

The Servant's Baptism

Mark 1:9-11

In our last study we looked at the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as Mark relates it to us, in the ministry of John the Baptist -- that strange and wonderful ministry which zeroed in on the need for repentance as the place where God meets man. Repentance always is the place to begin with God. A change of mind, a different way of thinking about yourself, about the way you have been and the way you are acting and what your needs are, an acknowledgment of guilt and of your need before God -- that is repentance, and that is where God always meets man.

In the next two paragraphs in Chapter 1, Verses 9-15, the phrase "Jesus came" occurs twice. In Verse 9: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee..." And again in Verse 14: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee..." Those two little words, "Jesus came," are always a formula for dramatic and radical change.

When Jesus Christ made His public appearance there on the banks of the Jordan River, it was a moment that changed the world forever. Ever since Adam sinned in Eden, mankind has needed a Redeemer Who would come and reconcile men to God. Since the dawn of time, fallen humanity had waited for the appearance of a perfect man who would challenge sin and Satan and deliver the human soul from the bondage of evil. Many thousands of suns had risen and set on a world held fast in the grip of crushing iniquity. But, the day Jesus came, everything changed! When Jesus shows up, nothing remains as it was.

Today we want to look at these verses and consider the events surrounding the baptism and temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

9 It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

10 And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.

11 Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

All four gospels record the baptism of Jesus. As we saw last time, a remarkable spiritual awakening had broken out in Israel. Literally thousands of people were leaving their homes, their jobs, their families, and streaming out of the cities down into the desert to listen to this strange, remarkable man, John the Baptist. They were coming out of the cities because they felt the torment of their guilt, their inadequacy, their lack of a sense of acceptance before God. John was offering a way out, and they responded in great numbers. And John baptized all who repented, acknowledged their guilt, and sought forgiveness of sins.

Now this brings us to an important question. Whatever Gospel record we read of Jesus' baptism, the big question the careful reader asks is: **Why was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, baptized?** in this brief account Mark seems to suggest three things which will help us answer that question:

A. The Servant's Identification with sinners

First of all, the significance of the baptism of Jesus is explained in that it is the Servant's identification with sinners. Hebrews 2:17 says about Jesus, the Son of God, **"Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."** Isaiah 53:12 prophesies about Jesus, **"He was numbered with the transgressors."** In His death on the cross, Jesus **"bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors."** The reason that Jesus is baptized like a sinner is because Jesus was associating himself with us. He took our place. This was the first step leading to the cross where He ultimately was made to be sin for us. This was the first sign of His intention to do so, when He took the place of a sinner, and was baptized with a baptism of repentance and confession of sin.

Why was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, baptized? G. Campbell Morgan answers that question this way:

"He was baptized as a repenting soul. His, also, was a baptism of repentance. His, also, was a baptism of the confession of sins. In that hour He repented, He confessed sins, but the repentance was not for Himself, the sins were not His own. In that hour He identified Himself with the multitude who had been thronging out to the baptism, identified Himself with them in the consciousness of sin, in repentance for it, in the confession of it. In that hour of baptism we see the most solemn and wonderful sight of the Servant of God who had come from the silence and seclusion of Nazareth, taking upon Himself the burden of human sin, counting it as if it were His own sin, doing that to which an apostolic writer ultimately referred by declaring: 'He was made sin.'"

Of course our Lord did not come confessing His own sins, He had no sins of His own - but this is the point: He came to make Himself one with those who were confessing their sins.

The baptism of Jesus is the Servant's identification with sinners. Now there's great comfort there in that thought to all of us, or at least there ought to be, because this means that though sinless, though perfect, though holy, the Lord Jesus Christ is able to sympathize with our struggles with sin and with temptation, because though He never sinned, He has actually entered into the shame of sin. That is profound, and it is very comforting for us as sinners!

But there is also a challenge in this thought, we need to ask the question of ourselves: how do we behave towards those who are struggling in sin around us? We often go to great lengths to disassociate ourselves from sinners and from the type of sins that they sin in. And we certainly must live holy lives and avoid sin. But Jesus' baptism causes me to consider: what was it for Christ to identify with sinners? It was a greater cost than it would ever cost us to identify with them! But His great cost to Himself meant great gain to us, His utter selflessness in being willing to lose all reputation to be identified with sinful men.

Alexander Whyte, speaking of General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, says this of him: "The General sits down on the same form,

himself beside the off-scouring of the city, thus it is that he gets his penitent form so well filled, and his Salvation Army so well recruited. It was something not very unlike that when He, who knew no sin, came to the Jordan waters along with the Roman soldiers and the Jewish publicans who were there confessing and forsaking their sin." What a lesson in evangelism!

B. The Servant's Consecration as Savior

What I'm talking about is that there is a decision made here by the Lord Jesus, a commitment, dedication of Himself to God. For 30 years He had stayed in Nazareth faithfully doing His days work, discharging His duties in the workplace, probably at home after the decease, we think, of Joseph. He must have longed for a sign to lead Him out into the Father's will for His life's purpose, His Father's business. John's preaching and baptism was that sign, and the moment He knew John was there He launches Himself out upon His life's task. His baptism by John the Baptist signifies His entire consecration of Himself to be the world's sin-bearer.

In other words, by being baptized He is yielding Himself up without any reserve to do His Father's will, even if it involved the cross. This is what the Lord was doing, consecrating Himself to be the Savior, "to fulfill all righteousness" as He says in Matthew.

Prophetically David tells us of the Messiah's attitude in Psalm 40:7-8, where he says, **"Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God."** Jesus is consecrating Himself as Savior, dedicating Himself to God's will. Though He is truly God, He was a man; though He was a Son, He became a Servant; and now as He is about to enter into His life's ministry, He consecrated Himself to do the will of the Father, whatever that may be. Hebrews 5:8 says, **"though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."**

So Jesus was baptized to identify with sinners, to consecrate Himself as savior, and third, Jesus was baptized to show:

C. The Servant's Approval by the Father

What meaning did Jesus' baptism in the mind of God? What did it mean for the heavens to be torn apart and the voice of God to speak? God had not spoken in such a manner since the law of God was given at Sinai's Mount! What did it mean?

Mark shows us something significant here. Matthew records that God said: 'This is my beloved Son', whereas Mark records: **"You are My beloved Son."** Mark shows this a personal experience which Jesus had, not just a demonstration to the crowd. At His baptism Jesus submitted Himself to the Father, and at that moment He was approved by the Father. This was a personal approval of the silent years of Jesus' life for 30 years in obscurity - but it is also an approval of the work that He's about to embark on, the work of the cross!

These words from the Father are a combination of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. Psalm 2 speaks about a Son, a King, who has the nations for His inheritance, who possesses the ends of the earth, and who rules them with a rod of iron. Isaiah 42 says, **"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom**

My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him." So the Father combines both prophetic ideas of the Messiah, the Christ, in one approving statement. The Son He loves is the Servant in whom He is well pleased. Jesus came as the Son of God, the righteous King. And He came as the Suffering Servant who would give His life a ransom for many. So the Father ratifies Jesus' identification with sinners and His consecration as Savior going to the cross.

And fourthly, Jesus' baptism shows

D. The Servant's Anointing by the Spirit

What is happening now, when the Spirit comes upon him like a dove? The answer is that Jesus is given a new manifestation of the Spirit. Now, this is not the first time Jesus had the Spirit -- we must not think of it that way. Jesus lived by the power of the Spirit His whole life.

To use the language of Scripture, Jesus was *anointed* by the Spirit at this point. In Old Testament times they anointed kings and priests by pouring oil upon their heads, committing them to the function and office in which they were to serve. This is the picture of what is now occurring in Jesus' life. He is being anointed by God through the Spirit with power and authority to meet the demands of the ministry upon which He is about to launch.

Some weeks later, in the synagogue at Nazareth, Luke tells us, Jesus quoted a passage in Isaiah 61 which dealt with this, and applied the words to himself:

**"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,"**

One commentator put it like this: 'Not only the Son loves His followers enough to suffer the pangs of hell in their stead; but also the Spirit fully cooperates by strengthening Him for the very task; and the Father, instead of frowning upon the One who undertakes it, is so very pleased with Him that He must needs rend asunder the very heavens, that His voice of delightful approval of God might be heard on earth. All three are equally interested in our salvation, and these three are One'. Of course, it's a wonderful demonstration of the doctrine of the Trinity - the Spirit coming in the form of a dove, the Father's voice speaking, and Jesus in the Jordan being baptized.

Isaiah had pleaded with God in Isaiah 64:1, **"Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!"** What is the baptism of Jesus? The heavens were opened to show that the heaven that once was closed because of our sin, shut against us personally, is now opened by Christ undertaking His role as the Servant of the Lord. Jesus came from obscurity and isolation for 30 years from Nazareth to Galilee. He came to identify with sinners. He came to consecrate Himself as the Savior. He came to be approved by His Father, to be anointed by the Spirit, and to begin His saving work.

Application:

As remarkable as this event was, nevertheless all these things that happened to Jesus can happen, and, indeed, must happen in us as well. That is the whole point of the gospel. Jesus was taking our place; therefore what happened to Him must happen in us.

Jesus identified with sinners, and we must recognize that we are sinners in need of a Savior. To be saved, we must be found in Jesus, united with Him through repentance and faith. Have you confessed your sin and your need for a Savior? Have you repented, turned away from your sin, and turned to Jesus to rescue you from sin and death?

Jesus consecrated Himself as Savior, and when we are united with Jesus Christ by believing in Him, we must also be consecrated, set apart to serve the Lord. Have you submitted to the will of God and consecrated yourself to be the servant of the Lord?

Jesus was approved by the Father. And when we are in Christ we are accepted and loved by God the Father as well. We are adopted as children of God. Can God say of you, "You are my child, in whom I am well pleased?"

Jesus was anointed by the Spirit. And when we trust in Jesus to save us, we also receive the Holy Spirit. That is why Jesus, standing with his disciples after the resurrection, said to them, **"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth,"** (Acts 1:8). The Spirit of God must come upon us. The gift of the Holy Spirit must be given to us, so that we might have the power to live as God wants us to live.