



Speaker:
Paul Forrest

The Launch of Jesus' Ministry

Series: The Gospel of Mark · 2 of 2

5/7/2020 (THU) | Bible: **Mark 1:9-13**

We remarked last time that Mark's is the shortest of the Gospel accounts. We said that there was a different emphasis in this just as in the others. We find that Mark is on the one hand more concise, yet in other places more detailed.

An example of how he can be concise is today's passage in Mark 1:9 to 13. Because somehow, two of the most significant events in the life of Jesus are covered in just five verses!

I've entitled this message *Jesus Enters the Ministry*. Not very original. But why not *Jesus Prepares for the Ministry*? It's because the baptism and temptation that we shall look at today were not merely preparation. They are important factors in his whole ministry.

Think on this. Jesus Christ is the centre of all this commotion at his birth and when he was a young child. We hear about him again several years later and then, again, nothing. That is for the best part of thirty years, we hear nothing about Jesus. He lives in the little town of Nazareth, presumably carrying on with the family business, making chairs or furniture, and selling them—trying to make a living as best he can.

Waiting.

Waiting patiently until the day came when it was time to leave. He had an appointment with John the Baptist at the Jordan. And so he says farewell to the family. And he gets up and he leaves. Packs his stuff and begins the long walk.

As the crow flies from Nazareth to Jordan—that part which was one of the most likely places he was baptized—would be about thirty miles. But in terms of the route he would have taken, it was most likely nearer *seventy* miles. And I can only imagine that he walked. We don't know how long that would have taken him. This is the King of kings, and he was having to walk!

The time for Jesus' life of obscurity was coming to an end. He had this appointment.

And so we look at his baptism. It says in verse 9 that he came from Nazareth. Just a small town. No prestige about it. And you can perhaps understand the attitude of those who were incredulous when presented with the very big claims about this man. I mean, would you believe someone was the Messiah if they came from a small nondescript town or district? If he had come into this world today rather than 2000 years ago, and you heard that this Jesus Christ was from Kirkby or from Tuebrook. If you heard that that a young man was born and bred in one of the small streets off Rocky Lane just down the road from us. And you were a religious type, and someone told you that this man was the Messiah...

I'm not excusing their unbelief. I'm asking you to think how incredible it was that God chose such a humble entrance into this world for the very creator *of* this world.

Now this baptism was not just an example for people afterwards to follow—that they should be baptized in obedience to God. It was more than that. It was about *fulfilling righteousness*. It was necessary to his whole mission.

So he goes to make this appointment, perhaps following the route of the Jordan southwards.

And we know from elsewhere that on that day that he arrived, everyone else was baptized before him. We don't know, but can it be...CAN IT BE THAT THE LORD OF GLORY STOOD IN A QUEUE? NO, STOOD AT THE *BACK OF THE QUEUE*? The long line of people in front of him were sinners, maybe some of whom he came to die for.

And he goes to this River. The Jordan. Not the cleanest of rivers...

You may remember from the Old Testament Naaman the commander. He was instructed to have his leprosy healed by bathing seven times in the Jordan. And of course Naaman had been around, and said that there are plenty of crystal-clear, healthy-looking rivers around the place. *Can we at least do it in one of those?*

The Jordan was despised by Naaman, but not by Jesus Christ. Not despised by the one who many years before had PARTED the Jordan River, on more than one occasion. Parted it miraculously. And yet he's willing to step down into those murky waters. Just another token of his humility. So:

- He comes from a nondescript town
- He has a normal job
- He waits around for *decades* to begin his ministry
- He leaves home and just starts walking
- And he joins a queue, to be baptized by a sinful man who he came to save, in a river that wasn't too attractive.

Humility. Immense humility.

It says in verse 10 that straight away he came up out of the water. Both Baptists and Presbyterians have fought over this verse to try and show from this some mode of baptism. I would just say that we cannot prove one way or the other a mode of baptism from this verse. Because we can either imagine that Jesus was underwater and then John lifted him back out. And in that way, he came up out of the water. That makes sense. That's what the Baptist would have us believe. Another possibility is that he went down the bank into the river, maybe up to his ankles, and had water sprinkled or poured on him. And then he came up out of the water. And that possibility fits the description too. And the Presbyterians would say well, look, this is not proof for immersion. So today we're not going to give a final answer on that particular subject. Water was involved!

What happened after this was quite incredible. It says that Jesus saw the **heavens opened**. The heavens opened. What does that look like? It was as if there was a tear in the very fabric which separates the two worlds, the world of men and the heaven of God. And this imagery is used in the scripture as something desirable. It says for example in Isaiah 64 and verse 1—and we could make this a prayer—it says, “Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence.”

Tear the heavens, Lord.

And here this fabric was torn open to provide a channel through which the Holy Spirit would descend to Jesus and through which the voice of the Father would be heard.

So the first thing we see is this dove. Jesus is perhaps looking up—as it were, facing heaven, praying. And then he sees this manifestation of the Spirit descending. Descending in a form that looks like a dove.

You will be aware that Jesus himself is compared to, for example, a lamb. And whether it be a lamb or a lion or a dove, it's simply that there is some characteristic or characteristics of each animal that are of use in describing something about the person.

We can think of two examples in the scriptures when we come across doves. We see one in Genesis 8. It was a dove that we see returning to the ark, returning to Noah, with some vegetation in its bill, which was the token that judgment was over and peace was about to ensue, albeit temporarily.

And in the Song of Solomon we see a dove employed as a symbol of love. Utter devotion. And just in those two examples from scripture, the peace and the love, we see two aspects of the *fruit of the Holy Spirit*. Remember how it begins, “The fruit of the spirit is **love**, joy, **peace**...”

Well, we have the dove there and we also have this voice. We have this voice from heaven. It says in verse 11 that the voice came from heaven and said, “Thou Art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Here he addresses the Son himself, and confesses to him who he is.

- He uses the word “beloved”. He tells him, *I love you intensely*. I can't describe to you friends what the love of the Father to the Son is. It's too big. Perhaps take the most extreme example of love that we can find in this world. Maybe the love of a mother to her son or a woman to her husband. And take that extremity of love and multiply it. And multiply it. AND MULTIPLY IT. and THEN we shall get a small glimpse of the love that God has for his Son.
- And in calling him his Son, he owns him. He owns him as his own, as “My Son”. He acknowledges Jesus as being the Son of God and as **God the Son**. He is part of that godhead. He is therefore **divine**. This man, who's going to go to the cross and take all the horrible sins of mankind on himself and suffer in their place, to redeem them....**He was God**.
- And what's more the Father says that he is “Well pleased”. He is well pleased with the Son. In other words, it gives the Father *immeasurable pleasure* to know the Son. The sense of this word here is that God had this infinite love for the son before the world was. That he presently has this intense love for his son. And that he will have this great love for him for all eternity.

If we if we have a look here in Matthews 12th chapter and verses 16 to 18, it says of Jesus that “...he charged them that they should not make him known, so that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet saying, ‘Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles.’”

This is him. *This is him*.

If you go back and look at the quote in Isaiah, you will see that it calls Jesus Christ God's “elect”. I know you may be thinking that you are one of God's elect. And your friend over there is one of God's elect. And your spouse is one of God's elect. But Jesus Christ is most certainly God's elect. But yes, if you if you are a believer YOU TOO are the elect of God. Jesus Christ is elsewhere described as the heir of the Kingdom. And you if you are born again, YOU are counted as an heir of God. And just as Jesus is perfect in righteousness, so it is that if you have been changed from darkness to light and have received the Spirit and have faith in Jesus, YOU have the same perfect righteousness that Christ has.

What does that mean? It means that if you're a believer:

- You are loved by God—*just like Jesus*.
- You are a son or a daughter of God—*just like Jesus*.
- And you...*you* provoke a sense of pleasure in God. Because he knows you. *The same sense of pleasure that he has for his own son*.
- And in the same way just like Jesus God has taken pleasure in you in the past, he presently takes pleasure in you, and he will be WELL PLEASED with you for all eternity! All eternity.

In this episode, we're not to think that this was a mere confirmation of Jesus identity. It was to show us that **Christ's ministry was entirely a trinitarian work**. Where **God the Son** has **God the Spirit** descend on him and has **God the Father** endorsing him as the Son of God.

What's more friends—what is more remarkable than that—is this: that **it is the whole of the Trinity that is dedicated to your eternal salvation**.

Let's have a look at the temptation of Jesus then. The temptation.

We notice in verse 12 it says, “And immediately...”. *Immediately*. There’s an urgency there. No time to hang around after the baptism, to enjoy some refreshments have a time of worship with the saints. None of the luxuries that we would have. He was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness. And this is perhaps the strongest word used for the influence of the Spirit. This is not merely being “persuaded” by the Spirit. This is not just being “led” by the Spirit or “moved” by the spirit. This is the spirit DRIVING him. There was an urgency. And it shows us that **this Holy Spirit who blesses so much is the same Holy Spirit who escorts us into the arena of trial**.

We said last time about the wilderness. It was a description of a place that was uncultivated and uninhabited. What was the point of John residing in the wilderness? What was the point of Jesus venturing into the wilderness for his temptation? **It is simply to get us to understand the concept of separation**. Separation from the world.

You can see how habited places of this world are, if you like, representative of the world. To physically separate from those places as John and Jesus did is to paint for us a picture of separation from the world. A world that we live in. Whose inhabitants we interact with. Who we are related to. Who are friends of ours. And yet we are inhabitants of a different place, friends. We LIVE in the wilderness. This is our home now.

Do you not remember from Revelation in chapter 12 and verse 6 that it says, “And the woman”, who hopefully I persuaded you represented God's people, “fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.” THAT'S WHERE WE LIVE NOW. In the wilderness!

Verse 13 says that Jesus on arriving in the wilderness was to stay there for forty days. Forty days.

You will know perhaps that this number is important in Scripture. You might remember for example that the Hebrews, being led out of Egypt, spent **forty years** in the wilderness. It does say however in Hebrews chapter 3 and verse 8, “Harden not your hearts as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness.” The day of temptation in the wilderness. That trial didn't go so well, did it?

More particularly, we should think about those two figures from the Old Testament that represent the Law and the Prophets: that is, Moses and Elijah. For you will read in the Old Testament that both fasted for **forty days**.

And this forty-day idea comes in in Ezekiel chapter 4 and verse 6, where Ezekiel's told when he's finished, "Lie again on the right side and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have appointed thee each day for a year." So forty years of rebellion is represented by **forty days** here.

So this choice for Jesus to spend forty days of fasting in the wilderness was no accident. It's no arbitrary number. It's hugely symbolic and it identifies Jesus with...no, it emphasizes that association he has with that old covenant that God had with his people.

The temptation that we are familiar with, from that account in Matthew, was of course at the *end* of the forty days. Some people have ventured to suggest that from Mark's account it could be that because it says he was there in the wilderness "forty days, tempted of Satan", he was tempted throughout the whole forty days. And then at the end are the temptations that are recorded for us.

I would say it's unlikely. Unlikely because I believe that one of the points of the fasting for forty days was to reduce Jesus to a physically, emotionally—perhaps mentally—weak condition. To make it easier if you like for Satan to win. See how that in Jesus' weakness, the victory is all the better!

It reminds us of Elijah when he took on the prophets of Baal. He set up a contest. And when it was his turn to call on his god, the God of Israel, he made it more difficult. The sacrifice was saturated. There was water everywhere. By human standards, this was making something that was highly unlikely *completely impossible*. And yet the fire of God, in answer to prayer, came down and consumed that sacrifice. And so it was that the victory was all the more glorious.

Do you not remember when Gideon had 30,000 men? And God argued that should they get the victory, they would quite naturally say, *Well, it was the was the numbers, it was the training, it was the arms; it was us*. So God makes sure that his men are reduced down to a number of just a few hundred so that when they get that impossible victory, they will ascribe it ALL to God.

And so it is here. Jesus is victorious! He's victorious even in this condition:

- After a month with no food
- In a place where it was hot during the day and freezing cold at night
- In an environment that was inhabited by dangerous animals, like jackals and lions
- And following a hard assault by Satan.

AND HERE, BOTH THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE ANIMALS MAKE THIS THE COMPLETE OPPOSITE OF EDEN. AND JESUS CHRIST SUCCEEDED WHERE THE FIRST ADAM FAILED.

He sits in this weed covered, predator infested, wasteland that was CAUSED by Adams fall, and shows how it was meant to be done. He gets the victory.

This was, of course, devastating to Satan and all the demons. Because this was the first time in the whole of human history that Satan and his angels failed to get someone to sin.

This was Jesus as it were *undoing the mess* caused by Adam's failure.

Our account finishes with the mention of the angels. "The angels came and ministered to him". I can almost visualize the angels, waiting eagerly in the wings, wanting to come in and help, but held back according to the command of God.

And so finally they are allowed to attend to him. Perhaps bringing him some food. Perhaps sitting on the ground with him and offering words of encouragement and edification.

And you know friends that this ministry of the angels is for us, too. Don't forget that the angels that ministered to Jesus are still around today! And who knows whether they have been involved in some way in your life. Because **we cannot tell the unseen conflicts that have gone on in the heavenly regions on your behalf.**

Some have tried to create some kind of formula from this. That whenever you receive a blessing you should expect a temptation to follow hard on its tails. I must reject that as too rigid a view. But I will say this, friends. That...*cycle* of blessing and trial is very real, and is inevitable. That is our lot. Blessing, and trial, and blessing, and trial.

But please remember that these trials are for your good. *All* of them. All of them for your good. And even in those trials, God is with you constantly. Not only so, but he even employs the holy angels to minister to you.

The Lord bless you all in the mighty name of Jesus.

Amen.