

Series: Mark — Summer 2020 Series

Title: “Why is Jesus So Special?”

Text: Mark 1:9-11

Date: May 31, 2020

Verse 9

Mark introduces the ministry of Jesus in Mark 1:9-11. The events associated with the text are also recorded in Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22, and John 1:30-33. In verse 9, we read, “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John.” The event in our verse, the baptism of Jesus, has been regarded as “the inaugural event of Jesus’ public ministry.”¹ In the book of Acts, we learn that the disciples view Jesus’ baptism in this way. While it was deemed the starting place of His ministry, His ascension was seen as the final act in His ministry (Acts 1:22).

Notice Mark’s reference at the beginning of verse 9 to “those days.” Luke tells us that Jesus’ baptism occurred during “the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar” (Luke 3:1). This places the start of Jesus’ ministry during the year AD 27.² Relatively speaking, the total time frame of His work would be brief, lasting only a few years.

Notice also the reference to Jesus’ hometown. Our Lord didn’t come from a lofty position in life. “Nazareth in Galilee” was a small town of little significance. The entire region around the village contained twenty-five to thirty thousand residents. It only had around four hundred residents itself. Nazareth was often viewed with ridicule and derision by people within Israel.³ It is for this reason that Nathanael infamously asked, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Jesus’ place of origin is a reminder that God often uses insignificant things and people to accomplish His purposes (1 Corinthians 1:26-28). One should never assume that he or she is too weak for God’s usage. Little is much when God is in it.

While Jesus’ hometown is important, Jesus’ baptism is the focus of our verse. Our text begs the question, “Why did Jesus need to be baptized?” Even John was aware of the apparent contradiction in our Lord’s submission to baptismal waters (Matthew 3:14). It seems strange that Jesus would submit to the ritual, since baptism often involved an admission of one’s defilement by sin (Mark 1:5).

It is important to note that our Lord wasn’t baptized for the same reasons that others were baptized. There is no mention in our text, as there was in Mark 1:5, of Him confessing sin. Jesus identified with sinners in baptism, but He was not a sinner (1 Peter 2:22). He was immersed to show the need for others to be immersed. He was baptized to show others the importance of repentance. He provided a picture of the need for deliverance from sin and all of its consequences.

Jesus’ baptism also pointed to His substitutionary work on our behalf. It was indeed exemplary, but it also “expressed a vicarious confession of sin on behalf of the many.”⁴ Jesus went under the water, not because He was a sinner, but to show He came to embrace the guilt of sin in order to make atonement for those in sin. Thanks be to God for what Jesus did. He

¹ Edwards, 34.

² Schnabel, 44.

³ Schnabel, 44.

⁴ Lane, 56.

became “sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Verse 10

Mark 1:10 describes the aftermath of Jesus’ baptism. We read, “As soon as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.” The Greek translated “as soon” is a favorite word of Mark’s. He uses it often in his gospel account. It denotes the idea of immediacy. Some think it is used in order to engage his original audience, which was largely made up of action-oriented Romans who might have had short attention spans. Such a perspective may be a result of reading American culture into the text. Mark instead seems to use the word to express continuity between different events.⁵ Here he implements it to show the connection between John and Jesus’ respective ministries.⁶

Mark tells us that Jesus “came up out of the water” after His baptism. The verbiage favors baptism by immersion.⁷ Sprinkling, or any other mode, would not require such an action. Churches would be wise to follow our Lord’s preferred method for baptism. Immersion is the practice that is the most faithful to Scripture. In addition, it best paints the symbolic picture the ordinance is designed to provide (Romans 6:4).

As Jesus was lifted out of the Jordan, “he saw the heavens being torn open.” The original language portrays an aggressive action. One has said it conveys the idea of the skies being “rent like a garment.”⁸ The spectacle in the sky was undoubtedly a sight to behold. It surely startled those in attendance. It was a Divine miracle intended to dramatically capture the attention of onlookers.

The language concerning the heavens is also prophetic. We perhaps see a fulfillment of Isaiah 64:1 — “If only you would tear the heavens open and come down, so that mountains would quake at your presence.” Jewish tradition held that things seen in our text — the heavens being opened, the Lord’s voice being heard, and the descending of a dove — would all be signs accompanying the inauguration of Messiah’s kingdom. Perhaps these interpretations were drawn from the Isaiah passage mentioned above. They could have also been founded on Isaiah 32:15. In that text, the prophet used language to speak of the Spirit of God being poured out from above.

In our current text, the coming of the Spirit upon the Messiah involved Him descending on Jesus “like a dove.” It is important for students of Scripture to take note of the simile in our text. Use of the word “like” indicates that the apparition was not literally a dove.⁹ Of the same event, Luke says “the Holy Spirit descended on Him in a physical appearance like a dove” (Luke 3:22). Apparently, the event in our text involved a real spiritual appearing of the Spirit of God that was accompanied by some type of physical phenomena. The appearance of the Holy Spirit resembled a dove.

The appearance of a dove-like figure was important for first century Jews. In the teaching of many first century rabbis, the bird was a popular symbol for the community of God’s people. It was an icon for the nation of Israel. As a result, the descent of the Spirit “like a dove” was meant

⁵ Lane, 57.

⁶ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 68.

⁷ Schnabel, 45.

⁸ Robertson, 255.

⁹ Schnabel, 45.

to prove that Jesus was the new and unique representative of Israel.¹⁰ Our Lord was the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. He was the one all of Israel desired (1 Samuel 9:20 and Daniel 11:37). He was the much anticipated Deliverer.

The way in which the Spirit came upon Jesus was proof that He came for a special task. In the Old Testament, the Third Person of the Trinity came upon people for special acts of service. Gideon (Judges 6:34), Samson (Judges 13:6), King Saul (1 Samuel 10:10), and King David (1 Samuel 16:13) were all recipients of the Spirit's special anointing. Prophecy foretold that the Spirit of God would similarly come upon the Messiah in the last days. Speaking on behalf of the Anointed One, Isaiah proclaimed, "The Spirit of the Lord God is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners" (Isaiah 61:1). Jesus claimed that Isaiah's prophecy applied to Himself (Luke 4:18). He knew He was the Lord's chosen one who would make atonement for sin and bring deliverance from death.

Astute students of Scripture can hardly help reading about Jesus' baptism without thinking back to the Genesis creation account. In Genesis 1:2, we read, "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters." The gospel writers seem to allude to the original creation account in their depiction of our Lord's baptism. In doing so, they depict Jesus as the means by which the creative order can be restored. Though sin thwarted God's original plan for humankind, and though it drastically altered the all life on earth, Jesus' work on humankind's behalf made a way for things to be reversed. Because of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, salvation and restoration is available to all. Entrance into the New Heaven and New Earth has been granted to all who trust in His substitutionary life, death, and resurrection.

Verse 11

Along with the dramatic occurrence associated with the skies and the dove, a supernatural sound was also heard at Jesus' baptism. Mark tells us, "And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased'" (Mark 1:11). The sound of loud talking coming from the sky was certainly a strange phenomenon; one that could only be attributed to Divine intervention. For Jews who witnessed Jesus' baptism, the voice was likely regarded as being the voice of the Lord. We should regard it as belonging to God the Father.¹¹ Interestingly, both the sound of the voice, along with the appearance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, give good Scriptural precedent for the Trinity. In our scene, we see God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit all present in differing ways.

A voice from heaven will be heard again later in Mark's Gospel. At the Transfiguration of Jesus, God the Father will say nearly the exact same thing He says in our current text (Mark 9:7). The assertion is intended to show Divine approval. As one has said, it asserted "the Father's acceptance of the Son as the mediator, substitute, and surety of the New Covenant."¹²

The Lord's declaration was thoroughly rooted in Old Testament Scriptures. Some see it as a quotation of Psalm 2:7 — "I will declare the Lord's decree. He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'" Instead of being a direct quotation, it seems that our verse is merely a reference to the Messianic content of the psalm. In addition to the psalm, many see

¹⁰ Lane, 57.

¹¹ Ryle, 5.

¹² Ryle, 5.

shades of Isaiah 42:1, 49:3, and 49:6 in the declaration from heaven.¹³ Some even believe the words of the Lord contain an allusion to Genesis 22:2. If so, the loud voice intends to declare God's intention to sacrifice His Son.¹⁴

In the original language of the text, Mark uses a present tense verb that depicts continual action. As a result, the verbiage "expresses an eternal and essential relationship." We know this is in keeping with solid Trinitarian theology. Jesus has been with God since the beginning of time (John 1:1). He was actually the means by which God accomplished creation (Colossians 1:16). The eternal relationship between Jesus and the Lord is here conveyed by the Father's love for Jesus. Such love will also be referenced later in Mark's Gospel (Mark 12:6). In John's Gospel, Jesus affirmed the way in which He was the beloved of God the Father, saying, "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands" (John 3:35).

At the end of the day, the voice from heaven was meant to shine light on the Divine nature of Jesus. Its primary purpose is not Messianic. Jesus was indeed God's chosen Messiah, but the voice highlighted a different truth about His nature. Jesus was also one with God and the Spirit (John 17:21). He was Divine — 100% God and 100% man. As Mark affirmed in the opening verse of his gospel, Jesus Christ was "the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). If He was not God, He would have been unable to make a perfect sacrifice for our sins, since only God is perfect.

Because Jesus was the Son of God, we have been given the opportunity to become sons of God in another sense. His sacrifice on our behalf secured our acceptance into God's family. The Bible says, "He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One" (Ephesians 1:5-6). Notice from Paul's words to the Ephesians that it was Jesus' status as "the Beloved One" that made it possible for "us to be adopted as sons." Because of what Jesus has done, the very words that were spoken from heaven at Jesus' baptism can now be spoken over us! Each believer is now regarded as a child of God in whom God is well pleased. If you have been born again, there is no condemnation or wrath hanging over your life. The Lord sees you as one of His children. He loves you, He fully accepts you, and He is well pleased with you because of the cross!

¹³ Edwards, 37.

¹⁴ Schnabel, 46.