

Mark 1:1-11
A Defining Moment

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

² As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,

³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The Baptism of Jesus

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

Prayer: Holy Father, we come to you today in the name of Jesus Christ, the one to whom you spoke as he came up from the waters of baptism in the Jordan River. Now teach us about the great importance of that event, we pray in his name. Amen.

Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his ministry. What is a defining moment? It is an event that happens, say in a person's life, and it influences, maybe directs, that person's life in a certain direction from then on.

I'll give you an example. My grandfather was a U.S. marine who landed on the shores of France shortly before World War I ended. He was asked to write up the account of an intramural game between two marine sports teams for the marine newspaper. He received such satisfaction in doing that that he decided that's what he wanted to do the rest of his life – he wanted to be a sportswriter. When the war was over he got a degree

in journalism, and that's what he ended up doing for many years for the Houston Post newspaper, he was a sportswriter.

Today I want us to consider a defining moment in Jesus's ministry – his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan river. Let me give you four reasons why this was a defining moment in Jesus' ministry:

Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his ministry because it was....

- I. It revealed that he was the One whom John the Baptist was preparing the people to receive. -REVELATION – The revelation that he was the divine Messiah***
- II. It revealed Jesus' full identification with his people in their need of forgiveness for their sins. -IDENTIFICATION – His identification with sinners he came to save.***
- III. It revealed the descent of the Spirit from heaven upon him. -EFFUSION It was his inundation in the Spirit of God.***
- IV. It revealed the Father's love for and pleasure in his Son. -AFFIRMATION It was the Affirmation of the Father's love for and pleasure in him.***

Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his ministry because...

- I. It revealed that he was the One whom John the Baptist was preparing the people to receive. It was a REVELATION.***

Who was this "John the Baptist"? He was a very important man in the pages of the Bible. His coming into human history is announced in at least two places in the Old Testament: in Isaiah chapter 40 and Malachi chapter 3.

If you look at the beginning of Mark 1, verse 1, we see that after the announcement of the subject of this book, "***the Gospel of Jesus Christ,***" we see that the author, Mark, immediately begins to quote from the OT prophet Isaiah and he quotes from that wonderful chapter, chapter 40, he quotes from Isaiah 40:3. If you look back at Isaiah it reads like this:

A voice cries:^[b]

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

In Isaiah the word "LORD" is used, which is the personal, covenant name of God, and what it says is basically that Yahweh is coming, our God is coming, and we need to make proper preparation for him.

What we read here in Mark is the same thing, Mark 1:3 says,

(E)'Prepare^[c] the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,"

The word “Lord” here is “kurios” in the Greek, which is the name used in the Greek translation of the OT for Yahweh God. So both Isaiah, and Mark quoting from Isaiah are saying, “Prepare to receive the Lord, prepare to receive God, for he is coming among you. And a voice in the wilderness is crying out for us to prepare for God’s coming among us. Yahweh, the God of the OT, the personal God of the Hebrew people, is going to come and we need to get ready to receive him. This is what we read further on in Isaiah 40:9-11:

**...say to the cities of Judah,
“Behold your God!”**

**¹⁰ (C) Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;**

**(D) behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.**

¹¹ (E) He will tend his flock like a shepherd;

(F) he will gather the lambs in his arms;

**(G) he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.**

This is really an amazing prophecy in Isaiah. Basically what it is saying is that Yahweh is going to come in his own person and rule among his people and be a shepherd to them. He’s going to walk among them.

Mark’s Gospel goes on in these first few verses saying that there was a messenger in the wilderness making this announcement. And then in verse 4 he identifies who this messenger was – it was John. He came out of the wilderness where he had been living and he began to preach that the people needed to repent of their sins and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

And his preaching did not go unnoticed. News about this powerful preacher, this prophet, spread throughout the land. People came out to the Jordan River from all over the country. They listened to his preaching and many heeded his preaching. They confessed their sins, they acknowledged how they had offended God, disobeyed his law, and then were baptized by John in the Jordan River. To be baptized means to be immersed in water and that’s what was happening. People were confessing their sins and walking down into the Jordan River and John would immerse them.

John was not dressed in fine, soft, and luxurious clothing. Verse 6 says he was dressed in camel’s hair, which I imagine is pretty rough, and he wore a leather belt, the same clothing that the OT prophet Elijah wore. So John preached like an OT prophet and he was dressed like an OT prophet. He was the mighty prophet of God who stood between the Old and New Testaments. He ushered in the New Testament era. He prepared the way for the coming of Israel’s Messiah.

John was a mighty prophet of God, but look at what he says in verse 7, ... **“After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to**

stoop down and untie. ⁸ (Q) I have baptized you with water, but (R) he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

John is saying here that someone much greater than he is coming, someone so great and holy that John is not even worthy to stoop down and untie his sandals. And though “I baptize you with water” he is going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” John’s baptism was very meaningful and important, but it was a baptism in a physical element, a common, everyday element, in water. But the baptism of the One following him would be in none less than the very Holy Spirit of God.

Who is this One, we might ask, that John is talking about? Verse 9 gives the answer:

⁹ (S) In those days Jesus (T) came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

It is Jesus from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, a region about 37 miles north of where John was probably baptizing.

If we turn to the Apostle John’s account of John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus we read in John 1:29:

²⁹ The next day he [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

John was saying that the One he was preparing the people to receive was the One who would take away the sin of the world.

So John’s whole purpose in life, his ministry, his sacred calling, was to help prepare the Hebrew people to receive the promised Messiah by helping them “get right with God,” as is sometimes said. They needed to examine their lives in the light of God’s Word and see how they had failed him and confess their sins to him. And there was a concrete, a physical way for them to do this, there was an action they needed to take. They had to confess their sins and they had to allow themselves to be baptized by this prophet from the wilderness named John.

Thus their hearts would be prepared, they would be humbled by the recognition of their sins, they would be open to hear of the way of forgiveness through the preaching of Jesus, through his coming death for their sins. Ground that is plowed up can receive the seed and water, whereas on hard ground the seed does not penetrate and the water runs off. So John turned over the soil of their hearts so they could receive the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus’ baptism was a defining moment in Jesus’ ministry because it was a REVELATION that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah of Israel.

Jesus’ baptism was a defining moment in Jesus’ ministry because...

II. It revealed Jesus’ full identification with his people in their need of forgiveness for their sins. It was an IDENTIFICATION.

This is so interesting. The people were coming out to John at the Jordan river, and they were confessing their sins and being baptized. And news of this had spread all around the country.

And Jesus heard about it up in the north, in Galilee. And what did he do, he didn't say, "Well,, that's very good, those people need to repent." But what does he do? He travels the 37 miles or so, a good day's hard walk and he gets in line on the riverbank with all the other people confessing their sins and waiting to be baptized, and what does he do, but he follows right into the water up to John and presents himself to be baptized.

Well, John knew instinctively that this man Jesus had no sins and didn't need to be baptized. Let's read what happened in Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism, in Matt. 3:14-15:

14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

So John did not want to baptize Jesus, but instead felt he was the one who needed to be baptized by Jesus. Yet Jesus insisted that John baptize him in order "to fulfill all righteousness." John, recognizing the authority of Jesus, consented and baptized him.

How are we to understand this? What does it mean to "fulfill all righteousness." Let's think about this:

We know for sure that Jesus had no sins, so he didn't need to repent in order to qualify for baptism. John seemed to be right in initially objecting. But Jesus is saying that for him to be baptized would "fulfill all righteousness," it would be considered by God as a righteous action, that it would be the will of God.

I think what we may see here is that Jesus, as a human being, is submitting as did all other righteous human beings, to this call of John to prepare for the Lord's coming by repenting of sins and being baptized. As a Hebrew son of his nation, he submitted to this call of the prophet to all the people.

Jesus was not guilty of any sin; he had no need to repent of anything. It's possible that what he is doing here is presenting a picture, a foretaste, a hint that he would be the one to bear his people's sins. He was identifying with them as sinful humans – not that he himself was sinful, but he had come to take away their sin

This is difficult to understand, but it was the will of God for his Son to be baptized and so he was.

Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his ministry because...

1. It revealed that he was the One whom John the Baptist was preparing the people to receive. It was a REVELATION of Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his ministry because..

II. It revealed Jesus' full identification with his people in their need of forgiveness for their sins. It was an IDENTIFICATION OF JESUS as the one who was fully human and yet would bear away the sins of his people.

Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his ministry because..

III. It revealed the descent of the Spirit from heaven upon him. It was an EFFUSION of the Spirit upon him. What does the word "effusion" mean? It means an outpouring. I'm using it because it rhymes with the other key words, but outpouring does not!

Let's think for a minute about the bestowing, the outpouring, the effusion of the Spirit in the OT for those who were called to serve as prophets, priests or kings. You may remember when David was anointed as King of the nation by the prophet Samuel; he who poured a horn of oil on his head.

So this whole idea of anointing with the Spirit, of the bestowal, or giving of the Spirit for particular special ministries of service in the Hebrew nation was a phenomenon that we see in the OT.

But the OT prophecies pointed to the future coming of One who would be a special individual whose chief characteristic would be the bestowal or anointing or effusion of the Spirit.

Here are some of the key OT scriptures:

Isa. 11:1-3

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

Isa. 42:1

(A) Behold (B) my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, (C) in whom my soul delights; (D) I have put my Spirit upon him; (E) he will bring forth justice to the nations.

In Luke 4 we see Jesus standing up in his home synagogue in Nazareth and reading from Isaiah 61:1-2

(J) "The Spirit of the Lord (AK) is upon me, because he has anointed me to (AL) proclaim good news to the poor. (AM) He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and (AN) recovering of sight to the blind,

***(AO) to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
 19 (AP) to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."***

So all these texts are talking about the Spirit of Yahweh coming on this individual and he would be endowed with all these powers that the Spirit gives to bring healing and deliverance to needy people.

John himself tells us that the Lord let him know that the one upon whom he saw the Spirit descend was the Promised Messiah and sure enough he saw that happen. So he knew Jesus was the anointed One of God who had come to deliver his people.

The coming of the Spirit on Jesus of Nazareth was no small event. Notice how Mark describes the event in Mark 1:10, [Jesus} ***U) saw (V) the heavens being torn open (W) and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.***

This was not an inconsequential, everyday, common event. It was a spitting open of the sky and the Spirit of God descended, he came down in the form of a dove. The Spirit could be seen lighting upon Jesus. God poured out his Spirit on his Son.

The other three gospels report this also:

Matt. 3:16 ...the heavens were opened to him, (G) and he (AH) saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;

Luke 3:21-22 - 1 Now when all the people were baptized, and when (A) Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, (B) the heavens were opened, 22 and (C) the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove;

John 1:32 - 32 And John (A) bore witness: (B) "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and (C) it remained on him.

Here we see that John was an eye-witness of the descent of the Spirit. He came down from heaven. He came from God. This was a defining moment in Jesus' life and ministry. God the Father himself poured out the Holy Spirit in power on his Son. The text here in John says the Spirit remained on him. It never departed from him. In fact, the presence of the Spirit was the invisible power of God that was present with him throughout his ministry.

We read in Acts 10:36-38, ***37 ...you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, (E) beginning (E) from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: 38 how (G) God anointed Jesus of Nazareth (H) with the Holy Spirit and with (I) power. He went about doing good and healing all (J) who were oppressed by the devil, (K) for God was with him.***

Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his ministry because..

III. It revealed the descent of the Spirit from heaven upon him. It was an EFFUSION of the Spirit upon him.

Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his ministry because..

**IV. It revealed the Father's love for and pleasure in his Son. -AFFIRMATION
It was the Affirmation of the Father's love for and pleasure in him.**

We read in Mark 1:11, ¹¹ **And (X)a voice came from heaven, (Y)"You are my beloved Son; (Z) with you I am well pleased."**

There are two great truths in the Father's words to his Son:

First of all, "You are my beloved Son." This was a personal word from God the Father to his Son. These same personal words are stated in Luke 3:22, **"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."**

When we turn to Matthew 3:17 we read, **behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."**

So here in Matthew the Father's words seem to be a witness to the onlookers, as to John the Baptist, but in Mark and Luke they are personal words to Jesus himself. There is no great difference here.

The Father also spoke these words from heaven at the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain in Matt. 17 and Mark 9, **"This is my beloved Son..."**

So on two occasions the Father spoke directly from heaven to and to others near him about his love for his Son. Jesus also testified to the Father's love for him in his prayer to the Father in John 17:24, **you loved me before the foundation of the world.**

What is happening here at Jesus' baptism and on the mount of Transfiguration? God is letting us see his affirmation of his love for his Son. He had loved the Son before the foundation of the world, of the universe; he had loved his Son in all eternity. And now that the Son has taken upon himself our human nature, that love was not interrupted in the least, but was as steadfast and faithful as ever. This statement of the Father to the Son was an AFFIRMATION both to the Son personally and to the witnesses of the Father's deep and abiding love for his Son.

In John 8:29 Jesus said, **And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."**

The Father's words to his Son were not only personal AFFIRMATION OF HIS ABIDING LOVE for his Son but an AFFIRMATION that the life and ministry and service of his Son were pleasing to his heavenly Father.

Jesus' chief mission in life was to please his heavenly Father. He said to his disciples in John 4 that his true "meat and drink" was to do his Father's will. When he faced the

cross he prayed to the Father that the suffering and separation of the cross could be removed from him, but then he submitted to the Father's will, not his own.

It was for such loving and submissive obedience that the Father loved him and declared from heaven, **“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”**

Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his ministry because..

IV. It was the Affirmation of the Father's love for and pleasure in his Son.

So, we've seen today:

Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his ministry because it was....

I. It was a -REVELATION – The revelation that he was the divine Messiah that John was sent to prepare the people to receive.

II. It was an -IDENTIFICATION – His identification with sinners he came to save.

III. It was an -EFFUSION – an outpouring of the Spirit upon the Son.

IV. It was the -AFFIRMATION - of the Father's love for and pleasure in his Son.

Applications:

1, If we haven't done so, like Jesus, we need to come to God seeking baptism. Unlike Jesus, we are all sinners and need the forgiveness that Jesus offers us because of his death and resurrection.

2. As Jesus poured out his Spirit on his Son and the Spirit remained on him, so God also pours out, anoints his people with the Spirit to begin and carry on the Christian life.

If we come to God through his Son in sincere faith, the Spirit will also remain on us and with us forever.

3. In Jesus' baptism We see a clear manifestation of the three persons of the triune God who act to save his people. The Father sent the Spirit upon his Son and spoke from heaven. The Son was coming up out of the water, dripping wet, the Spirit was sent from heaven to rest on the Son, and the Father spoke from heaven.

The three persons of the one God are seen that day on the banks of the Jordan when Jesus was baptized.

Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his ministry, and thus also for us his people. To him be glory in the church forever. Amen.

Prayer: Gracious Father, you broke open the heavens and sent your Spirit upon your Son and spoke to him of your love and pleasure in him. We thank you also have sent the Spirit into our hearts that we might believe in your Son, follow him in the waters of Christian baptism and become his disciple. Evermore strengthen us in our knowledge of you and in our service to your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

By Jeff Gregory, pastor

Good Shepherd Community Church
8441 Hunnicut Rd.
Dallas, TX 75228
214-324-9915
www.gsccdallas.org

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