

## **Jesus Prepares for His Ministry**

A Sermon on Mark 1:9-13

Preached by Paul Liberati, January 23, 2021

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*It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan – Mark 1:9*

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Last week, we looked at the ministry of John the Baptist and saw that, as the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets, it was his job to prepare the people of God for the coming of Jesus Christ. To that end, he came as the *Messenger* of Malachi 3:1 and the *Voice of one crying in the wilderness* corresponding to Isaiah 40:3. His message was also very clear: The King is on his way, and therefore the *people* of his kingdom must be prepared. If we had to sum up the entire ministry of John the Baptist, we could say that it was a ministry of preparation.

Well, this morning, as we move along in our study of the Gospel of Mark, we recognize that there's still another preparation that Mark wants us to see. Only this time, it's not the people in view. Instead, it's the preparation of Jesus himself. As he comes down from Nazareth of Galilee, Mark shows us that there were two things that he had to do before he began the work his Father had given him to accomplish.

First of all, in verses 9-11, we see that Jesus *had to be baptized*. And then, in verses 12-13, we see that he had to be *tested in the wilderness*. Both of these aspects of his preparation were critical and, as we make our way through our text, we'll see exactly why that was. For now, just consider one point of practical application—namely, if the Son of God had to be prepared for the work that His Father gave him to do, how much more do you and I also need to be prepared? If the Son of God, who says to us (John 5) that he has *life in himself* still had to be equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit, then what makes us think that we can ever rush right into the day, or rush right onto the job, apart from the

grace and power of that same Holy Spirit working in our lives? In a word, if Jesus had to be prepared for his work, then you and I must be prepared for ours.

Now, there's no question that Jesus had to be prepared, and to that extent there's certainly a lesson here for us. But now, as we look at some of the details of our passage we should also recognize that the *nature* of the work he came to do has no parallel with ours. The work of Jesus Christ is absolutely unique. And, we know that because our whole salvation depends *solely* upon what he came to do and not what we can do for ourselves. Because of that, even the preparation of Jesus Christ, both in his baptism and in his testing, is ultimately in a category of its own.

### **1. The Significance of Jesus' Baptism**

One of the questions that we often hear people ask is, *Why did Jesus have to be baptized?* After all, didn't Mark already say, back in verse 4, that John came with a baptism of repentance? And didn't he say that it was for the remission of sins? And yet, we know that Jesus has no sins and no reason to repent.

Well, the answer to that question is very simple. The baptism of Jesus was the *ceremonial aspect of his kingly, prophetic and priestly ordination*. Just like in the Old Testament, every prophet, priest, and king had to be ordained and anointed, so here we can see that the One who fulfills these offices in himself, was likewise set apart and ordained.

There's a lot of different ways to show how this is true, but for the sake of time, just consider one aspect. In his baptism, Jesus is being set apart and ordained as the Great High Priest of his people.

### **2. The Baptism of Jesus as a Priestly Ordination**

In Luke chapter 3, where the Bible records baptism of Jesus, Luke provides an important detail to the picture. After Jesus was baptized, he says in verse 23, *And Jesus began His ministry at about thirty years of age*. The reason that's important is that, if you

look back to the Book of Numbers, you'll see that one of the qualifications God gave to Moses was that for any man to serve in the priesthood, he had to be a minimum of thirty-years-old. In fact, the age qualification was so important, God repeats it no less than seven times throughout the chapter (vv 3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47). When you see how much emphasis is placed upon the minimum age for the priesthood, you realize exactly what Luke is saying when he mentions that Jesus began his ministry at thirty years of age.

But it's not just the age of the priesthood that we find in Scripture. Rather, we also see that, in the process of ordination, the priest himself would undergo a ritual baptism of ceremonial cleansing. In Numbers 8:5-7, the Bible says, *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them ceremonially. Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle upon them the water of purification.*

Now, certainly, there were other aspects to process, and you can read about them in Numbers 8. The thing that we need to see here is that, in terms of setting them apart, every priest was baptized by the sprinkling of clean water, and verse 11 specifically says, *in order that they may perform the work of the LORD.*

So then, when we come to the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, we can see that his baptism was no less than his priestly ordination, performed by a man who was also *born into the priestly line* (Lk. 1:5).

### **3. Jesus Appeals to John's Baptism**

When Jesus went about performing his work, one of the things he did was cleanse the Temple. When Jesus saw the merchants and money changers defiling the House of God, he flipped their tables over and drove them all out with a whip of chords that he made. When the rulers of the Temple heard, they came and confronted the Lord, saying, *By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?* In other words, the chief priests wanted Jesus to know that he was operating outside of his jurisdiction.

But was he? Notice how Jesus responds to their question. *But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one question; and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—was it from heaven or was it from men?*

Obviously, the rulers didn't know how to answer that question. If they said that John's baptism was from heaven, everyone would ask them why they hadn't been baptized by John. On the other hand, if they said that it was simply from men, they'd be in trouble with the people because all regarded John as a prophet. In the end, they had to say that they really didn't know.

The point, however, is that in failing to answer the Lord's question, they failed to answer their own. What Jesus was saying by his question was that his authority to cleanse the temple came from the fact that he was acting as the true High Priest, and it was the baptism of John *by which he was ordained to that work*.

#### **4. Jesus Anointed with the Holy Spirit**

Jesus certainly tied the validity and authority of his ministry to the baptism of John. But if you look back at our text, you can see that John was not the only one who was involved in that event. In verse 10, the Bible says that after Jesus was baptized, *He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

Here we see that the ordination of Jesus Christ was far more than the sprinkling of clean water. Rather, in addition to that, we see that just like the prophets, priests, and kings of the Old Testament were anointed with oil, representing the Holy Spirit, so Jesus was anointed on that day with the full measure of the Holy Spirit Himself.

As you think about that, you realize what a rich and beautiful picture this is. All three persons of the Trinity are working together in a very intimate way to accomplish the redemption of God's people. As the Father speaks from heaven, He commends the Son and then anoints him with the Holy Spirit, in preparation for the work He called him to do.

#### **5. The Father's Message About Jesus**

In the New Testament, there are only three recorded instances where God spoke audibly from heaven. One is in this passage, the other was on the Mount of Transfiguration,

and the other time was when the Father reminded the Son that everything he was doing was for the glory of His Name (Jn. 12:28-30). The reason I point that out, is that there's something special about when God speaks from heaven. Every time, it's to teach us that we need to recognize the person of Jesus Christ for who he truly is.

In Mark 9, when the disciples were on the Mount of Transfiguration, they saw that Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus. The message of that event should have been clear to them: Jesus is the greater Prophet, and fulfills the ministries of all the prophets who went before him. For some reason, however, the disciples didn't get that message. Instead, they made the mistake of trying to put Jesus on the very same level with all the other prophets. In verse 5, Peter says, *Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.*

But just as Peter was speaking, Mark says, *a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a Voice came out from the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!* Then, verse 8 says, *Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.* You see, every once in a while, we can stumble when it comes to the person of Jesus Christ. It's true that Jesus was baptized by John and it's true that he was set apart for the work of a prophet, priest and king. But the thing that we need to remember is that, in comparison to every other prophet, priest and king in the history of God's people—Jesus Christ is greater than them all.

## **6. Jesus Tested in the Wilderness**

Now, in terms of his preparation, the Lord's baptism was just the first part. As you look down to verses 12 and 13, you can see that the second half was the 40 days of testing that he endured. As you look at that, I want you to notice *two things* about the testing that Mark describes: he says that it was initiated by God and conducted by the Devil.

Every week, Christian congregations all around the world join together in the praying of the Lord's Prayer. And, one of the things that we ask for in that prayer, is that God would lead us *not into temptation but deliver us from evil.* But a few months ago, when our family first started coming to this church, we noticed that this congregation says:

Deliver us from *the evil one*. When we first heard that, we wondered why and, when I looked it up in the Greek text, I found that there was a definite article in front of the term evil (*tou ponerou*). Well, for that reason, it seems likely that *the evil one* is the best translation of the text. Moreover, in his *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Daniel B. Wallace comes to the same conclusion. In his comments on Matthew 6:13, he writes, *Although the KJV renders this 'deliver us from evil,' the presence of the article indicates not evil in general, but the evil one himself.*

Now, I bring that up not because I want to make a point about translations, but because, to a certain extent, it really changes what we're asking of God. Sure, we can say that all evil comes from the devil, but when we say to the Father, *deliver us from the evil one*, it reminds us that we have every reason to believe that God will hear and answer that particular prayer. And that reason is found in our text.

You see, one of the missions of Jesus Christ was to come into this world and do battle with the King of Darkness, and prevail. In 1 John 3:8, the Bible says, *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.* If you think back to that great promise of Genesis 3:15, you remember that God said that one day, the Seed of the Woman would come and *bruise the serpent's head*.

And it's true that, as we move along in the Gospel of Mark, we see that Jesus is progressively and persistently overtaking the Kingdom of Satan, and that ultimately he does deliver that death blow, by his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead. And yet still, what we need to see in our text is that his temptation in the wilderness was the very first step in that process. In preparing Jesus for all the work that lay ahead—he had to make this initial stand against the enemy of our souls. The wilderness was more than a boot-camp scenario. It was a live-action test that was definitive for the rest of the battle.

But again, this was a test that was initiated by God. Not only did God initiate the war in Genesis 3, when He said to the woman, *And I will put enmity between your seed and the seed of the serpent*, but even here it's God who initiates the battle. Mark says, *Immediately, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness.*

The original language here is strong and it fills the narrative with intensity. While Matthew and Luke use a different term that amounts to *leading* and *guiding*, Mark uses a

stronger word (*ekballo*) showing that Jesus, *by a strong and irresistible force*, was “driven” into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. We can see by this that, although the testing of Jesus was conducted by the devil, it was initiated by God.

And, it's here that I think we have the answer to our question, Why is it that God will hear our prayer and deliver us from the evil one? It's because when it comes to the battle we have with the Devil, the victory is already won in Christ. In other words, God doesn't have to lead us *into* temptation in the way that He led His Son. Moreover, God can deliver us from the evil because, in providing for our salvation, He did *not* deliver His Son (Rom. 8:32; 2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Pet. 2:9).

When God said on that day, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*, He was telling us that Jesus came and Jesus did for us what none of us could have ever done for himself. That includes the life of perfect obedience that he lived, the sacrificial and substitutionary death he suffered for our sin, and yes, as we can see in our text for today – it also includes the victory that Jesus won in *all* the battles that he fought with the Devil himself.

## **7. Looking Forward in the Gospel of Mark**

It's fascinating to me that Mark doesn't actually tell us that Jesus prevailed. To see that explicitly, you have to read the details that both Matthew and Luke provide. It's possible that part of the reason for that is Mark's style. As we study Mark's Gospel, we see that he tends to be short, and you can feel that he brings us through the story at a faster speed than anyone else. But you know, it's also possible that the reason Mark doesn't mention the victory of Jesus here, is that his victory becomes altogether clear in everything that follows this account.

As we look on in the Gospel of Mark, we can see that Jesus, far from being defeated to any degree, goes forth as a mighty victor and a man of war. As soon as he's ordained and receives the anointing of the Holy Spirit, as soon as he's tested and tried in the wilderness, Jesus sets for a full-on conquest through enemy lines. He begins to preach the Gospel, gather his twelve disciples, and then systematically conquer the darkness of this world.

As we anticipate the rest of Mark's account, however, my prayer is that you and I would already be encouraged. My prayer is that you and I would already rejoice, because the fact of the matter is that our journey will be a looking *back* to the victory that's already been won. **Amen.**