

The Rain Maker

Summaries of Mark Part 1

Mark 1:1-11 4/29/2018

Summary: Mark presents the gospel in 4 parts: 1) Who Jesus is (Son of God), 2) What he came to do (turn the desert of God's judgment into a lush forest by pouring out the Spirit and bringing salvation), 3) How he plans to do it (through humility, suffering, and death!), and 4) How we can get in on it. For the rain to fall on you, you must repent.

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Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **2** It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"-- **3** "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" **4** And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. **6** John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. **7** And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. **8** I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. **11** And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, **13** and he was in the desert for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Introduction

What is Rain?

I'd like to begin by reading a verse that, for many people, is one of their favorite verses in the Bible.

Hosea 6:3 Let us know the LORD; let us press on to know him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.

That's a wonderful promise, isn't it? But what does it mean, exactly? When God comes to you like the winter and springs rains – what is that like? How can you tell that it has happened? And if it isn't happening, what can you do to make it happen?

The 4-Part Gospel

Today I would like to begin a study through the Gospel of Mark. There are four book in the NT that describe the life of Jesus – the Gospel of Matthew, Gospel of Mark, Gospel of Luke, and the Gospel of John. All 4 show us the glory of Christ from a different angle, and it's appropriate to refer to them all as gospels, but Mark is the only one that actually uses the term “gospel” to describe his book. It's the very first thing he tells us in v.1 of his book.

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ

In the NT, the word **gospel** refers to the entire Christian message. The message that Jesus preached and taught through his actions, and that he propagated through his Apostles. Basically, the entire NT – that's the gospel. And in the gospel of Mark, it's presented in 4 parts:

- 1) who Jesus is
- 2) what Jesus came to do
- 3) how he plans to do it
- 4) how you can get it in on it

We won't get to #4 until next week, but let's start with part 1 – who Jesus is.

1) Who Jesus Is: The Son of God

Mark doesn't burn a lot of words establishing that one. He knocks it out in the very first sentence of the book.

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Matthew and Luke give long genealogies. Mark just says, “You want to know who Jesus is? Son of God. Next question?” That settles it for Mark – Jesus is the Son of God. That's a reference to Psalm 2, where God the Father speaks to the future Messiah and says:

Psalm 2:7 ... "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. 8 ... I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You will rule them with an iron scepter" ... 10 Therefore, you kings ... you rulers of the earth. ... 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed

Who is Jesus? He is a divine being and he is the messianic Son of God from Psalm 2 who will rule the world.

2) What Did He Come to Do? Bring Rain

That's who Jesus is – how about part 2 of the gospel: what Jesus came to do? Instead of telling us; Mark is going to show us. One thing we'll learn about Mark is that he writes with a paint brush instead of

a pen. So many times instead of just telling us an answer, he paints a picture to show us the answer in a vivid way that we won't forget. And that's what he does in this opening section of the book to show us what Jesus came to do. He came to do something about the problem of the desert.

The Desert = the Absence of God

The first 13 verses of the book are the prologue, and the backdrop of the prologue is the desert. Desert is mentioned 4 different times in that section.¹ That's the backdrop. If Mark were making a movie instead of writing a book, I think I know how it would start. It wouldn't be like Luke, which opens with the high priest in the glorious and awesome golden interior of the Holy Place in the Temple in the holy city. It wouldn't be like John, which opens in the mysterious counsel of God before the beginning of time. The opening scene of Mark's Gospel would start with the camera zoomed in on a scorpion, and then a tumbleweed rolls by as the camera pans out and you see that you're in the middle of a desolate wilderness. As far as the eye can see, deserted, uninhabited land, no sign of civilization, and no way to get to civilization, and the wind howls through sharp, gaping canyons and steep, barren hills with rock walls – a desolate wasteland.

And that's not just scenery to add color to the story. It's a key part of the message of the book – part 2 of the gospel. And it all comes out of that quotation from Mark's absolute favorite book of the Bible – Isaiah. Mark loves to quote Isaiah, and the first time is right away in v.2 of the book.

2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"-- 3 "a voice of one calling in the desert

In the book of Isaiah, the desert represents God's judgment on Israel. They had rebelled against him, and so he withdrew his presence from them. And when God does that, life turns into a desert wasteland. When God withdraws his presence, all of life dries up.

And the whole first half of Isaiah is all about that desert of God's judgment that was coming on Israel. The second half of Isaiah promises a time when God will finally relent and bring his presence back to his people. It will be like refreshing, life-giving rain falling on the desert and turning that desert into a lush, green rainforest. And he would do that by pouring out his Spirit.

Isaiah 32:10 ... the harvest of fruit will not come. ... 13 a land overgrown with thorns and briars ...14 The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland... 15 till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest.

So the first half of Isaiah is all about the desert of judgment, and the second half, starting in ch.40, is all about that renewal that will come when the rain of the Holy Spirit falls on the desert and turns it into a flourishing forest. And guess where Mark is quoting from here. The opening paragraph of that second half of Isaiah. Thirty nine devastating chapters of judgment and desert, and then this:

Isaiah 40:1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed that her sin has been paid for ... 3 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

So do you see what Mark is doing? By painting this backdrop of the desert and then quoting that passage, he showing us that when Jesus arrived on the scene Israel was still in that desert of judgment. They had been in it for 700 years. But now, none other than the Son of God himself has arrived to bring restoration and to fulfill the promises of the second half of Isaiah. He's going to be the one who will pour out the Holy Spirit.

¹ The voice calling in the desert in v.3, John baptizing in the desert in v.4, then Jesus being sent out into the desert by the Holy Spirit in v.12 and being tested in the desert 40 days in v.13.

8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

So that’s what Jesus Christ came into the world to do – to bring salvation, restoration, renewal ; to pour out the Spirit of God on the people of God and turn the spiritual desert into a flourishing forest of blessing by bringing the presence of God back to his people. He will destroy the wicked, eliminate evil altogether, and usher in the great, glorious age to come. That’s what Jesus came to do.

Now, will he do it immediately? No, he’s going to roll his kingdom out gradually. And Jesus will explain the details of how all that will look in ch.4. But for now, Mark just wants us to know that Jesus’ mission was to come and put an end to the spiritual desert.

The Solution to Dryness

This is one of the most important things you can learn in life – that when God withdraws his presence, life turns into a desert. It dries up. And the solution to the desert is the Son of God pouring out the Spirit of God. That’s true in every context – large scale and small scale.

When you turn on the news and you get depressed – crooked politicians, crime, injustice, poverty, war – this world is in a spiritual desert. When we see that, our temptation is to think in terms of natural solutions. We need to vote for better politicians, we need better laws, better policies, more money, protests, gun control. None of those things will even make a dent in the problem of evil in the world. The solution is the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. Nothing short of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be powerful enough to solve the problem.

And all of that is true at the individual level as well. In your own life, when God is distant and your life turns into an unfruitful, unproductive desert – what’s the solution? More activities? More friends? Better physical health? More money? No – it’s the grace that comes through Jesus Christ. Sometimes as Christians we forget the basics. When your life is dry, don’t over-complicate it. Draw near to Jesus. Will that make your troubles go away? No, but it will bring grace and hope and joy and strength and endurance and love into your heart while you’re going through all the troubles.

Preparation

So here’s a question – if Jesus came to bring all this wonderful restoration, where is it? Why is there still so much spiritual dryness in the world? And in our own lives? If you have your Bible, look again at v.2 where Mark quotes Isaiah. It’s actually a quotation from both Isaiah and Malachi.

2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"-- 3 "a voice of one calling in the desert, `Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

Before God comes a voice will come first. And that voice will prepare the way for God to come. Who is this voice? And how does he prepare the way for God to arrive? Part of that quotation (that phrase **who will prepare your way**) comes from the last book in the OT – Malachi. And if we look in the context there we find that the voice belongs to a future prophet who will be a lot like Elijah. And the way he prepares the way is by preparing the hearts of the people to be receptive when God comes. In other words, he will call people to repentance. That has to happen before God will come and bring salvation because the wheels of God’s restoring love will only drive on the highway of repentance. The whole reason they were in the spiritual desert to begin with – the whole reason they were far from God, was because of unrepentance. And so if God comes back and they are still unrepentant, that won’t be a good thing for them. Instead of receiving salvation, they will be punished even more.

So in his mercy, God sends a messenger ahead of him to call them to repentance. If you imagine a city that is rebelling against the king, and so the king comes with his army to destroy that city. But he’s a merciful king, so he sends a messenger ahead of them to warn the city and plead with the people to drop their arms and join his side before he arrives. Anyone who does that will be given full amnesty and

forgiveness, and will receive all the glories and blessings of that kingdom. But anyone who refuses will be destroyed in the judgment.

So all of that is the promise, and Mark begins his book with an announcement that that voice from Isaiah 40 has arrived, and it's John the Baptist.

3 “a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ ” 4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins

He's the one. John is the voice in the desert. “Is he also the Elijah figure from Malachi?” Yes. That's the point of v.6

6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist

According to 2 Ki.1:7-8 that's the exact outfit of Elijah. Everyone knew that. On Halloween, if you put a garment of hair and a leather belt on your kid and sent him out trick-or-treating, everyone would immediately say, “Oh cute! Look at the little Elijah.”²

No Excuse

So John is the forerunner, and the people knew it. God did such mighty works through John the Baptist that everyone in Israel knew without question that he was a true prophet of God.

4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Imagine you were there. You look around at the masses of people streaming out to the desert – walking away from Jerusalem into the wilderness. You're being jostled by this huge crowd coming out of the Denver area making your way on foot 30 miles out to Keenesburg. And you're huffing and puffing because it's pretty rough going, descending about 4000 feet in elevation. You've never seen anything like this in your life.

You finally arrive at the place, and the entire hillside is covered with people. A lot of them are soaking wet. The rest are waiting in line. And when you get close enough to hear, you're amazed as you listen to one person after another after another confessing their sins – soldiers, peasants, merchants, tax collectors, fishermen, young, old – publicly confessing specific incidents of stealing, lying, sexual sin, selfishness, greed, coveting. And you think to yourself, *Wow, you don't see that every day.* This is a truly astonishing thing.

It was astonishing because the people were waiting for a savior who would save them from temporal trouble and hardship, not a savior who will save them from their own sin. They baptized Gentiles who were converting to Judaism, because they considered Gentiles unclean. But never Jews. To tell Jews that they needed to be baptized would imply that they were just as unclean as the Gentiles, and they needed to be cleansed, and be initiated into the people of God as a new convert. That message would be an incredibly tough sell in first Century Judaism – or at any time in Jewish history. But John was such a powerful preacher that the masses came out to him and confessed their sins and submitted to his baptism of repentance.

Now, is all this confession true repentance? Will it last? Will the people of Israel embrace Jesus as the Messiah? Mark is going to hold us in suspense with all those questions. He'll show us the answer as he continues through the book, but for now, he just wants us to see the overwhelming positive response to John's ministry.

² Luke states that explicitly. **Luke 1:17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah...** That's what Luke says, but remember, Mark writes with a paintbrush instead of a pen, so instead of spelling it out like that, he just paints us a picture of John the Baptist walking around in an Elijah costume.

All of that is important because it says something about the people who rejected Jesus. God sends a prophet, makes it so crystal clear that he's a true prophet that the whole nation knows without question that he's a true prophet from God, and after they all go out there and affirm that he's from God, John tells them who Jesus is. So they have to accept what he says or they are just flat-out rejecting God. Even later on, after John was killed, the people still believed he was a prophet from God. So they knew John was telling the truth. There is no excuse. None of them could say, "What? Jesus is the Messiah? I didn't know that. How could I have known?" No one could say that because God made it so clear that John was a true Prophet.

God always gives adequate proof. No one ever has any excuse for rejecting Jesus Christ. When people don't understand the truth of the gospel of Christ, it's always because of a heart that is not willing to accept it.

So, we know John is from God, and whatever he says about Jesus you can take to the bank. So what did he say about Jesus? Did John vouch for him? He did more than that.

7 And this was [John's] message: after me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

Matthew 11:11 says John was the greatest man who ever lived up to his time. The greatest human who ever walked the earth was so far below Jesus that he wasn't even worthy to serve Jesus in the lowest, most menial way.³ You can't express the superiority of Jesus over John in any stronger terms. He will be orders of magnitude greater than the greatest man who ever lived. He will have a higher position, a higher calling, a better heart, a closer relationship with the Father, a greater portion of the Holy Spirit – Jesus is greater in every way – so much greater that John is not worthy to so much as attend to Jesus' feet.

We Get to Serve Christ!

And by the way, John wasn't exaggerating. He really wasn't worthy to serve Jesus or to even touch his feet. No one is. No one deserves that high privilege. Certainly not me. But can you believe, even though I'm not worthy of it, I have been given that privilege? So have you. You and I have been given the privilege that John the Baptist was never given. He never got the chance to serve Christ, but you and I can do it every single day. Jesus said whatever you do for the least of his brothers, you do for him (visiting him in prison, providing food and clothes, etc.). We can do all kinds of wonderful things for Jesus by serving his people for his sake.

3) How: Humility, Suffering, & Death

Ok, so we've seen the first two parts of the gospel. Part 1 (who is Jesus?) – He's the powerful Son of God who will rule over all. Part 2 (what did come to do?) – He came to pour out the Spirit of God and bring restoration and renewal and salvation to the people of God. So far that made good sense to the people. They could accept those first two parts easy enough. But then comes part 3 of the gospel, and here's where everything gets turned upside down. Part 3 is a shock. It's a surprise. No one saw it coming. It makes no sense to anyone, it was a huge stumbling block, and all through this gospel we're going to see everyone, including Jesus' own disciples, refuse to accept this part of the gospel even after Jesus says it right to their face in simple, straightforward terms.

So what is it? Mark is going to unfold it gradually, methodically, bit by bit as we go through the gospel. But I'll go ahead and let the cat out of the bag right now and tell you. The third part of the gospel that people had such a hard time accepting is this: Jesus will accomplish this salvation in a shocking way. He'll do it by humbling himself, becoming a servant, then being rejected and suffering and dying.

³ Nothing was lower than attending to the feet. There were even rules that forbade Jewish slaves from removing his master's sandals. Only gentile slaves were to do such a lowly job.

Mark 8:31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke plainly about this.

Nobody saw that coming. In fact, even when Jesus put it that plainly, still, Peter couldn't handle it.

32 ...Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

Nobody envisioned a suffering Messiah (even though it's right there in Isaiah 53). If you were captured by terrorists, and seal team 6 came to rescue you, and when they showed up, they laid down their weapons, surrendered, and allowed the terrorists to line them up and shoot them and they all died, you'd be pretty disappointed in that rescue. You'd be quoting the great theologian Princess Leah: "This is some rescue."

But part 3 of the gospel is that Jesus will bring this great deliverance and salvation by humbling himself and suffering and dying. And as hard as that is to accept, it is an essential part of the gospel. Without it, you don't even have the gospel. I think that's the main reason why Jesus keeps telling people not to spread the news about him. He doesn't want people going around preaching about him and his message because they don't understand part 3, which means they don't understand the gospel.

Identification with Sinners

Now, as I said, Mark reveals part 3 of the gospel in a very gradual, deliberate way. Here is chapter 1, instead of stating it explicitly like he does in ch.8, he does what he likes to do – he paints a picture. Instead of telling us about Jesus' humility and suffering, he's going to show us. The first time we see Jesus in Mark is in v.9. The Messiah makes his entrance onto the pages of Mark's gospel for the first time. Drum roll please! What is the arrival of the great Son of God going to be like?

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

What? That's his big entrance? That's not very spectacular.

There you are, bumping through the crowd on your way from Jerusalem out to be baptized by John. And you have no idea who it is, but this guy right in front of you in line looks like he's been on the road for a while. So you strike up a conversation with him, and right away you can tell from his accent that he's from out in the sticks. So you ask him, "Where are you from?" and you expect him to say some village in Galilee.

You already have kind of a dim view of this guy, and you're surprised that, being from Galilee, he would be interested in coming down south and being baptized. Galilee was mostly rural, and the people were generally uneducated, and had a reputation of not being all that interested in God's Word.

So you ask where he's from, thinking it might be Capernaum or some other town up there. And this stranger says, "I'm from Nazareth." "Nazareth? Never heard of it. Where's that?" Jesus was used to that response – he'd gotten it his whole life. Especially when he came down here to Judea.

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee

He has to say **Nazareth in Galilee** because most of the people probably had no idea where Nazareth was. It was an utterly obscure place. And it had no significance at all. It's never mentioned in the OT, Josephus never mentions it, and it's never mentioned in any rabbinic writings. It's an incredibly obscure little village.

And the people who had heard of it weren't impressed by it. When Philip first told Nathanael that they found the Messiah, and it was Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael's response was:

John 1:46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

The only thing the people knew for sure about Nazareth was that the Messiah couldn't come from there. Everyone knew that the Bible is clear that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem – which is in the

Judea area. But this man comes from an obscure village in a despised region, and he **was baptized by John in the Jordan.**

Why Was Jesus Baptized?

That's a little troubling, because the only thing Mark says about John's baptism is that it was a baptism of repentance. Why would this spotless Lamb of God, who never sinned, do something that was a gesture of repentance? Jesus didn't have anything to repent of.

I think there were a few reasons. First, he was identifying himself with John the Baptist and his teaching because that's what defined the people of God at that time. Before Jesus, the people of God was the nation of Israel. After the resurrection, the people of God is the church. But what about in between - during the life of Jesus? What defined the community of God's people during that time? Answer, it's the John the Baptist community. And you joined that community through baptism. So Jesus was baptized by John to identify himself with the community of the people of God.

That's one reason. I believe another reason was to fulfill his role as the representative of God's people. He came as the one, true Israelite who fulfilled all that the nation of Israel was supposed to be, and so he underwent the perfect baptism on behalf of the whole nation to consecrate the people to God, paving the way for God to come in restoration.

But there's a problem. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. Jesus was perfect. He never sinned in any way, so he didn't have anything to repent of. So why would he do something that is for sinners?

The answer is this – part of the reason Jesus came was to identify with sinners. It was even prophesied in the OT that he would be numbered with sinners in his death.⁴ Just like Moses identified himself with the sins of the people even though he himself wasn't guilty of those sins,⁵ Jesus did the same thing.

The Awesome Inauguration

So those are some good reasons why Jesus would undergo the baptism of repentance, but still – isn't there a risk? Isn't it going to run the risk of making it look like John is greater than Jesus? And more than that - isn't it going to run the risk of making it look like Jesus is just another sinner in need of cleansing and repentance? You would think so if it were just a normal baptism, but watch what happens when Jesus comes up out of the water:

10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Heaven Opens

Mark doesn't tell us exactly what it looked like, but from the descriptions in other passages of Scripture we can imagine it. Heaven is always described the same way – brilliant, flashing spectacular Jewels and precious stones – the light of the glory of God refracting through them with infinite beauty and colors beyond description, God's awesome throne surrounded by 4 huge living creatures 24 rulers on thrones, and countless millions of angels.

One thing Mark does describe is how heaven opened.

10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open

⁴ Isaiah 53:9.

⁵ Exodus 32:23.

The other gospel writers just say that the heavens opened, but Mark uses a more violent word – *ripped* open. That language comes from Isaiah 64:1.⁶

Isaiah 64:1 Oh, that you would tear the heavens and come down

Isaiah is speaking for the generation who has been punished by God and is out in the spiritual desert because God has left them and is distant from them. And they can't stand it anymore, so they cry out, "God, you're way up above the heavens, we're down here – come down here to us." The ripping has to do with urgency. They want him to rip up the heavens because the heavens are what stand in between God and them. Picture a father who sees a bully beating up on his kid and instead of just opening the front door he knocks it down because he's trying to get out there so fast. They want God to do that for them. An earth-shattering, heaven-shattering rescue.

That's Isaiah 62, and by using that wording about ripping the heavens open, Mark is telling us – that prayer is being answered at Jesus' baptism. When Jesus was baptized, God shredded the heavens and came down to earth to rescue his people.

Mark only uses that word *ripped* one other time.

Mark 15:37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. 38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

He starts the book telling us the Jesus' arrival ripped the heavens open, and he ends telling us that Jesus' death ripped the veil of the Temple open. From beginning to end, that which separates us from God is ripped to shreds in the Son of God.⁷

So Jesus comes out of the water, and suddenly the clouds roll back, and the blue sky goes to the side so you can see the blackness of outer space. And then that blackness cracks open and you find yourself gazing directly into the dwelling place of God! The first thing you notice is the brilliant bright light and the glorious, spectacular colors and innumerable angels and other glorious beings.

Again, that's speculation because Mark doesn't describe it, but one other thing Mark does describe is what came out of heaven at that moment (or rather, who came out).

10 ... he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

It would have been amazing enough if one of the angels had left heaven and come down. But it's not an angel. It's the central figure in heaven – God himself. God the Holy Spirit does something he had never done before – he takes a physical form.⁸ And he comes right out of heaven, descends down, and lands on Jesus. In fact, the language is that he didn't just land on Jesus, but entered inside Jesus.

Spirit Empowerment

In order to accomplish this awesome task of bringing salvation Jesus is going to need omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit. This is going to be the most dramatic, most powerful, most monumental act of deliverance ever, and so it requires the greatest measure of the Holy Spirit ever bestowed on a human being.

Wow! That's quite the baptism. I guess the fear that Jesus would end up looking like just another sinner wasn't a problem. Everyone else gets baptized and the only thing that happens is they get wet. Jesus gets baptized and heaven cracks open!

⁶ Some have also pointed to Ezekiel 1:1, but in that passage the heavens are not torn and, more significantly, God does not come down. Heaven is opened so that the prophet can see in. The Isaiah 64 passage is a much closer parallel.

⁷ Notice also that in both contexts there is an affirmation of Jesus as the Son of God.

⁸ Luke 3:22.

The Father's Pronouncement

And not only does the Holy Spirit come down, but God the Father speaks audibly. Sometimes people ask, "If Christianity is really true, why doesn't God give us proof by just speaking from heaven?" He did!

10 ... he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

So now we're right back to part 1 of the Gospel. Who is Jesus? Once again – he's the Son of God – confirmed by nothing less than the Father himself speaking audibly from heaven.

Conclusion

This section begins and ends with a clear statement of exactly who Jesus is. That's the starting place of everything – you must understand exactly who Jesus is, which is why it's so important for us to study the Gospel of Mark. The pictures Mark paints are so vivid, if you stick with us all the way through this study, you'll see portraits of the glory of Christ that you'll never forget.

But what about the rest of this baptism account? Why does the Spirit appear as a dove? And why does the Spirit take the action he takes in v.11? And why is it so important that God announce his love for Jesus at his baptism? That's where we'll pick it up next time, and I hope you can make it, because the answer to those questions can make a world of difference in learning how to understand and enjoy God's love for you.