souls and overflow with joy in it so that the world around us hears about what Jesus has done.

Friend, if you're hearing this and you are headed in the opposite direction, please listen to these words of Jesus Christ. If you are pursuing a lifestyle of sin, if you are rebelling against God, if you are ignoring what God has revealed in His Word and choosing to live according to your own plans and desires, if you are living as though Jesus did not come, as though the time has not been fulfilled, as though the kingdom of God is not at hand, please heed the words of King Jesus. Repent and believe in the gospel. If you disregard these words, there is heartache and emptiness and despair and eternal separation from God that awaits you. If you heed these words, there is hope and joy even in the midst of heartache, and there is eternal communion with God that awaits you. There is the privilege of being part of the kingdom of God. This is the message for all of us, whether this will be your first act of repentance and faith, or whether you have been a Christian for years and are continuing to repent daily of sins and consciously put your hope in the gospel. This is the message for all of us, of ongoing repentance and faith. This is the simple message of the gospel.