

God Himself Is Baptised

Mark 1:9-11

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Introduction

Last week we began a new sermon series in *The Gospel According to Mark*.

- I explained to you that Mark likes to get straight to the point.
- In the very first verse he immediately tells us that he is writing about the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.
 - He does not present Jesus to us and let His identity unfold—he lays it all out.
 - *Jesus* means that He is the Saviour.
 - *Christ* means that He is the Messiah or the anointed one that God promised.
 - *Son of God* means that He is the second person of the Trinity—There is God the Father and God the Spirit, and He is God the Son from all eternity.

And Mark also begins with His official ministry.

- There is nothing about His birth—he goes right to the official beginning by telling us about His forerunner—John, who prepared the way for Him.
 - And how did John do that?
 - As a voice in the wilderness, calling the people to prepare for the coming of the Son of God by a baptism of repentance for the remission (or forgiveness) of sins.
 - He tells us that the eternal God Himself is coming to baptise us with God the Holy Spirit.
 - John's is a baptism with water that points to this baptism, this washing away of defilement, that only God the Son can accomplish by God the Spirit.
- This shows us how deep the problem of sin is.
 - We must be baptised by God and no man, not even John can do it.
 - We are defiled by sin—it has spoiled us—it has ruined our world and it has ruined us.
 - We are cut off from God because of it.
 - We are condemned, sentenced to perish in hell.
 - Our condition is far worse than we think it is.
 - But here is John in the wilderness, officially declaring to us in God's name that the LORD Himself, the sovereign, self-existing, eternal Son of God, is coming to baptise us with the Holy Spirit.
 - Here is the gospel, that this sovereign, self-existing, eternal Son of God is coming... or rather has come... to baptise us with God the Holy Spirit.
 - Surely this one who is so majestic and so worthy that John is unfit to loosen His sandal strap—a service that no Jew would ask even the lowest of his Jewish servants to do in that culture... surely He is able to wash away our sin and our defilement.

And today we come to the place in Mark where Mark shows us how Jesus Christ the Son of God officially began His public ministry.

- What is His very first official appearance?
- How does the ministry of the Son of God commence?

Take a look with me at what it says in Mark 1:9-11.

- This is the portion of Mark that we will be looking at today... Mark 1:9-11.
- Give attention to this reading because this is the Word of God.

Mark 1:9-11: It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

May the LORD bless the reading and now the exposition of His holy Word.

I. What a mind-boggling way for the Son of God to begin His public ministry—the Son of God is baptised!

A. You might rather expect that He would make His appearance in a glorious fiery chariot of seraphim like Ezekiel saw in his vision...

1. You might think that He would appear in glory as we are told that He will do at the last day, surrounded by holy angels with the sound of a great trumpet.
2. You might think that all would be constrained to fall on their faces before His glory and majesty in awe and terror.
 - He is the Son of God—begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.
 - He is from eternity the self-existing God and creator of all things, exalted and majestic, holy and pure, the judge of all the earth.
 - John said that he was not even worthy to loosen his sandals.

TRANS> But what do we see instead?

B. We see Him as man coming from Nazareth of Galilee to be baptised of John in the Jordan River!

1. In their accounts, Matthew and Luke present Him as one born to lowly parents...
 - Luke shows that He was born in a manger, surrounded by smelly animals in a drafty place with only shepherds to attend Him.
 - That He should be born into the world is itself stupendous.
 - Like Mark, they show us that he comes from Nazareth instead of appearing from the clouds of glory at Jerusalem...
2. But Mark's way of presenting Him is, perhaps, even more striking.
 - He has just told us that He is the Son of God who comes to baptise us with a baptism of repentance and remission of sins...
 - A baptism we need because we are defiled and condemned in our sin...
 - And he has just shown us how John said that baptism with water is just a symbol of the baptism that only He can give us by the Holy Spirit.
 - But to our amazement, He comes and is baptised by John.
 - This is how Mark presents Him to us... not as one baptising, but as one being baptised Himself—the Son of God!
 - As if He, the Holy One of Israel from heaven is defiled and in need of repentance and cleansing—as if He is defiled and condemned.

3. Matthew has his own way of showing us how stupendous this is.
 - He recounts John's objection and insistence that it is he who needs to be baptised by Jesus... he says, "I need to be baptised by you."
 - But Mark's way we are told nothing else but that He is the Son of God who is coming to baptise us with Spirit...
 - And then the first time we see Him, He is the one who is getting baptised!
 - No comment is needed—the effect is very powerful.
- How can God who came from heaven to baptise be baptised?
- C. He in fact needs to be baptised *because* He came to baptise us.
1. That's right—in order for Him to baptise us, He had to become one of us so that He could represent us.
 - That is why He was born of a woman.
 - As it says in Hebrews 2, He had to become flesh because He came to save us and we are flesh. Please turn to Hebrews 2 for just a minute.
 - Look at Hebrews 2:9—it says that He came that He might taste death for us... that is, experience death.
 - In verse 10 it describes how He became the Saviour that we need.
 - It says that He was made perfect (that is, just what we need to be saved) through sufferings.
 - Look at it...Hebrews 2:10 & 11: **For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect [all that we need] through sufferings. ¹¹ For both He who sanctifies [that is Jesus] and those who are being sanctified [that is us...all who come to Him to be washed] are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brothers...**
 - Do you see?
 - He had to become one with us in our ordeal—as sinners who were defiled by sin and condemned on account of sin.
 - He had to intimately associate Himself with us so our guilt and condemnation was transferred to Him... not because He sinned—but because of association with us.
 - He had to be one with us so that He could suffer for us.
 - Hebrews 2:14-17 goes on to explain further His association with us:
 - 2:14: **Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood [we are made of flesh and blood], He Himself likewise shared in the same, [He became flesh and blood] that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage [we as God's people did not know how our sins could be washed away]. ¹⁶ For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.**

- If He had been coming to save angels, He would have become a spirit like them, but because He came to save His people who are human flesh, He had become human flesh too.
 - All with a view that He might represent us as a faithful High Priest who makes propitiation for our sins... which He did by actually suffering death in our place.
2. So Jesus is baptised to show that He Himself needs to be pardoned and cleansed from the defilement, not of His sins, but of our sins!
- a. His baptism shows that He has entered into our ordeal as those who are defiled and under judgment.
 - Later on in Mark, (Mark 10:38) He will refer to the cross as a baptism that He must be baptised with.
 - Suffering on the cross!
 - That is the way that He is cleansed from the sins (our sins) that He acquired by His association with us as our Mediator and Head.
 - The cross is the way that He is made perfect—all that we need—through sufferings.
 - Just as our baptism points to the cleansing that He does by washing away our sins, so His baptism points the baptism of His death—
 - b. The way that He is baptised, or cleansed as our Mediator (not just symbolically) is by His suffering and death under the curse of God.
 - He bears the penalty, the full punishment, of our sins.
 - And now the way we are baptised is by Him as those who come to Him for cleansing and forgiveness through His blood—we are baptised into His name so that we have the benefit of His sacrifice for us all.
 - c. When He goes to the cross as our redeemer, it is as if we all go to the cross—He tastes death and hell for all of us... to cleanse the whole body...
 - Because this is so, all of those who are in Him have already been to hell and need not, indeed *can* not, ever go there again.

TRANS> What a marvellous thing it is for us that He came to be baptised!

- By receiving the symbol, He was placing Himself in our ordeal.
- He began His public ministry with baptism by John, and He concluded it with baptism on the cross for us all.
 - Now He is able to truly baptise us... to do what the water symbolises.
- And now I want to show you how God the Spirit and God the Father responded to our Lord Jesus at His baptism.
 - We will follow our text and look at how God the Spirit responded first.

II. God the Spirit came to God the Son at His baptism.

- Look at verse 10: **And immediately, coming up from the water,**
 - Let me digress here for just a minute to clear something up—

- When it says that Jesus *came up from the water* or *out of the water* as the alternate text—it does not mean that He was put under the water, for we are told in scripture that ceremonial purification is by sprinkling—
 - It rather speaks of him stepping out of the water.
 - Those being baptised would wade into the river and then they would have water sprinkled upon them, likely with hyssop.
 - That the language is used this way can be seen when Philip baptises the eunuch, for we are told in Acts 8:38, and I quote,
 - **Acts 8:38: And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.**
 - They both went into the water, but not under the water.
 - Philip went “down into the water” just the same as the eunuch, but surely it does not mean that both went under the water. Going into the water was not the baptism, but it is where they went for the baptism by water.
 - Acts 8:39 speaks of their coming out the water like this: **Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away... and so on...**
 - They both went down into (not under) the water, and they both came up out of the water (not breaking surface together as if they were both submerged, but as coming up from the baptism).
 - The point is, when scripture speaks of going into the water and coming out of the water it does not say anything about the mode.
 - We find that in places like Ezekiel 36:25 and Isaiah 52:15 which clearly speak of the cleansing that Christ will give when He comes, and of course there is Psalm 51:7 where it says: **Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**
 - Enough digression...let me get back to the point...
 - Verse 10 tells us what happened as soon as Jesus was baptised: **And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.**
- A. This is something that the Jews were expecting...for the heavens to be opened and the Spirit to come!
1. The Jews recognised that God had ceased to speak to His people directly by the Holy Spirit after the Old Testament prophets ceased (with Malachi).
 - They said that the Spirit spoke only by “the daughter of a voice”, in a distant echo, but they expected the Holy Spirit to return when the Messiah came—or actually when John came to prepare His way.
 2. Here are some quotes from them... that speak of the heavens being opened, of the Spirit coming, and even of the Father speaking in the first one:
 - This is from the Testament of Levi 18:6-8 written around 250 BC:
 - The heavens will be opened,
and from the temple of glory sanctification will come upon him,
with a fatherly voice, as from Abraham to Isaac.

And the glory of the Most High shall burst forth upon Him.
And the spirit of understanding and sanctification
shall rest upon him.

For he shall give the majesty of the Lord to those who are his sons in truth
forever.

- And here is another from the Testament of Judah which speaks of the messianic king as a Star of Jacob and says in 24:1-3:
 - “the heavens will be opened ... to pour out the spirit as a blessing of the Holy Father.”

B. The word that Mark uses to refer to the rending or tearing of the heavens is *skhid'-zo*.

1. It is a strong word that is used here to speak of God, as the Jews expected, breaking through the heavens to come to us.

- We need not concern ourselves with just how this was displayed.
- What we need to know is that it was a display to show that God had rent the heavens asunder (as Isaiah 64:1 longs for) to come down!
 - **Isaiah 64:1: Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!**
- There was a breaking forth from the realms of glory to our world.
 - The numinus broke into our world.
 - It was the beginning of the age of the Spirit that God had promised that would come to full expression when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost.

2. Here we have the Holy Spirit returning to man from whom He had been estranged!

- Man was created from the first to be a dwelling place for God by His Spirit.
 - We were always meant to be led by the Spirit as those who were made in the image of God—to enjoy full communion with God by the Holy Spirit.
 - But sin disrupted that.
- Jesus is the foundation of the return of the Spirit to man. He reconnects us.
 - We are shown right here by the rending of the heavens and the descent of the Spirit in the visible form of a dove that this great restoration comes about through Him!
 - This is not to say that the Holy Spirit was not present in the Old Testament.
 - Most certainly He was—the prophets spoke by Him and the people responded to God through His ministry to them.
 - But the only reason they could enjoy the Spirit then was because of Jesus Christ who was yet to come.
 - He is the one who was responsible for bring the Spirit to fallen man both before and after this event.
- To make that plain to us, God has the Spirit come to Him here in a visible way...
 - And He also waited until Pentecost to pour out the Spirit in the fullest measure on us—after Jesus had ascended into heaven.

- But you see, Jesus is *the anointed one*... the one who is anointed by the Spirit, so that all of us can be anointed by the Spirit.
- He is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit because He is the one who properly received the Spirit from glory to give to us.

C. And just what does the Spirit do?

1. First of all, for Jesus, He came to Him to help Him be the mediator for us—to carry out His work of redemption in human flesh.
 - Jesus came as a man, not a man who could tap into divine power, but as a man who like us had to live by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - We are told that He did His miracles by the Spirit.
 - He was the perfect man, and the perfect man is man filled with the Spirit of God.
 - It was by the Spirit that He also enjoyed communion with God—and that He prayed and understood the truth.
 - And as a prophet, it was by the Spirit that He prophesied.
2. And for us, the Holy Spirit does so very much!
 - a. He is the one who causes us to be born again.
 - Since the fall, we are dead in trespasses and sins—that is, dead toward God—unable to respond to Him.
 - But when Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit, we are made alive.
 - That is why Jesus called it a new birth in the Spirit.
 - b. In making us alive, the Spirit works in us that we might understand and believe God's Word...
 - And that we might believe and obey His word.
 - First and foremost, the very gospel itself—we see that we are sinners who need to be forgiven (to be washed with a baptism of repentance and remission of sins), and we see that only Jesus crucified can atone for our sins...
 - And the Spirit enables us to receive and rest upon Christ alone for our salvation.
 - No one will come to Jesus for salvation apart from the Spirit's work.
 - c. And when we have come to Jesus,
 - The Spirit enables us to grow into His likeness... to be progressively sanctified.
 - We are enabled to understand God's commandments by Him and we are enabled to walk in conformity to them and we are convicted of our sin.
 - And He also empowers us for service to God—especially so for prophets or apostles... but for all us at some level.
 - d. And perhaps the most delightful thing is that we have communion with God in the Spirit...
 - There is a way that defies explanation by which He manifests His love to us and His presence with us.
 - He gives us assurance of His love and hope in His promises.

- He causes us to know that the LORD is with us and gives us hearts full of praise and gratitude and worship.

TRANS> Jesus our mediator is the one for whom the heavens were torn apart that the Spirit might return to us!

- It is by His merit that the Spirit has come, and by His merit that we may have the Spirit too.
- But now let us look and see: how God the Father responded to Jesus at His baptism.

III. God the Father spoke to God the Son from heaven.

A. There might be some tension here...about what the Father thought of Christ now!

1. Certainly when the Son of God was in glory, He was the delight of God the Father.
 - There was a mutual delight between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - Each reveals throughout the pages of Scripture that their purpose is to glorify each other.
 - The Son says, "I have come to glorify the Father," and the Father, "I am working to glorify my Son," and the Spirit, we are told, comes to glorify Jesus and the Father.
2. But what now that Jesus has become our mediator at His baptism?
 - What will the Father think of Him now that He is tied to us as one with us, bearing responsibility for sinners like us...
 - so closely associated with us that we are one body with Him and that He can suffer for our sins?
 - What effect does this have on the Father's relationship to Him?

B. There need be no doubt!

1. Right here at Jesus' baptism the Father speaks and says, "This is my Son."
 - a. This is the divine testimony that rips through the heavens from God's abode.
 - It comes with all authority.
 - Jesus, though baptised as our mediator, is still just as much the Father's Son.
 - b. And do you know what that means for us who are in Christ by faith?
 - 1) It means that we can be sure that we are sons of God too—by adoption.
 - Jesus was not adopted here, He was already God's Son and the Father is declaring that He is still God's Son...
 - But by becoming one with us, He has made us all sons of God through faith in Him.
 - 2) That means that we are secure in God's house forever—with Jesus.
 - That means that we have a full inheritance in God's house—that we belong as members of the family.
 - It means that we have full and open access to the Father so that we may come to Him in prayer and in worship.

2. But God the Father does not simply say to Jesus “you are my Son.” He also says, “You are my beloved Son.”
 - a. Once again, this is the divine testimony from heaven.
 - Jesus did not cease to be loved by the Father for coming in our flesh.
 - As our Mediator, He is also the Son of God’s love.
 - It is true that He will have to bear the curse for us on the cross and will be cursed on account of our sin, but the Father will love Him all the more for this!
 - The Father praises Jesus because He so delights in Him showing love to us and showing love to Himself, His Father, because Jesus’ obedience honours the Father.
 - In the end, it makes His love even stronger if it were possible.
 - b. But here is the great thing for us who are in Christ.
 - Since Christ the mediator is *beloved* it means that all of us to whom He is attached are not only sons, but *beloved* sons.
 - God loves you beyond all comprehension if you are in Christ.
 - He is committed to doing what is best for you—and He has the wisdom to know what is best and the power to do what is best...
 - And He will—His love will never fail.
 - To be beloved of Him is to be absolutely assured of everlasting happiness—if God is for us, who can be against us?
3. But there is yet more that the Father says to His Son at His baptism.
 - He says, “You are My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!”
 - a. It can be the case, in human relations at least, that a parent can love his child and yet be disappointed with him...to find no pleasure in him.
 - But God the Father, speaking with all authority from heaven, declares that He is pleased with His Son as a human being.
 - You understand that Jesus still has His divine nature, but He also has a fully human nature, and it is to Him in human flesh that the Father expresses His pleasure here at His baptism.
 - He delights in Him, He rejoices in what He is as a man.
 - b. What a grand thing it was when God finished creating the world in which we were to live and declared that it was all good...
 - And how much better still when He then created the first man and woman and put them in the world that He had made and then declared that the world with us in it was very good!
 - What delight it gives to a child to know that he is pleasing his parents!
 - To see their smile and to know that they are pleased with him.
 - But what a horrendous thing it was when we fell and when God declared in the day of Noah,

- **Genesis 6:6-7: And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the LORD said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”**
 - Alas, He had no delight in us because we had become sinful and very corrupt!
 - That is why we so desperately need to be baptised by God the Son who baptises us with God the Spirit.
- And do you know what the next verse is in Genesis 6?
 - The next verse says, **8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.**
 - But Noah was a sinner too... how can this be explained?
 - It is explained right here in our text in Mark—that the Son joined Himself to us as our mediator at His baptism.
 - The Father knew that He was going to do that—and that enabled Him to take pleasure in Noah because He takes pleasure in His Son.
 - He is pleased with Him even though He is tied to us.

Conclusion

Oh live this out my dear friends!

- Come to be baptised by the One who was baptised for your sake...because He became one with you!
- Receive the Holy Spirit whom He restored to earth as the One who was anointed by Him for our sake—that we might have Him dwell in us also...
- And then live as His sons and daughters who are the delight of His eyes...as those in whom He finds pleasure.
 - Get into step with this... you please the Father—you delight Him.
 - Your person, your spirit, who you are as uniquely created by Him... He takes great delight in you if you are in Christ.
 - Don't you see?
 - Christ is the one who restores the Father's pleasure in us so that He rejoices over us!
 - He restores holiness by washing us all, He restores the Holy Spirit to us as the anointed one, and He restores us as sons in whom the Father delights.
 - That is why God the Son was baptised.