

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

You Are My Beloved Son

January 15th, 2017

Mark 1:9-13

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 1:9; that’s on page 836 in your pew Bibles. If you weren’t with us last week, then you missed a little bit of introduction, you might want to go back and listen to that message on line, but for now let me just remind you that this Gospel is essentially the Gospel of Peter through the translation and scribal work of John Mark. It tends to be brief, blunt and action packed – just what you would expect from the Apostle Peter. Last week we read about John the Baptist and how people are prepared to meet the Lord and this week, we do that very thing. This week Mark introduces us to Jesus and this is what he says. Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 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. (Mark 1:9–13 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

I think I mentioned last week that a “Gospel” is not a biography per se. Many scholars believe that Mark INVENTED the genre of “Gospel” so it is probably pretty important for us to understand exactly what that is. Let me show you again that quote from the early church about

the Gospel of Mark. It's from Papias in the year 130 AD. He says:

Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, **not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord.**¹

Not indeed IN ORDER. Now I simply point that out to show that a Gospel is not a biography per se. A biography would naturally walk you through the events of a person's life more or less in order and then at the end would try and pull all of that together into some sort of analysis and reflection – a Gospel is not quite like that. The Gospels are often and even generally in chronological order, but their main concern is to help us understand who Jesus is and what Jesus did to secure our redemption and so sometimes in Mark's Gospel he will put events side by side because they mutually interpret each other not necessarily because they happened in chronological proximity. I'm saying that not because these stories we are looking at this morning are out of order – they are not – I'm saying that to alert you to the unique concern of a Gospel. A Gospel is written not just to narrate events – a Gospel is written to explain significance and to solicit faith. Mark is telling us who Jesus is and why it matters. He has skipped all the information about Jesus' childhood and teenage years – those things would have been very important to a BIOGRAPHER – Mark is not a BIOGRAPHER. Mark is an EVANGELIST and so he cuts right to the chase. He says **HERE IS WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW** about the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. This is who he is and this is what he came to do for us. That is what this introduction is all about. Mark says three things in particular.

Introducing Jesus:

He says first of all that:

1. Jesus is the (beloved) Son of God

That is the first thing Mark wants us to know about Jesus. Look at the very first verse in the Gospel of Mark – we read it last week. Mark begins this Gospel by saying:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1 ESV)

¹James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 3.

Mark tells us right off the top who Jesus is. He is the Son of God. That is by far the most important thing you need to know about Jesus. It is the beginning of Mark's Gospel and it is the climax of Mark's Gospel. Much like in a good High School essay, Mark gives us his thesis right off the top and then with story after story after story he demonstrates the truth of that thesis. Then at the end having overwhelmed us with evidence Mark provides a concluding sentence in Mark 15:39. This sentence, fittingly enough given the original audience for this Gospel, comes out of the mouth of a Roman soldier. A Roman centurion looks at Jesus on the cross and says:

"Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39 ESV)

That is the first thing and by far the most important thing that Mark wants us to understand about Jesus. Mark says it, the centurion says it – but of course the most important person in the story to say it, is God himself. At Jesus' baptism, at the moment he came up out of the water a voice came from the heavens and said to Jesus:

"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11 ESV)

So what in the world does it mean to call someone the Son of God? That's actually very important for us to think through that in our day and age because our Muslim friends accuse us of blasphemy at precisely this point in our theology. To a certain extent Islamic theology developed in reaction to Mohammed's incorrect understanding of the Trinity and the incarnation. That misunderstanding is actually recorded in the Qur'an.

They say: "(Allah) Most Gracious has begotten a son!" Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous! At it the skies are ready to burst, and the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin, That they should invoke a son for (Allah) Most Gracious. For it is not [worthy of] the majesty of (Allah) Most Gracious that He should beget a son." (Sura 19:88-92)

Now part of the problem is that they think that when Christians say that Jesus is the Son of God they mean that God the Father had marital relations with the Virgin Mary and by so doing produced Jesus. That too is in the Qur'an.

"In blasphemy indeed are those that say that Allah is Christ the son of Mary." (Sura 5:17)

Mohammed rejected Christianity because he thought we were saying that God the Father had

inappropriate relations with the Virgin Mary and by those relations BEGAT Jesus Christ – but is that we are saying? Is that what Mark means by calling Jesus the Son of God?

Mohammed should have read the rest of the New Testament. The Apostles were very careful to explain what they meant by using that title for Jesus. The whole Book of Hebrews exists to explain the exalted nature of Jesus Christ and the various titles and offices that are conferred upon him. Let me show you just a little bit about what Hebrews says about this title of “Son”.

Hebrews 1 says:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? (Hebrews 1:1–5 ESV)

So here the Apostle says that “Son” is the NAME that the second person of the Trinity has inherited. It is a NAME. Names in the Bible indicate identity and calling. Imagine if the second person of the Trinity had been called “Dawn” or “Rex” or “The Avenger” or “The Destroyer” – those names all MEAN SOMETHING well so does the name SON mean something.

Commenting on this passage in Hebrews Philip Hughes says:

“The “name” which distinguishes Christ from the angels and elevates him above them, in the comparison introduced by the fourth verse, is that of “Son”, for as our author goes on to show, the son inherits the position of privilege and authority...”²

So in Hebrews 1 the Apostle says that calling the second person of the Trinity “Son of God” does not say anything about the manner of his conception – it is a metaphor, it is a symbolic way of saying that he is of the Father and yet distinct from the Father and that he has all of the authority of the Father and he inherits all that belongs to the Father. That’s what the name ‘son’ means!

It doesn’t mean that the second person of the Trinity had a beginning – John 1:1 says:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1 ESV)

² Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary On The Epistle To The Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 51.

John calls the second person of the Trinity “the Word” – another obviously symbolic name – and he says that the Word was with God in the beginning and that he was God in the beginning. So let’s put all of that together. To call Jesus the Son of God as Mark does repeatedly throughout his Gospel and as God himself does here at Jesus’ baptism is to say 4 things. It is to say first of all that:

i. Jesus is “of” the Father

He is of the same substance as the Father – like how I am “of the same substance” as my father. The author of Hebrews said that too in Hebrews 1.3:

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature (Hebrews 1:3 ESV)

The Greek word there for “nature” means literally “substance” or “essence”. Jesus is OF the Father. He is God.

ii. Jesus is distinct from the Father

Jesus is of the Father but to call him Son is to make an obvious distinction. I am like my father and of my father but I am not my father. John says the same thing when he says that the Word was with God and the Word was God. God and with God. Equally God and yet distinct in person.

Thirdly to call Jesus the Son of God is to say that:

iii. Jesus does the Father’s will

That is what a son did in those days – not so much anymore – but in those days to be a son was to obey the father and to do the work of the father. If your father was a baker then you became a baker and you did baker things. If your father was a farmer then you became a farmer and you did farmer things. Jesus says many times in his flesh that he has come to do the Father’s will. In John 12 for example he says:

For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. (John 12:49 ESV)

Isn't that amazing? Jesus only said what the Father told him to say. And according to Mark's Gospel, Jesus only did what it was the Father's will to do. In Mark 14 Jesus prays and says:

“Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:36 ESV)

So to call Jesus “the Son of God” is to draw attention to the fact that he obeys the Father in all things and perfectly.

Fourthly it is to say that:

iv. Jesus inherits the Father's property

Hebrews 1 makes that point as well. The Apostle says that Jesus is:

the heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2 ESV)

That is what it means to say that Jesus is the Son of God! It is to say that he is GOD – and yet is distinct from the Father. It is to speak in Trinitarian terms. It is to say that Jesus is perfectly obedient and it is to draw attention to the fact that Jesus has inherited the world.

Make sure you know that the next time you speak to a Muslim friend. Make sure you keep that in mind as we work our way through Mark's Gospel. Now, that is by far the most important thing that Mark wants you to know about Jesus, but it isn't the only thing. He says two more things to us in this introduction. He says second of all that:

2. Jesus is uniquely filled with the Holy Spirit

Look again at Jesus' baptism. Mark says:

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. (Mark 1:10 ESV)

There are two grammatical indicators embedded in this text that let us know that this is a very significant event. The first one is the use of a Greek word translated by the ESV as “torn open”. That word is incredibly important in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. That is the word that was used when Moses **parted** the Red Sea; that is the word that was used when Moses **split** the rock to give water to the people in the desert – that’s a salvation word! That’s a ‘power of God’ word. And it is also the word that Mark comes back to at the very climax of his revelation and interpretation of Jesus Christ. In Mark 15:38, at the very moment Jesus died on the cross Mark says:

And the curtain of the temple was **torn in two**, from top to bottom. (Mark 15:38 ESV)

Same word. This is Mark’s way of saying that something of cosmic significance is happening. A rift between earth and heaven has opened! Power has come down so that people can go home – this is a Gospel word!

The other indicator we find in the text that lets us know that something important is happening here comes to us in the particular phrase that Mark uses to describe the Spirit’s descent. The ESV says that the Spirit was descending “on him” but the Greek is more intense than that, it actually says the Spirit descended “into him”. James Edwards for example explains:

the Greek intensifies the union of Jesus and the Spirit: “the Spirit was descending *into* him,” indicating Jesus’ complete filling and equipping for ministry by the Spirit.³

Now you have to remember that in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was often said to have “come upon” people at certain times in order to help them do some work of redemption on behalf of God’s people. The Spirit of the Lord for example, came upon Saul – multiple times and for a variety of purposes. One time, a Jewish town had been defeated by an enemy and that enemy was going to mutilate and humiliate all the men of the town and the news of the disaster was brought to young King Saul and the Bible says:

And the Spirit of God **rushed upon Saul** when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled. (1 Samuel 11:6 ESV)

³James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 36.

In that story the Spirit of God came upon Saul and gave him a righteous anger and courage for battle and he fought with the enemy of God's people and set them free.

In another story the Spirit came upon Saul to make him prophesy. 1 Samuel 10 says:

the Spirit of God **rushed upon him**, and he prophesied among them. (1 Samuel 10:10 ESV)

So the Spirit of God would fall UPON people in the Old Testament to help them do things related to revelation and redemption. But it doesn't say that about Jesus. It doesn't say that the Spirit fell "upon him" it says the Spirit descended INTO HIM.

John the Baptist understood that this was a whole different thing. In The Gospel of John he is recorded as saying:

"I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit **descend and remain**, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' (John 1:32-33 ESV)

Jesus was filled with the person and power of the Holy Spirit in a unique way. This was DIFFERENT than what happened in the Old Testament. This was new, this was bigger and this would change the world.

The third thing that Mark says about Jesus in this introduction is that:

3. Jesus is our substitute and representative

This is one of those things where once you know to look for it, you will see it everywhere. Now, you probably noticed that in the first point we made about Jesus being the Son of God I put the word "beloved" in brackets and then I didn't say anything about it. But now let me come back to that. God used that phrase with that adjective at Jesus' baptism. He said:

"You are **my beloved Son**; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11 ESV)

Now where have you heard that before? What Old Testament story does that remind you of? It is one of the most important stories in the Old Testament. It is the story of the binding of Isaac. Do

you remember that? At the start of the story, God says to Abraham:

“Take your son, your only son Isaac, **whom you love**, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” (Genesis 22:2 ESV)

And Abraham went. He didn’t know why God was asking him to do this but he went trusting that God would provide. When Isaac – his beloved son – asked him why they went to the mountain without an animal to sacrifice Abraham said:

“**God will provide for himself the lamb** for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together. (Genesis 22:8 ESV)

Abraham knew that God would PROVIDE THE LAMB and so he and Isaac went. When they got to the top of the mountain, Abraham did as God had said; he bound Isaac on the altar. And then just before Abraham did what he did not want to do God did what Abraham had believed and prayed that he would do. God showed up and he said:

“Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, **your only son**, from me.” 13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering **instead of his son**. (Genesis 22:11–13 ESV)

The point of this story is that God does not expect us to give him our beloved sons – this story teaches us to believe in a God who will do that for us! That’s why Jesus is called God’s beloved Son – God’s only Son – and John the Baptist understood that connection very well which is why when he introduces Jesus to his disciples he says:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29 ESV)

John saw Jesus and he says: “this is that”. This is the lamb that God has provided for us. He is our substitute. We don’t have to die for our sins because God has provided a lamb.

Jesus is the BELOVED SON of God. He comes as our substitute and representative. He immediately begins to do for us the things we could never do for ourselves – and he starts right at the beginning. Way back in the beginning – right after the fall – God said to the devil:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your

head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

God said – A WAR IS COMING! You hate my people and they hate you. You will attack them and abuse them and even appear to defeat them but I am saying to you right now, that you will not win. A child will come – born of a woman – and he will defeat you. He will crush your head, you will bruise his heel, but he will win.

And so right after Jesus is revealed as God’s BELOVED SON – where does he go? Mark says:

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. (Mark 1:12 ESV)

Does he go straight to the cross? Does he go straight to the throne? No he has work to do first. Our work. He has a battle to fight first – OUR BATTLE. That’s what the desert is all about for Mark! The desert is about Jesus going out to fight our enemy for us – it is ROUND ONE. DING DING. It is Jesus slapping the devil in the face and saying: “I’m here. It’s on and you’re DONE.”

Adam and Eve couldn’t do it – they lost a fight to the devil IN A GARDEN surrounded by every good thing of God! Israel couldn’t do it – they hadn’t been in the desert 20 minutes before they were whining and complaining and longing to go back to Egypt! So what does Jesus do? He does what we never could. On our behalf Jesus DEFIED and DEFEATED the devil. He was tested and tried in every way just as we were – YET WITHOUT SIN.

Again and again and again in Mark’s Gospel we will see Jesus doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. As one commentator put it:

Jesus is Israel reduced to one.⁴

More than, Jesus is humanity reduced to one. Filled with the Spirit he is God, in the flesh FOR US. He does for us what we could never do for ourselves and he pays for what we have done in his body on the cross. That is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – the Son of God.

Response:

⁴James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 37.

Now, in light of the time, I'm just going to give you 4 words in terms of response. How should we respond to this incredible news about what God has done in Christ to secure our redemption?
4 words:

1. **Repent**
2. **Trust**
3. **Worship**
4. **Serve**

That is the trajectory of Christian response. When people ask Peter how they should respond to the message of the Gospel Peter says in Acts 2:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38 ESV)

Do you want in on this? Then repent! Let go of whatever it is that you are trusting in and cling to Christ! If you are an unbeliever this morning then that is what you need to do. You need to repent – unplug, detach, let go, confess your sin and believe and trust in the life and death of Jesus Christ for your salvation. Repent. Convert utterly – be baptized! Die to yourself and your self saving, self justifying efforts and put all your chips on Christ. Go all in. Do that, and your sins will be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now to the believer hearing this again – and feeling refreshed in your salvation graces – the Apostle Paul has a word for you. He says:

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. (Romans 12:1 NIV11-GK)

Paul says, when you see afresh the mercy of God in the offer of Jesus Christ then you put your whole life on the alter. You serve him, you worship him with all that you have and all that you are! This is your true and proper worship and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Let's pray together.