

**Mark:
A Father's Love for His Son**

Mark 1:9-13

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January 25, 2004

Now turn with me once again to the Gospel of Mark, and we pick up the reading this evening in Mark 1:9, and we'll be reading through to verse 13. Before we read the Scriptures together, let's come before God together in prayer. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, we come and ask again that You would breathe an illuminating light upon Your word. We ask that You would break it open to us. Help us to understand that which we read, and help us to treasure it within our hearts, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Hear the word of God:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.

Thus far God's holy and inerrant word.

Matthew and Luke provide a much fuller description of these events, particularly the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness. Mark is in a hurry. He's like that. You'll notice that as we study the Gospel of Mark together. He's always giving us minimum detail. This passage is all about Jesus, tells us several things about Him: how He comes down from Nazareth, goes to the wilderness to meet John the Baptist, is baptized in the River Jordan, the Spirit comes down upon Him in the form of a dove, and immediately He's driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted for 40 days. I want us to go straight into the passage. We don't have time for *hor d'oeuvres* this evening; there's a meal on the table here.

I. Jesus submits to baptism.

The first thing that I want us to see is that Jesus submits to baptism. He undergoes the baptism of John. We were looking at this last time, John's baptism. It's a little different from Christian baptism. This wasn't baptism in the name of the Trinity, but this was a baptism that Mark calls (and other gospel writers call) "a baptism of repentance." Its focus was on the need for the people of God to repent of their sins. They were in breach of covenant. There's something of a lawsuit—you lawyers should understand this particularly. There's something of a legal lawsuit that lies behind this: they'd broken their word; they'd broken their promises. It's almost as though John's baptism was a declaration of war, an ultimatum. They've been invited into the wilderness; it's a sign. They're in breach of contract; they've slighted the covenant of God. The waters of John's baptism were symbolic of the need for cleansing. It was a sign of judgment.

Do you remember how Paul picks an aspect of this up and applies it to Christian baptism? In 1 Corinthians 10 he's talking about the baptism of the people of God as they passed from Egypt and through the Red Sea and into the wilderness. Do you remember they passed on dry land and they were baptized "into Moses and in the cloud and in the sea"? The Egyptians were destroyed. It was a sign of judgment. The baptism saved them, but it was also a sign of judgment.

Peter takes it up in 1 Peter 3. It's a difficult passage, and Peter is alluding to Noah. And Peter is saying, 'You know, the waters, the deluge, the flood that came upon the world'—Peter refers to it as a baptism. Eight people, eight souls were saved but the rest of mankind perished. There's an aspect of baptism that's a sign of judgment.

In Mark's Gospel the words of two of the disciples, James and John, and you remember that they want to be on either side of Jesus in the coming of the kingdom? And do you remember what Jesus says to them? "Can you drink of the cup that I drink of, and with *the baptism* that I am baptized with?" He's talking about His death. He's talking about the cross, and He calls it "a baptism."

Mark doesn't actually record John the Baptist's argument with Jesus that He didn't need to be baptized. He had no need for a baptism of repentance: He had nothing to repent of. He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. But Jesus is standing in the waters of the Jordan River and John pours water over him, symbolic of cleansing from pollution. Thousands of men and women...Some have recorded that it was as much as 300,000 people who had come to be baptized by John. They came from all over Judea and Jerusalem, but now Jesus is there. He's standing in perhaps the shallow waters of the River Jordan, and John is pouring this water over Him, symbolic of a baptism of repentance. What is this? He's publicly identifying with sinners. He's saying, 'I too will identify with this. I too will become a sinner in need of repentance.' How could Jesus have repented? He never sinned. Throughout the gospels, you know,

Jesus was about saying, "I forgive you." He never asks for forgiveness. He confers forgiveness; He forgives sins by divine power. And now here He is in the Jordan River undergoing a baptism of repentance. You will remember, perhaps, what one of the gospel writers adds in order to explain this, some words of Jesus to John: "Permit it. For this time," Jesus says to John, "for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

What's going on here? Well, several things are going on here all at once. This is the official commencement, inauguration if you like, of Jesus' public ministry. It begins with this baptism; it ends with His ascension. You know, when they are substituting for one of the disciples, for Judas who is now dead, you remember in the Acts of the Apostles, and they are choosing another disciple. They have to choose someone who had known Jesus "from the time of Jesus' baptism until the time that He was taken from us," they say. This is an important moment. This is Jesus' inauguration into public ministry.

Baptism, as you know, was used in the Old Testament. It was a form of consecration. When a priest would reach a certain age, actually roughly 30 years of age according to the Book of Numbers, the very age Jesus is now, in chapter 8 of Numbers, he was baptized; he was consecrated; he was set apart, showing that God had called him into service.

The Lamb of God, the Mediator, the Servant of the Lord is being inaugurated into the public ministry that will take Him to His death. It's a sign that Jesus is willing to play the role of the Mediator. He's willing to become our Redeemer. In this baptism, Jesus is stepping down; He's entering humbly to receive this baptism. He's ready to except this humiliation in our room, in our stead, in the role of Messiah, in the role of Savior and Redeemer. It's on behalf of us as Jesus fulfills the terms of the covenant. He did not need a baptism of repentance. He didn't need to repent on our behalf, but He identifies Himself with us. He becomes, as it were, a sinner in our room, in our stead. He becomes the covenant-breaker. He becomes the one who has violated the terms of the contract with God, and it'll cost Him. It'll cost Him His life. It'll cost Him shed blood. It'll cost death. This is Jesus' public pronouncement of His obedience as He takes on now the office of the Mediator in a public fashion.

This is His active obedience on our behalf. You know, theologians have talked about the *active obedience* and the *passive obedience* of Christ. They have spoken about Jesus on the cross as His sort of passive obedience, but now there are all manner of other acts that Jesus did that led up to that moment. This is one of them, and at every point of His life and ministry He's identifying with us so that He can become our substitute and our mediator. When Gresham Machen was dying he sent a telegram to his longtime colleague and friend, Professor John Murray, and the telegram read, "Thank God for the active obedience of Christ." Machen was passing through a lot of suffering, and at every point he could identify with his Savior, that he knew that his Savior had been here, had met this

trial, had met this temptation, and met it victoriously at every point. Jesus is being baptized.

II. Jesus is anointed with the Spirit.

Secondly, Jesus is anointed with the Spirit. Something extraordinary happens. Try to imagine it: the heavens open up. I've been trying to imagine it all week. I'm not quite sure what that actually means, what it would look like, the heavens opening up. There are some wonderful paintings that have tried to depict this. And the Spirit descends. The only other time that Mark actually uses this word, "the rending, the tearing apart of the heavens," is when he describes the tearing of the veil after the death of Jesus. It's pictorial language that says, 'God is going to come now. The word of God is about to be spoken. God is about to make something known.' The Spirit of God and the word of God combine together in Jesus, and this revelation that's about to come, it's as much to Jesus as it was to John, and that it was to any others who might have heard it.

A little later back in Nazareth in the synagogue on a Sabbath day, Jesus, you remember, will read from Isaiah the prophet, from chapter 61, the passage which speaks of the Spirit having come upon Him to preach the good news, to open the eyes of the blind, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to open the prison for those who are bound, and so on. And then He says...you remember what He says? "Today this has been fulfilled in your ears." The Spirit has come down upon Him—the descent of the Spirit to enable Him, to strengthen Him, to fulfill the office of the Mediator. This baptism of the Spirit was a sign as much to Jesus as to John and the others. It comes, to God's priest, to proclaim God's word as a prophet. The word that He heard is reminiscent of the second Psalm, "You are My Son, / Today I have begotten You." And then it goes on to say, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the uttermost parts of the earth as Your inheritance."

Jesus is a priest; He's a prophet; He's a king. And all of that is being revealed in a moment. He will preach in dependence on the Spirit. He'll battle with Satan in dependence on the Spirit. He'll overcome temptation, as we shall see in a moment, in dependence on the Spirit. Notice that the accomplishment of redemption on our behalf is Trinitarian: the Father speaks; the Spirit is sent down onto the Son. All three—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—three persons in one God now combined together in operation and in fulfillment of a promise to save a people to Himself.

Why a dove? The Spirit comes down in the form of a dove. Why? Back in the beginning of your Bibles, do you remember, in the opening chapter of Genesis, and Mark has already hinted something about the opening chapter of Genesis by the very way that he begins the gospel, "The beginning of the gospel." And perhaps he's giving us a clue, but he's already alluded to Genesis 1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." And do you remember that

the Spirit brooded, hovered, bird-like over the waters, that in the process of the original creation, the Father and the Spirit and Jesus were all operating? And now, perhaps, Mark wants us to pick this up, that Jesus has come to *recreate*, to undo the consequence of the Fall. The last Adam is here who will undo that which has befallen creation. And in this One, standing now in the waters of the Jordan River...in this One a new creation will dawn.

III. Jesus hears His Father's voice.

And then, thirdly, Jesus hears His Father's voice. God is present, and He speaks. "This is My beloved Son..." "This is My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." No doubt that was a word that John needed to hear. No doubt that was a word that others needed to hear, the corroboration of the Father as to the identity of Jesus as God's beloved, eternal Son.

But you know it was as much for Jesus as anyone else. Jesus is entering publicly into His ministry, a ministry that will lead to His death. And as though, yes, even Jesus, in all the splendor and glory of the person of Jesus incarnate, the Father says, 'Look! I love You. I want You to know this.' Some of you fathers have spoken to your sons at important moments in their lives—as they've gone off to college, as they get married, or perhaps more importantly and pertinently when they're going to face a trial, a difficulty—and you've said words like this, "I love you. I want you to know this. I want you to know this when you won't hear my voice. I want you to know this when it appears as though I'm far away."

There would be such a moment for Jesus. On the cross, you remember, He didn't say, 'My Father, My Father, why have You forsaken Me?' as though the concept of His own sonship had been veiled for a moment. What He said was, "My God," and all that He was aware of on the cross was His identity as the incarnate One, as the weak One, in frail, human flesh now ousted onto a cross and dying and in darkness and hearing no voice from above. And here, you remember, as on the Mount of Transfiguration when the future, I think, was unveiled to Him perhaps a little more, His Father speaks this word of reassurance, 'You are My Son, and I love You.' And surely it would be a light to Him in dark places.

IV. Jesus is tempted.

And, fourthly, Jesus is tempted. Notice the language here, and it's the language of Mark to be sure, "The Spirit," verse 12, "immediately..." No sooner has the Spirit come down upon Him, no sooner has the Spirit witnessed with the Spirit of Jesus that He is the eternal Son of God, that the Spirit drives Him into the wilderness—the wilderness again, a little reminder of creation that is now fallen. Jesus hadn't come to Eden; He'd come into a fallen world; He'd come into a

world ravaged by sin. He's come into our world, this horrible world of wars and rumors of wars and death and disease and disfigurement and trial and pain and sorrow. And Jesus is driven into the wilderness. That's where redemption must be won. If He is to restore a fallen creation, if He is to restore what Adam lost, He must go not to Eden, but to the wilderness. Oh, by the way, don't be surprised when you consecrate yourself to the Lord, you give yourself in abandonment to the ways of God, don't be surprised if trial comes immediately on its heels. There's a cosmic battle taking place now. 'Jesus is driven into the wilderness,' Mark says, 'to be tempted by Satan.'

Now notice this (and this is so important): It is God who has the initiative here; it isn't Satan. The Spirit dictates the terms. This is a surprise attack. This was unannounced. I think it caught Satan off-guard. He wasn't prepared for this. Perhaps Satan had thought that Jesus would now be marched triumphantly as the King of Kings into Jerusalem, but it was not so. He was driven to meet Satan in enemy-occupied territory. He's sent...He's driven on a mission to engage the enemy. He's going unannounced into his presence, into his lair, into his very den. It's the first major assault on the kingdom of darkness, and the initiative is entirely that of the Spirit and of Jesus. And Satan tempts Him, but Mark doesn't give us the details. You will remember the other gospels do, but Mark doesn't.

Were they real temptations that Jesus faced? Did Jesus feel the appeal of the sinful, wicked proposals that were put to Him? Did He smell the scent of illicit power, and did His saliva glands begin to work at the prospect of yielding to these temptations? Were they real? Was there a struggle? Was there a fight? You know, one old church fathers said that (Well, I don't know how old he was, but he was a church father, and it was a long time ago), "Jesus could dispel the assault of the devil like vapor." Would that it were so. It certainly isn't like that for us, is it? To switch off a television program, or to delete that wretched pornographic advertisement that comes unsolicited onto your computer monitor, to resist the pride that often accompanies praise—oh, how hard it is! Jesus didn't win His victory without effort and without struggle, without pain. In Gethsemane, His sweat, do you remember, it was as great drops of blood falling to the ground. The writer of Hebrews speaks of His "strong crying and tears." The very fact of who Jesus was meant that Satan had to attack Him with all the energy of his disposal.

You know, he doesn't have to do much to bring us down. In fact, he doesn't have to come personally; he just has to send one of his minions. Just a little word, just a little suggestion, that's all it takes for us. But Satan himself has to deal with Jesus and bring to bear all of his powers and push to the very limits of his ability. Jesus was tempted for 40 days, those symbols of Israel in the wilderness, and symbolic that the Messiah has come to form a New Israel in the Church of God. You cannot imagine the force of this temptation.

You cannot even begin to imagine it: its power, its appeal, its subtlety. There was

nothing of Jesus that Satan could get a handle on: Jesus wasn't fallen. He had no sin. You know, Satan can get his hooks into our hearts because our doors are wide open. He has to do something different with Jesus. He has to try to get Jesus (just for one moment) to do something for Himself instead of for others, to abandon (just for a moment) His role as the Mediator and just operate on the initiative of His own divine power. You remember one of the temptations: Turn this rock, this stone into bread. Do you think that was difficult? Was it difficult for the Creator of the heavens and the earth? You've seen those pictures of Mars: Jesus made that. He made that just like *that*. Do you think it was difficult for Jesus to turn a few rocks into a few loaves of bread? No, of course not. But in so doing, He would no longer have been the Suffering Servant, the lowly servant of God incarnate in flesh and blood. He would've been working on the initiative of His own divine power and working for Himself and not for others. In baptism He identifies with them, and at the end He dies the death a sinner dies. And, oh, how His holy heart must've longed to shrink from that, and those are the areas that Satan tempted Him.

Jesus is the One to whom now we turn when we are tempted, the Great Victor. Martin Luther once said, when asked how he defeated Satan, he said (it's something like this), 'Satan comes and he knocks on the door of our hearts. And he says, "Who lives here?" And Jesus goes to the door and says, "Martin Luther used to live here, but he no longer lives here. I live here now." And He slams the door shut.' Our Substitute and Mediator and King has gone to war against Satan and has emerged victorious. And it is with Him, Christian, that you are in union.

And one last thing. Do you notice at the end of verse 13 that angels minister to Him? In the Garden of Gethsemane, do you remember that an angel came and ministered to Him, sent at the bidding of His Father to take care of His Son? They take care of you too, every day, every moment of the day, as God sends His ministering spirits to watch over you. Don't you want to see those mighty creatures? One day you'll see them. One day. Alexander White once said that next to Jesus, the first person that he wanted to see was that angel in the Garden of Gethsemane that ministered to Jesus. What a prince he must be. What a royal prerogative he was sent on in his mission. What trust God put in him to go and minister to His Son in His hour of need. And every day Jesus sends them forth to you and to me. Open your eyes, Christian. Open your eyes. Let's pray together.

Our Father, these are such mighty and glorious words we can scarcely take them in, but we thank You for Jesus. We pray that we might love You, Lord Jesus, more and more. And bless us now this Lord's Day evening. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

A Guide to the Evening Service

The Themes of the Service

Last week, we began a new series of sermons on the Gospel of Mark—*The Mark of a Christian*. Tonight we come to the baptism and temptation of Jesus. In the midst of it we hear the cry of God the Father giving expression to His love for His only-begotten Son. What wondrous Love is this! The focus of our worship this evening will be to catch a glimpse of our Savior's love for us in His willingness and obedience to do His father's bidding.

The Psalm, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs Under the Care of My God, the Almighty (Psalm 91) The words come from Psalm 91. One person who experienced God's comfort and peace through Psalm 91 was the famous 19th-century British preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. In 1854, shortly after Spurgeon had been called to pastor a London church, the city experienced a major cholera epidemic. "Family after family summoned me to the bedside of the smitten," he later wrote. The death rate was so high that Spurgeon was conducting funerals daily. The long hours trying to comfort the grieving and personal discouragement over the scope of the epidemic left Spurgeon feeling weak, vulnerable, and frightened. He felt it was only a matter of time before he came down with cholera because of his contact with so many of the dying. "I became weary in body and sick at heart. My friends seemed to be falling one by one, and I felt that I was sickening like those around me." An exhausted Spurgeon was sinking.

But that soon changed. As Spurgeon was returning from conducting yet another funeral service, a flyer posted in a shoemaker's shop window got his attention. The flyer contained sections of Psalm 91, including these heartening words: "You will not fear the terror of night ... nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you" (Ps. 91:5-7).

The impact of Psalm 91 upon Spurgeon was dramatic. He wrote: "The effect upon my heart was immediate. I felt secure, refreshed, girt with immortality. I went on with my visitation of the dying in a calm and peaceful spirit; I felt no fear of evil and I suffered no harm. The providence which moved the tradesman to place those verses in his window I gratefully acknowledge, and in the remembrance of its marvelous power, I adore the Lord, my God."

Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken (Tune by Bill Moore)

As we prepare to contemplate the Father's love for His Son, it is very appropriate that we sing of our personal consecration to the Son. We sing it tonight to a tune written by our own Bill Moore.

The Spirit Breathes upon the Word — A hymn that asks for the help of the Holy

Spirit to open the Scriptures to our hearts and understanding.

The Sermon

The baptism of Jesus marks His public entrance and consecration into public ministry. Mark has told us nothing of the first thirty years of Jesus' life—so eager is he to tell us of what Jesus did for us during the last three years of His life!

The baptism of John the Baptist has a slightly different focus to what we usually call “Christian” baptism. His, as Mark has already made clear in the opening verses, was a “baptism of repentance” (1:4). Jesus is identifying Himself with the need for repentance! Since He is without sin, this signals for us the substitutionary character of His ministry. He had nothing to repent of, but in His willingness to become the Savior, he must be “made sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). There are indications that (at the age of thirty) Jesus may have been identifying Himself with the role of the priestly ministry, since that service usually began at this age. Just as the Great High Priest prepared himself for his atonement-day ministry by publicly washing and anointing, so Jesus is washed by the waters of John's baptism and receives the Holy Spirit (1:10). The fact that heavens are said to open signals that new revelation is about to be given. God is about to speak. This is one of those moments of great significance. The Father is declaring His love for His Son at the very point of His identification with sinners! The words are meant to be of comfort to Jesus as much as for the instruction of those who heard it. Jesus was now in need of being reassured of His identity as the eternal Son. The road He had chosen was to be darker than any which we will ever see. As He begins the journey into the ravages of hell on behalf of His own, His Father burst forth with the words, “I love you.”

Endowed by the Spirit, reassured by His Father's words, the Son goes forth—into temptation. Mark (who loves the word “immediately”) informs us that commitment to service is always tested, and in Jesus' case, the testing was immediate. Satan must try and undo this moment as best he can. And there to help Him in His hour of need were angels! Don't you wonder at their ministry? Tonight, we witness the Commander in Chief on the field of battle. And He is victorious!

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