

Heaven Opens, Hell Opens

Prologue Part 5
Mark 1:10-13 9/23/2017

Summary: The coronation: Jesus is anointed Messiah in fulfillment of messianic prophecy when the Spirit comes into him, and the Father calls him his beloved Son. The tearing of heaven means Isa.62:1 is happening – God is coming down to save his people. The Spirit meant awesome power. The anointing (vv.10-11) show Jesus in extreme glory (the perspective from God’s Word). But then the Spirit comes as a dove (a different kind of awesome), and instead of kicking Rome out, kicks Jesus out into the devastation to be tested. The outcome will be seen in Jesus’ encounters with demons. At this point he’s just seen entering the strong man’s house.

This is what it looks like to be loved by God (painful testing, but with affirmations of sonship, of God’s love, and the Holy Spirit and angels). This is the same love he has for us, as we are in Christ. Let God love you his way.

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Mark 1:9 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 forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Introduction

What Is It Like to Be Loved by God?

If you're like most Christians, chances are you struggle with really believing that God loves you. You know it intellectually, but you really don't feel loved by God. Why is that? I can understand a wife who doesn't feel loved, because even though her husband loves her, he's not very good at expressing it. But God is perfect at expressing love. So if God loves us so much, and he expresses it perfectly, why do we struggle so much with feeling loved by him?

I believe in many cases, it's because we have a skewed understanding of what his love is like. We cry out to God and say, "God, you seem so distant. I'm in the desert. Please, come near to me. Let me feel your love." We say that to God, but how can you tell when he has answered that prayer? What is it like to be loved by God? How does it feel, and how can you tell when it's happening?

If you struggle with feeling loved by God, this is going to be a great passage for you, and a great book of the Bible for you, because Mark is going to show us what it looked like for God the Father to love his Son. And since that's the same love we receive from the Father, this is going to be a great lesson for us. We'll learn what his love is like, so that when he shows it to us, instead of missing it because we're looking for the wrong thing, we'll be able to enjoy it.

Jesus Anointed

Heaven Torn Open

We left off last week with Jesus coming up out of the water as John baptized him. John referred to Jesus as **the one who comes after me** – my disciple. And sure enough, Jesus comes like all the other followers of John and is baptized right alongside them. Jesus publicly joined the community of people who were committing to the way of obedience to God - a pledge of good conscience toward God.¹ So Jesus is just like all the other disciples of John – right up to the point where John pulls him back up out of the water.

But at that moment, something happens that makes it clear that Jesus is not just your average Joe. Look what happens.

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

The other gospel writers just say that the heavens opened, but Mark uses a more violent word – *ripped* open. That language comes from Isaiah 64:1.²

Isaiah 64:1 Oh, that you would tear the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!

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." 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.

¹ 1 Pe.3:21.

² 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.

There was a tradition that said when the Messiah came, he would split the Jordan river.³ So when Jesus arrived, did he split the Jordan? No. He was baptized in the Jordan, and he split the heavens!

One other thing you need to know about that word *rip*. Mark only uses that word one other time. He uses it here at the beginning of the book to describe the heavens being torn open, and then he uses it again at the very end of the book to describe something else being torn open. Care to guess what that is?

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.⁴

So, the time has come. After all those hundreds of years of watching his people be manhandled and mistreated and oppressed by their enemies, God finally said, "That's enough!" and he rips open the barrier between heaven and earth and comes to his people to gloriously and decisively rescue them once and for all through his Messiah.

Coronation

So what we have here is the coronation of Jesus as that Messiah. Peter referred to it as an anointing.

Acts 10:36 You know the message God sent ... telling the gospel of peace through Jesus Christ ... 37 You know what has happened ... after the baptism that John preached... 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power

The way a king became a king was by being anointed with oil. So when Peter calls this an anointing, he's saying this is Jesus Christ being crowned King by God the Father. He's being crowned as the messianic King. But instead of just anointing him with symbolic oil, God crowns Jesus King by anointing him with the Holy Spirit. God produces this coronation ceremony that is beyond any coronation ever.

The time has finally come. The big rescue is underway. But before the Messiah rolls up his sleeves and gets started with the rescue, there is some preparation. God the Father equips Jesus with what he's going to need to pull off this rescue.

The Spirit Descends

10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him

The first thing the Messiah is going to need to accomplish this earth-shattering rescue is the Holy Spirit. I don't know what comes to your mind when you think of the Holy Spirit. Some people might think tongues, or healing or whatever. For the people in Mark's time, when they heard "Holy Spirit," they thought about one thing: awesome, mighty, power – especially military power. Whenever the Holy Spirit comes upon someone in the OT, some enemy army is about to get obliterated. The Spirit of the LORD came upon Othniel in Judges 3 and Israel's enemies get hammered. The Spirit comes upon Gideon, the Midianites are blown out (Judges 6). The Spirit comes upon Jephthah, the Ammonites are toast (Judges 11).

Judges 14:6 The Spirit of the LORD came upon [Samson] in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands

Judges 14:19 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. He went down to Ashkelon, and struck down thirty of their men

³ See NIAC on Mark.

⁴ Notice also that in both contexts there is an affirmation of Jesus as the Son of God.

In Judges 15 they tied him up with new ropes, the Philistines rushed him, and...

Judges 15:14 ... The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax ... 15 and he struck down a thousand men.

That's the kind of thing that would automatically come to mind back in Jesus' time when they heard the words "Holy Spirit." And so it's no surprise that when the Prophets talk about the Messiah, who would come and permanently defeat all God's enemies, they talk about how he'll have the Holy Spirit in great measure.

Isaiah 42:1 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me ... He has sent me ... 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God

So when the people thought about a great, powerful Messiah who would come and bring military dominance to Israel once again, vengeance on God's enemies, and justice on the nations, they thought of a man who would have the Holy Spirit in greater ways than anyone had ever had the Spirit.

And the other gospels say that he landed on Jesus, which it did, but Mark actually uses the word *into*.⁵ Jesus received the Spirit in greater measure than anyone ever before him.

John 3:34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.⁶

That makes sense if Jesus is going to be the one who baptizes people with the Holy Spirit. After his resurrection, the Spirit would come and indwell all believers,⁷ but at this point we're still in that OT era, where the Holy Spirit only comes upon a man in rare instances to bring a dramatic deliverance for God's people. And 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.

Affirmation of Sonship

And not just a human being, but the very Son of God. That's language from another very important messianic prophecy in the OT – Psalm 2. Psalm 2 is where the Father promises the Son that he will give him the kingdom.

Psalm 2:7 ... You are my Son; today I have become your Father. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

And in that psalm he commands all kings and princes and rulers everywhere in the world to bow the knee and worship this great King, because he is no less than the one and only Son of God.⁸

The Affirmation of Love

So God the Father gives Jesus his Spirit, then he affirms Jesus' unique relationship to him – his one and only Son, and then, third, he affirms his love for Jesus. When the voice comes from heaven and says, "**You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased,**" that's not some kind of thoughtless, offhand comment, like when someone says, "love ya" whenever they end a conversation. No, this is a

⁵ Gr. *eis*.

⁶ NET Bible footnote: *Grk* "for not by measure does he give the Spirit" (an idiom). *Leviticus Rabbah* 15:2 states: "The Holy Spirit rested on the prophets by measure." Jesus is contrasted to this. The Spirit rests upon him without measure.

⁷ See John 7:38-39.

⁸ The phrase "my beloved son," is language that was used of an only son. That's the wording that was used to describe Isaac, when Abraham was facing the excruciating prospect of having to sacrifice his beloved son.

very deliberate, very profound affirmation of the Father's love for the Son, which is a crucially important doctrine in Scripture.

John 3:34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

John 5:20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.

It's easy for us to pass by that. You think, "They are in the Trinity together – of course they get along. Of course they are going to like each other," and you move on. But the Father's delight in the Son is of tremendous importance for our day to day Christian life. Everything you need from God, and everything you desire from God – the only basis on which you can ask for it, and the only basis on which you can ever hope to receive it, is on the basis of the Father's delight in the Son. Jesus' great prayer for us is that we would become involved in the Father's love for the Son.

John 17:26 I have made you known to them ... in order that the love you have for me may be in them

Think of your favorite Bible verse about God's love for you, and you won't have to look far in the context to see how it's based on his love for Christ.

Romans 8:37 ... we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 ... neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Everything depends on those last 6 words. The unbreakable love the Father has for us is only because he loves Christ so much, and we are in Christ.

If you struggle with feeling loved by God, it may be because you think it depends on you, and you forgot that it depends on Christ. So the Father's affirmation of his love for Jesus is important for us to understand our relationship with God. But it's also important for Jesus. Notice that Mark is describing this whole thing from Jesus' perspective.

10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he [Jesus] saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him

The other gospels just say that it happened, but Mark makes a point of the fact that *Jesus* saw it happen. Does that mean no one else saw it? No, I think they did. We know John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit come down – that's stated in Jn.1:33. And we know the voice from heaven spoke not only to Jesus, but also to the crowd. In Mark, the voice from heaven speaks directly to Jesus and says, "**You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.**" In Matthew the voice speaks to the people and says "**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.**"⁹ So in Matthew the voice speaks to others about Jesus. But the point Mark wants to make has to do with the impact it had on Jesus personally.¹⁰

Preparation

By giving his Spirit, and affirming that Jesus is his only Son, and affirming his love for Jesus, God the Father is preparing Jesus to be able to pull off this great rescue. Because step one in this rescue is going

⁹ This is not a contradiction. Either God said both things, or, more likely, God said one of them, but in saying it, implied the other. So either Matthew or Mark was reporting the gist of what was said rather than giving an exact quotation. If the voice spoke to the crowd, the implication that Mark wants to emphasize is the impact it would have had on Jesus regarding the Father's love. If the voice spoke to Jesus, Matthew wants to emphasize the impact such a statement would have for the crowd or for John the Baptist.

¹⁰ Mark does something similar in 5:38 when he says, "...when they [Jesus, Peter, James, John, and Jairus] came to the home... Jesus saw a commotion..." That is not to imply that the commotion was somehow invisible to the disciples. It's only to emphasize Jesus' observation of it.

to be something so difficult that Jesus is going to need all three of those things – especially that last one, the affirmation of the Father’s love. Because what’s about to happen, from a human standpoint, is not going to feel like love. But if Jesus loses sight of the Father’s love, he won’t be equipped to handle what’s about to happen.

Perspective

But before we look at what’s about to happen in v.12, I want to show you something about the relationship between vv.10 and 11 and vv.12-13, because if you miss that, you’ll miss the whole point. What we see in vv.10-11 is pretty spectacular, right? It’s a glorious picture showing us who the Lord Jesus Christ is. Let me ask this – which angle is Mark showing us this from in vv.10-11? We’ve talked about how Mark’s gospel is like the picture of the woman where you see either the old lady or the young girl depending on your perspective. In Mark’s gospel you see either the powerful, spectacular, awesome, authoritative Son of God, or you see a lowly, weak, disappointing man, depending on the perspective. Remember which perspective shows you the amazing Messiah, and which perspective shows you the nobody from nowhere? The perspective that shows you the amazing Messiah is the perspective of God’s Word. The perspective that shows you the nobody from nowhere is the perspective of natural, human observation that is not informed by God’s Word.

And Mark alternates between the two perspectives. Which perspective do we have in vv.10-11? It’s the view of Jesus from the perspective of God’s Word (obviously, since God himself actually speaks from heaven – it doesn’t get any more God’s Word than that). Keep looking through that lens, because in vv.12-13 Mark shows us the scene from the perspective of natural, human observation. And if you look at vv.12-13 without the perspective of vv.10-11, you won’t see a clear picture of Jesus.

Jesus Tested

A Different Kind of Awesome

Ok, so what happens next? What is it that Jesus needed so much preparation for? What does God do first in this final, glorious rescue of his people? Send his Christ into Rome to lay down the law to Caesar and let him know there’s a new king in town? Send him throughout Judea to gather his army? Send him into the Temple in Jerusalem to take his place at the head of Jewish religion? This is going to be an explosion of power unlike anything we’ve ever seen, right? After that coronation, you expect to see the most spectacular display of military conquest ever.

Well, Jesus is all set to go to war, but not against Rome. Rome isn’t the problem. There is a much, much more powerful enemy than Rome that needs to be defeated, but that wasn’t going to happen on a military battlefield.

A Dove? Really?

In that culture, they believed that a bird coming down on the battlefield was a portent, or sign from the gods that they would get the victory – especially if it was a bird of prey, like an eagle. They believed that the eagle was the fiercest and most warlike bird, and so on Roman shields they had a picture of an eagle swooping down.

So what happens here? Heaven is torn open, God speaks, Spirit comes “swooping” down like a ... *dove*? That’s not very awesome. Isn’t that a little on the gentle side for symbolizing the awesome power of the Spirit on the great messianic deliverer who is mightier than John? Is his army going to march out to battle against the Roman military machine with little doves on their shields – “Watch out! Here come the doves!”

And what would Jewish people think when they saw this? If you look through the OT for references to doves, the primary one was that it was a sacrificial animal – for poor people. If you were too poor to bring a lamb, you could bring a dove instead because they only cost a few pennies.¹¹ So instead of a war-like image, the symbol ends up being this gentle bird that is associated with sacrifice and poverty. Yes Jesus is being crowned King and give an awesome power, but this dove imagery tips us off that this is going to be a little bit different kind of awesome. Jesus is about to do battle, but not a military one, and not against a human enemy. This is going to be a battle on a much greater scale.

Cast Out

12 Immediately the Spirit sent him out into the desert, 13 and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan.

Do you see what I mean about vv.12-13 not giving a very glorious picture if you don't look through the lens of vv.10-11? People just looking from a natural, human perspective – they just see this nobody from Nazareth get baptized and then he disappears into the desert.

The Devastation

They were already in the desert where John was baptizing, but Jesus gets sent out into the really remote wilderness. Probably to the area between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea known as “the devastation.” George Adam Smith: “It is an area of yellow sand, crumbling limestone, of scattered shingle. It is an area of contorted strata where the ridges run in all directions as if they were warped and twisted. The hills are like dust heaps, the limestone is blistered and peeling, the rocks are bare and jagged. Often the ground sounds hollow. In that wilderness Jesus would be more alone than any other place in Palestine.”¹² Temperatures there routinely go over 100 in the daytime, and it gets quite cold at night.

And the wind is miserable. Hosea 13:15 talks about Yahweh's terrifying east wind, that came out of the desert. They say it gets so dry it makes your skin feel like it is too small for your body and that even the friendliest people become irritable. It reminds you of the desert Jonah was in. When his shade plant died he became suicidal. And that was only for a few days – Jesus was out there 40 days.

Wild Animals

And Mark adds ...**with the wild animals**. This calls to mind the time of Israel's wandering in the desert.

Deuteronomy 8:15 He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions.

In Jesus' case, there would have been rats, hedgehogs, foxes, buzzards, vultures, the desert lynx (like a leopard), , and all kinds of poisonous snakes, like the sand boa constrictor. Spiders, scorpions, biting insects. I remember reading about a tribe of nomads who had to learn to sleep on their upraised elbow, so their head would be lifted off the ground. Otherwise harmful insects would crawl inside their ear as they slept. The mention of wild animals would have caught the readers' attention because at the time Mark was writing this book, Nero was putting animal hides on Christians and then letting packs of dogs rip them to pieces. Mark reminds those people, “Remember, Jesus was also thrown to the wild animals.”

And Mark says it was for Jesus to be tested. Israel was tested in the desert with wild animals for 40 years and they failed. Now Israel gets a do-over with Jesus representing the nation. And it's in that dangerous, miserable, hostile setting where Jesus faces the greatest threat of all.

¹¹ Lv.5:7.

¹² Barclay on Matthew 4.

Testing By Satan

13 he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan.

The people believed that the desert was a haunt for demons, and that seems to be affirmed in the NT. The demons in Lk.8:29 would drive the demoniac out into the desert. And in Matthew 12:43 Jesus said that when a demon is cast out of a person, it goes into the desert. In the OT the desert was where they sent the scapegoat after they transferred all their sins to it (Lv.16:22). So all that to say this is Satan's home turf. In v.10 heaven opened, now in v.12 hell opens.

The gentle dove-like Spirit immediately does a not-so-gentle thing. He sends Jesus out into the desert. The word for **sent**¹³ is a strong word – it means to cast or throw. It's the word for casting out demons. The Spirit just chucks Jesus out into the desolation. Instead of the Holy Spirit coming on Jesus in power and manhandling Rome, he manhandles the Messiah.

The scene is dramatic. The backdrop is a desolate, monotonous wasteland – an anti-Eden. In the foreground sits Jesus - utterly alone. Walking around in the unbearable heat, the east wind, the sand burning his feet, the irritation of whatever bug bites he had, the maddening, relentless sun beating down on his head. No people, no phone, no music, no books – like being in solitary confinement for a month and a half. To give you an idea, 40 days from now will be November 2. He sits out there hour after hour after hour. Time must have seemed like it stopped. Can you imagine how difficult it would be to concentrate on prayer? Desperately hungry, close to death, deprived of sleep.

Temptation is the hardest when you're tired or hungry, right? There is a link between the body and spirit, and physical weakness brings spiritual weakness. And Jesus fasted the entire month and a half. And now he has to face the full fury of a being who has gotten the best of every spiritual giant throughout history. Adam, Abraham, Moses, Enoch, David, Daniel, Job – every one of them fell, again and again, when they faced this enemy. Now Jesus, at his weakest, enters the domain of this powerful being to endure unrestrained attacks, and if Jesus fails at any point – has one sinful thought, one selfish motive, one, momentary lapse in faith or love for God – he does that one time for one moment and all hope of salvation for us is lost. This is the greatest combat that ever took place on earth.

Goal: Prevent Suffering

I won't go through the various temptations because Mark doesn't mention them. But I will say this: we know from the other gospels that they were all about the avoidance of suffering. Satan came to him and said, "If you're really the Son of God, don't be out here starving – make yourself some bread. Don't win followers by giving up your life – do it by jumping off the Temple and walking away unharmed. Don't gain the kingdoms of the world through the cross – let me just hand them to you." It was all about bypassing the cross, bypassing humiliation, and bypassing suffering.

Think about that. Satan's one goal with Jesus was to *prevent him from suffering*. Let that revolutionize your definition of Satanic attack. Has it ever occurred to you that Satan's greatest goal for you may be to prevent you from suffering? If he can get you to make the avoidance of suffering a priority, he's got you. He can destroy you. That's why he invented the prosperity "gospel." If he can get preachers to tell people to go ahead and seek comfort and riches and cars and houses and earthly pleasures – to make those things the pursuit of your life, he knows you'll never follow Jesus out into the devastation. You'll never follow Jesus in those moments when following Jesus means giving up some earthly treasure.

¹³ Gr. *ekballo*

The Outcome

So Jesus enters Satan's domain and does battle - what was the outcome? Mark doesn't say. He doesn't even mention whether or not Jesus resisted the temptations or anything else. He just tells us that Jesus was out there 40 days being tempted by Satan.

What is that? Can you imagine a friend telling you, "Yeah, I got into a fight today with the Golden Gloves champ. That was crazy. Anyway, I'll talk to you later..." Wait a minute – what happened? How did it turn out? Who won?

Mark is going to give us the answer. But he's going to do it with his paintbrush, not his pen. As we read through the book and watch Jesus encounter various demons, we'll see the outcome. And, (spoiler alert here) it's pretty decisive.

Jesus' dominance over demons is a major theme in Mark. And we don't have to wait long to see it. The very first miracle that Mark records (1:21-28) and the first parable he records (3:27) were both confrontations with Satan and the demonic realm. By ch.3 Jesus has already brought such massive devastation on the satanic army that the scribes are coming up with theories on how to explain it. Mark 3:27 is one of the key verses in the book of Mark. Jesus shoots down their theories by saying this:

Mark 3:27 no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.

That's obvious enough, right? If you walked in to the home of the current MMA champion when he's at home and wanted to take all his stuff, you would first have to tie him up. Otherwise you will find yourself very unconscious.

Jesus gave that as an explanation for how he was casting out so many demons. When Jesus arrived on the scene, Israel was under the control of Satan, and many, many people were under the control of demons. Those demonized people were seen as possessions in Satan's house. And Jesus backed a full semi-trailer up to that house, walked in, and just started clearing the place out – taking whatever he wanted whenever he wanted. And there was zero resistance, which showed Jesus' absolute supremacy over Satan. It proved he had the devil completely hog tied.

If you're in a fight with someone, how much stronger do you have to be than them to be able to tie them up while you're fighting? Jesus devastated Satan's work, which is why he came.

1 John 3:8 ...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

So Mark's going to show us all that as we move through the book, but here all we see in Jesus entering the MMA champion's house. Right after his coronation the Holy Spirit sends Jesus into a spiritual octagon and he's going to go 40 rounds with the champ who has been undefeated since the beginning of the creation. Satan has gotten the best of every human opponent he has ever faced started with Adam and Eve. But he finally meets his match in Jesus. The first Adam met this enemy in paradise and fell to the very first strike. But now, in his own house, Satan has to contend with a new Adam, a new Israel, who has the power of heaven behind him, the Holy Spirit in him, and angels at his side.

Conclusion: Let God Love You HIS Way

And I'll close with a comment about those angels, because that's how Mark closes.

13 and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

After all that about how miserable the desert is, Mark says that about the angels. In what way did they attend to him? Mark doesn't say. He just wants us to know the fact that they were there attending to him. So what point is Mark making? Is he emphasizing hardship, or comfort? If this is supposed to be a time of really difficult testing and hardship, doesn't Mark kind of spoil his own point by mentioning the

comfort from the angels? Having angels come and attend to you sounds great to me. And having God rip the heavens open and God speaking audibly to me and the Holy Spirit coming upon me visibly – that sounds awesome! So what’s going on here? Is this supposed to be a picture of Jesus being comforted and taken care of by the Father’s love, or a picture of Jesus suffering painful, brutal testing?

I think the answer is, Mark is showing us what it means to be loved by God his way, not your way. In this case, God’s idea of loving Jesus is assure him of his love, give him his Spirit, send him into excruciating testing and Satanic onslaught, and send angels to provide comfort and strength.

Trusting God to love you in his way takes a lot of faith, because we’re always so sure we know what we really need. And what we think we need is never the desert, with all its discomfort, danger, privation, and desolation. We want air conditioning and a comfy bed. We want money and nice treatment from people. That’s our idea of love from God. But who do you think is happier in life – the guy with AC and a soft couch and big screen TV, but no help from angels, and God at a distance; or Jesus, with physical hardship but with God assuring him of his love and reminding him of his sonship and angels ministering to him? I promise you, it’s Jesus in the desert. The first guy is miserable.

When God provided food for the Israelites in the desert during the Exodus, before providing that food, he waited a while until the people were on the brink of starvation. Why did God wait? According to Dt.8:3, he did that to teach the people that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Dt.8:3). And by having Jesus’ fast for 40 days in the desert, he was teaching Jesus the same lesson (Mt.4:4). As long as our focus is on bread – physical things, money, comfort, security, and we think those things are the source of life, we’ll miss the real source of life, which is every word that comes from the mouth of God.

That’s why the prosperity “gospel” is so deadly spiritually. That message teaches you to think that love from God means comfort and ease and money and health and cars and houses and all the comforts of this world. The very things that in ch.4 Jesus is going to warn us, “Watch out! Those things can choke the Word out of your heart like weeds in a garden.”¹⁴ People in the health, wealth, prosperity movement want God to express his love for them on their terms, not his terms. And that’s tragic because it makes you miss the real love of God, and it makes it impossible for you to be happy in times of hardship.

Why Don’t You Feel God’s Love?

So what do you do when you don’t feel loved by God? We’ve seen two things tonight that can cause that.

1) You Think it Depends on You

It may be that you are looking in the mirror for reasons why God should love you, and you’re not finding much. You look in the mirror and think, *Why would God love someone like me?* You’re forgetting that God’s love for you comes from God’s love for Christ, and your association with Christ. We think God’s love for us depends on our worthiness and lovability rather than Christ’s worthiness and lovability. When we struggle to understand, “How could God love someone like me?” we are asking the question in a way that leads in a completely wrong direction. If you want to ask a question, ask this: “How could God love someone like Christ?” That’s the only question that matters, and it’s an easy question. And the answer to that question is the answer to the first question. How could God love you? Because, if you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are so closely bound to him that God loves you with the very love he has for Christ.

¹⁴ Mk.4:18-19.

2) Wrong Conception of God's Love

The second possibility is that you don't feel loved by God because you have the wrong idea of what God's love looks like in this life. What does it look like to be loved by God? For Jesus, it looked like being thrust out into the devastation to be attacked by the devil and go without any earthly comforts, but to also have a strong affirmation of God's love, having a strong affirmation of his sonship, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and angels to care for him.

So in your life, God shoves you out into the wilderness, you go without comfort and pleasure, you are attacked and mistreated in a dry and weary land, and you interpret all that as, "Oh, God must be unhappy with me." You're like Job's friends. And you fail to realize that God has spoken from heaven. He has affirmed his great love for you. He has affirmed your relationship to him as his own child. And on top of that he's given you his Spirit to dwell inside you. And on top of that, he sends his angels to minister to you and serve you.

Hebrews 1:14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Solution: The Eyes of Faith

So what's the solution? If you struggle to feel loved by God because of one of those reasons, the solution is to look at your life from the perspective of God's Word rather than the perspective of natural, human observation. Mark is teaching us to look at Jesus that way, but also to look at our own lives that way.

In times of hardship, what occupies your thoughts – the way things look from natural, human observation, or the way those things look when viewed through the lens of what the Bible says about them? If you find yourself in vv.12,13 – you're out in the devastation, you're suffering, you're dry, you're being waylaid by the enemy, you'll never come out alive unless you back up and latch on to vv.10,11. What did the Father say about Christ? He loves him, accepts him, is delighted in him, is a Father to him, and gives him his Spirit without measure. And you are in Christ.