



Sunday, March 5, 2023

Lesson Text: Mark 1:4-13; **Time of Action:** 26 A.D.; **Place of Action:** the wilderness of Judea; the Jordan River

Golden Text: "And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11).

I. INTRODUCTION. This week's lesson deals with the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Although it was preceded by the ministry of John the Baptist, the uniqueness of Jesus' ministry soon became evident. The Father's testimony, Satan's temptations, and Jesus' call for disciples all marked Him as more than an ordinary man.

II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. Mark's gospel portrays Jesus as the Servant of the LORD sent to accomplish a specific work for God (see Mark 10:45). The book does not contain any references to the birth or childhood of either Jesus or John the Baptist. It begins abruptly with the ministry of John, the prophesied messenger who would prepare the way before the LORD (see Mark 1:2-3). Luke revealed that John began his ministry in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius (see Luke 3:1-3). John was about thirty years old at this time. Jesus was about the same age since



John was only six months older than Jesus (see Luke 1:36). Our lesson begins after Mark introduced John the Baptist as *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make his paths straight"* (see Mark 1:3).

III. JOHN'S MINISTRY PERFORMED (Mark 1:4-8)

A. John's ministry of baptism (Mark 1:4-5).

1. (vs. 4). Our first verse says **"John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."** While Mark's gospel is embodied in Jesus Christ, its *"beginning"* (see Mark 1:1) is traced back to the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist. Mark tells us that **"John did baptize in the wilderness"** which we learn elsewhere was *"the wilderness (or desert area) of Judea"* (see Matthew 3:1). Water **"baptism"** was not a new concept to the Jews for Jews already required Gentile proselytes (converts to Judaism) to undergo baptism. However, John was baptizing Jews and **"repentance"** was a prerequisite for receiving John's **"baptism."** The word **"repentance"** literally means *"a change of mind,"* but when applied to spiritual experience it implies a change in one's behavior as well (see Luke 3:7-14). This change of mind and behavior leads to turning away from sin and turning to God. Therefore John's mission was *"to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,"* and in doing so *"to*



make ready a people prepared for the LORD" (see Luke 1:13, 17). Acts 19:4 says *"John... baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Jesus Christ."* Those who submitted to **"the baptism of repentance"** bore witness that they had turned from sin and were ready for the Messiah. John preached that those who repented would receive **"the remission of sins."** The word **"remission"** signifies removal or cancellation, and **"sins"** refer to missing a mark that is set. In essence, **"the remission of sins"** means the cancelling of every mark we have missed that God has set for us.

2. (vs. 5). This verse says **"And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins."** The initial response to John's ministry was overwhelming for **"there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem."** When the people came to John from all over **"the land,"** they **"were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins."** In other words, in response to John's ministry, a large number of Israelites openly confessed their **"sins"** and received his baptism. They were aware of their personal sin and admitted to their failure in their responsibility to God.

B. John's way of life (Mark 1:6). This verse says **"And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey."** By the time John began his ministry he was a solitary person **"clothed with camel's hair, and with**



a girdle of a skin about his loins." Whether John ever had any connection with the communities that practiced self denial as a spiritual discipline we don't know. However, unaffected by the more refined dress of people from the nearby towns, John's appearance resembled his Old Testament counterpart, Elijah (see II Kings 1:8). He lived on a diet of **"locusts and wild honey."** The term **"locusts"** is another name for grasshoppers. According to the law, **"locusts"** were acceptable for Jews to eat (see Leviticus 11:22) and they were often food for the poor. **"Honey"** was available because of the wild bees in the area. Therefore, John lived a simple life. He didn't represent any religious sect or political party so he wasn't beholden to anyone for his livelihood. He was obliged to please no one but God.

C. John's message (Mark 1:7-8).

1. (vs. 7). This verse says **"And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose."** The height of John's mission wasn't in his baptizing ministry, as important as that was. The height of his mission was pointing the way to the Messiah who John said **"There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose."** The act of **"unloosing"** a **"shoe"** was the task of a slave. With this statement, John was indicating the superiority of the One who would come after him. John was saying that in comparison to that Person, he was not even on the level of a slave.



2. (vs. 8). This verse says **"I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost."** In pointing out the contrast between his baptizing ministry and the baptizing ministry of the Messiah, John presented his work as a mere symbol of the dispensational change that would take place because of the work of the Messiah. To show the contrast or the differences between him and the Messiah, John said **"I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost."** In other words, the Messiah would identify the repentant people with **"the Holy Ghost"** and His ministry (see John 14:16-17; Acts 2:4; I Corinthians 12:13). John was administering an outward symbol that identified a person as repentant and willing to submit to the Messiah. Jesus' baptism **"with the Holy Ghost"** would transform the heart and identify a believer with God's Spirit (see I Corinthians 6:19; 12:13). Water was the medium John used to identify Jews who repented with those who were awaiting the Messiah. But the Messiah would identify believers with Himself by bestowing the **"Holy Spirit"** on them. This **"Holy Ghost"** baptism had not yet been given even when Jesus was about to return to heaven, but He promised it would come *"not many days hence"* (see Acts 1:5). It happened on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts chapter 2) as Peter later confirmed (see Acts 11:15-16).

IV. JESUS RECOGNIZED BY HIS FATHER (Mark 1:9-11)

A. Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9). This verse says **"And**



it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan." The phrase **"And it came to pass in those days"** means that sometime during John's ministry, **"Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan."** Mark's account doesn't say anything about the reasons for Jesus' baptism. His baptism was not a baptism signifying repentance because He had not committed any sins. However, from other Scriptures we learn the rationale or reasons for Jesus' baptism. Several reasons have been suggested. First, **"Jesus"** said it was necessary *"to fulfill all righteousness"* (see Matthew 3:13-15). This probably meant that He had to be **"baptized"** to demonstrate obedience to His Father's will. Second, in baptism **"Jesus"** identified Himself with sinners. He would soon take their sins on the cross to show symbolically that He was one with them.

B. The divine testimony (Mark 1:10-11).

1. (vs. 10). This verse says, **"And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him."**

Mark's emphasis was not so much on Jesus' baptism itself as on the signs or testimonies that accompanied it. The phrase **"straightway coming up out of the water"** probably indicates that these testimonies or signs happened just after Jesus had come up onto the riverbank. The first sign or testimony occurred when Jesus **"saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him."** The **"Spirit descended"** upon Jesus from the **"opened heavens"** in the form of a **"dove."** This visible anointing was evidence



to John that Jesus was the one who would baptize with the **"Spirit"** (see John 1:32-33) and identify Jesus as the Son of God. But the testimony was not complete without the verbal witness by the Father as we shall see in the next verse.

2. (vs. 11). This verse says, **"And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."** The second testimony came from God the Father. **"From heaven"** He declared **"Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."** God's voice was probably heard and understood by John and other bystanders, but the word was directed to Jesus. God's words reaffirmed to Jesus that as He began the ministry that would lead to a humiliating and degrading death for sinners, the Father still loved Him and approved of Him just as He had from all eternity. Jesus did not become the **"Son"** of God at His baptism. He is the **"Son"** of God from eternity. The descent of the Holy Spirit, and God's declaration **"from heaven,"** are simply the outward manifestations of the **"Son's"** willing submission and the Father's pleasure in Him (see Philippians 2:5-11).

V. JESUS TEMPTED BY SATAN (Mark 1:12-13)

A. The motivation (Mark 1:12). This verse says **"And immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness."** Here Mark tells us that **"immediately"** or just as soon Jesus was baptized and the Father spoke of being pleased with Him, **"the spirit driveth him into the**



wilderness" to be tempted by Satan as we shall see in the next verse. The fact that this took place **"immediately"** indicates that Jesus' temptation was an event timed by God to **"immediately"** follow Jesus' baptism. It's interesting that the One who led Jesus **"into the wilderness"** was the **"Holy Spirit"** who had just descended upon Him. The verb **"driveth"** is a strong word, giving the idea of divine and scriptural necessity. There is a similarity of the **"Spirit"** driving Jesus out into the **"wilderness"** with Israel, who God called **"son"** (see Exodus 4:23) and was *"baptized unto Moses . . . in the sea"* (see I Corinthians 10:2). Israel was led by the **"Spirit"** in the pillars of cloud and fire (see Exodus 14:19, 20) along the path of wilderness testing.

B. The circumstances (Mark 1:13). Our final verse says **"And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him."** Mark's account of Jesus' temptation is brief. It does not contain any of the details of the individual tests and Jesus' response to them as does Matthew and Luke's account (see Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Mark simply says that Jesus **"was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan."** Jesus' tempter was **"Satan"** whose name means *"adversary."* Although **"Satan"** had numerous fallen angels at his command (see Revelation 12:7-9), he didn't trust this encounter with God's Son to any of them. He was determined to work his wiles on Jesus personally. The number **"forty days"** is possibly a symbolic reference to the forty years of Israel's wilderness experience (see Exodus 16:35; Numbers 14:33-34; 32:13; Deuteronomy 1:3). **Note: Jesus' temptations by "Satan"**



were not inward because "Satan" had no power over Him. Instead, the temptations were by outward enticements. Likewise, Satan has no power over believers but he entices us from the outside. Jesus Christ was "tempted," not only to teach us that it is no sin to be "tempted," but to direct us where to go for help when we are "tempted," even to Him who suffered being "tempted" that he might sympathize and empathize with us when we are "tempted" (see Hebrews 4:15). Mark also wrote in this verse that while Jesus **"was there in the wilderness"** He **"was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him."** Mark's account is the only one that includes the phrase **"and (He) was with the wild beasts"** so we can't be sure why He added that phrase; but it could possibly be that it was an intimation to Jesus of the inhumanity of the men of that generation whom He would live among. Many of them were no better than **"wild beasts"** in the **"wilderness"** and probably worse. The same thing can be said about many people in the world today. The last part of this verse says **"and the angels ministered unto him."** God's **"angels"** were busy supporting Jesus supplying Him with whatever He needed, and dutifully attending to Him.

VI. Conclusion. Jesus' ministry was introduced by the proclamation of John the Baptist. Jesus' baptism and temptation revealed the LORD's divine character. His baptism was a public act acknowledged by a heavenly voice. The announcement of His sonship was followed by a very



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private encounter—the temptation, an event timed by God to immediately follow Jesus' baptism. The lesson here is that believers need to be aware that often, after having a spiritual victory, we may be faced with temptation. Knowing this we need to be as ready as Jesus was.

*****The Sunday School Lesson, Union Gospel Press Curriculum*****