

# Jesus' Baptism & The Eyes of Faith

Prologue Part 4  
Mark 1:7-9 9/16/2017

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Summary: From the angle of God's Word Jesus is the spectacular Son of God and magnificent, authoritative Messiah. From the angle of natural, human observation he is a disappointing nobody from nowhere. Mark shows us the view from God's Word in John's prophecy about Jesus, and the natural view of the fulfillment. The natural view of the fulfillment makes sense if we start with the biblical understanding. Jesus trail blazed the way of obedience for us to follow (remember your baptism into the community of obedience!). Mark does the same thing for Jesus' inauguration. Failing to see from the biblical angle will result in confusion and doubt.

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**Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

**2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”— 3 “a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ ” 4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and p All of you when you stop listening toreaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.**

**7 And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”**

**9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” 12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, 13 and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.**

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# Introduction

## Two Angles

I told you that Mark writes with a paintbrush instead of a pen – he teaches principles by arranging the accounts of what Jesus did and said in a way that gives us a vivid understanding. And I mentioned last week that the portrait he paints of Jesus is like that picture I handed out last week where, if you look at it from one perspective, you see a beautiful young girl, and if you look at the same picture from another perspective you see a haggard old lady. Mark gives us a very similar portrait of Jesus. From one angle you see the awesome, authoritative, spectacular Son of God. From another angle you see a strange, confusing, disappointing man. The angle that shows you the glorious Son of God is the angle of God's Word. The angle that shows you the strange, disappointing man is the angle of natural, human observation.

And this particular text is gripping because Mark alternates between those 2 perspectives. He's going to show us a prophecy and the fulfillment, then he'll show us an announcement and its fulfillment. The prophecy and the announcement are both from the angle of God's Word, and the fulfillments are both from the angle of human observation. So you have a huge, amazing prophecy, followed by a strange, surprising fulfillment. Then you have a spectacular, awesome announcement, followed by a strange, surprising fulfillment. I believe this is very purposeful, because Mark is teaching us that the only way to see the glory of Christ is through the eyes of faith. And those who look through natural eyes only become more and more confused. So let's begin with the awesome prophecy. It's John's prophecy about the coming of the Messiah.

## The Awesome Prophecy

### Jesus is Mightier

**7 And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**<sup>1</sup>

There are 3 parts to that. First, he says **"After me will come one more powerful than I..."** The phrase, **after me** was a way of referring to a disciple.<sup>2</sup> Like when Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must take up his cross..." – that means "If anyone would be my disciple he must take up his cross..." So John is making a paradoxical statement: One of my disciples will be more powerful than I.<sup>3</sup>

I made the point last week that for that to mean anything, John had to be extremely powerful. Because if anyone else makes that statement, it's pretty much meaningless. If I said somebody is coming who is more powerful than I am, it could refer to any one of millions of people. Everyone knew that no

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<sup>1</sup> The other gospels give a lot more information about John's message. They talk about the content of his ethical teaching, what the fruits of repentance look like, his rebukes of the religious leaders, and the very severe warnings of judgment. The Messiah will come and lay an ax at the tree of Israel, he'll baptize with fire, he'll establish his kingdom through violent judgment. Mark doesn't mention any of that. Mark's purpose is to highlight the aspects of Jesus' ministry that point to his divine authority, but also to his lowly servanthood and suffering. So the parts about coming with a sword and defeating enemies – that wouldn't help make the point so there's no reason for Mark to mention it. So Mark mentions that Jesus will be the one to bestow the Holy Spirit on people – that shows his awesome, divine authority. And Mark shows us the part about Jesus showing up from nowhereville as just another face in the crowd and submitting to John's baptism of repentance in the Jordan. That shows his lowly humility.

<sup>2</sup> Some argue that John is not using the phrase in the sense of a disciple, but rather a simple marker of time (Jesus would come after John chronologically). This seems unlikely, especially given the emphasis in John's account, where John says **after me** three times, and one of them is a direct statement: **He is the one who comes after me** (Jn.1:27). For an argument in favor of this meaning "disciple" see the NIGNT Commentary.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, in John it's stated in a riddle-sounding kind of way. **John 1:15 ... He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.**

one was more powerful than John the Baptist, so for him to make that statement was an awesome prophecy. Jesus performed mightier miracles (and more miracles) than John or anyone in history. And so this coming one will be greater than John, and not just a little bit greater.

## **Jesus is a Greater Man than John**

### **7 ... the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.**

In Mt.11:11 Jesus said John the Baptist was the greatest human being who had ever lived up to his time. Greater than David, Moses, Abraham, Elijah, Elisha – all of them. And the greatest human who ever walked the earth was so far below this mightier one that he, John the Baptist, wasn't even worthy to serve that coming disciple in the lowest, most menial way.<sup>4</sup> You can't express the greatness of this coming disciple of John in any stronger terms. He will be orders of magnitude greater than the greatest man who ever lived. He will have a higher position, a higher calling, a better heart, a closer relationship with the Father, a greater portion of the Holy Spirit – Jesus is greater in every way – so much greater that John is not worthy to so much as touch Jesus' sandal laces.

## **We Get to Serve Christ!**

And by the way, when John said he couldn't so much as attend to Jesus feet, he wasn't exaggerating. He really wasn't worthy to serve Jesus or to even touch his feet. No one is. No one deserves that high privilege. Certainly not me. But can you believe, even though I'm not worthy of it, I have been given that privilege? So have you. You and I have been given the privilege that John the Baptist was never given. He never got the chance to serve Christ, but you and I can do it every single day. We can do it, because we have the Holy Spirit, which means we are greater than John the Baptist.

**Matthew 11:11 I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**

You and I are greater than John, and we get to do what he never got to do – serve the King of Kings. And not just untying his sandals, but doing much greater things in his service than that. Jesus said whatever you do for the least of his brothers, you do for him (visiting him in prison, providing food and clothes, etc.). We can do all kinds of wonderful things for Jesus by serving his people for his sake. Ministry is an awesome thing – don't even grumble about your ministry.

Ok, end of sidebar. Back to the point – first, Jesus was mightier than John, second, Jesus was a greater man than John, and third, Jesus had a greater ministry than John.

## **Jesus Had a Greater Ministry than John's**

### **8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.**

What I do involves water; he's going to come along and drown you in the Holy Spirit. There are many, many prophecies in the Old Testament promising that in the end times, when the Messiah came to set up God's kingdom, God would pour out his Spirit. That's what will change the spiritual desert that we talked about last time into a flourishing garden and forest – the Holy Spirit.

**Isaiah 32:14 ... the watchtower will become a wasteland ... 15 till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest.<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> Nothing was lower than attending to the feet. There were even rules that forbade Jewish slaves from removing his master's sandals. Only gentile slaves were to do such a lowly job.

<sup>5</sup> See also Ezek 11:19; 36:26–27; 37:14; Joel 2:28–29.

The glories of God's kingdom will come when he pours out his Spirit, and John is saying, "Guess what? When the Holy Spirit is poured out, this mightier one that I'm announcing who is actually greater than me is the one who will do the pouring. He will be the one bestowing the Holy Spirit on people."

You see what I mean when I call this section the awesome prophecy? In this verse Mark is showing us the portrait of Jesus from the angle of God's word, and it is awesome. The claims that John the Baptist made about Jesus were so grandiose that there's no way they could be fulfilled by anyone who wasn't almighty God in human flesh.

## **Familiarity with Scripture**

Now, before we look at the fulfillment of that prophecy about Jesus, let me just make a quick comment about these references in Mark to the OT. Last week Mark gave three very short phrases from three different places in the OT and combined them into one sentence. And I spent most of the study explaining the context of those three references and the significance for Mark's point. And now I just brought up Isaiah 32 about the Holy Spirit. Some of you may be thinking, "Would the original readers or hearers of this book have really been able to put all that together just from those little quotations?" Isn't it true that Mark was writing to a Gentile audience that was mostly illiterate? Would those people really hear a little phrase like that and immediately understand the full contexts of Exodus and Malachi and Isaiah?

The answer is, yes, Mark was writing to a Gentile audience – no question about that. There are Latinisms all through Mark cause the Romans spoke Latin. There are also some Aramaic terms (the language of the Jews). But whenever there's an Aramaic term, or a Jewish custom, Mark explains the meaning because Romans wouldn't know otherwise. If he were writing mainly to Jews, there would be no need to explain those terms and customs, which is why Matthew, for example, doesn't stop to explain those things like Mark does. Mark will stop and explain about ceremonial washings or other Jewish customs. But he never stops to explain the latinisms. And when Mark refers to time, it's Roman time, not Jewish time.<sup>6</sup> He mentions the 4<sup>th</sup> watch of the night – the Romans divided the night into 4 watches, and the Jews had only 3 watches. So the book is definitely written to gentile Christians who were not well-versed in Jewish language or culture.

However, it's a mistake to say that they weren't familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures. They were actually very well-versed. Mark doesn't expect the readers to know Jewish culture, but he does expect them to know the OT. Mark gives all kinds of references and allusions from the OT, and he doesn't stop to explain them.

Now, part of that was, no doubt, due to the fact that writers generally write to the highest level of the readers, not the lowest level. And the writers of Scripture expected the readers to study their writings. Paul told Timothy that in order to understand what he had written, Timothy would have to spend some time reflecting on it (2 Tim.2:7). And the Bible writers also expected that their writings would be taught. That's why teachers and preachers were such a big part of church life in NT times. And it's why the Bible repeatedly commands that churches pay pastors a full time salary, because doing a good job at teaching God's Word requires a man's full time so he can adequately study.

So all that is part of it, but we need to also understand that the people back then – both Jews and Gentile Christians, were very well-versed in the OT. It was the central hub of Jewish society, and they taught the OT Scriptures to new converts to Christianity in a very thorough way.

If you think it's unrealistic that people would read Mark 1:2-3 with three short little phrases and immediately think of the whole context of Exodus 12, and the whole context of Malachi 4, and the whole context of Isaiah 40 – if that sounds unlikely to you, just remember, we live in a visual media culture and they lived in an oral tradition culture. Think about our knowledge of visual media. Is it possible for one little phrase to instantly call to your mind an entire context where that phrase came from – even if I don't tell you where it's from? How about this: "May the force be with you." You can walk up to almost

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<sup>6</sup> 6:48, 13:35.

anyone in our culture and say those 5 words and immediately they not only know where it's from, but what the meaning and context was. "We're not in Kansas anymore." "Go ahead, make my day." "You can't handle the truth." "I'll be back." I could go on and on. There are hundreds of examples of short, little phrases that call to mind whole contexts of meaning in our minds. It's kind of sad to think we have that much knowledge of fictional stories, and not Scripture. But back then, it was Scripture because the time we spend learning the content of movies, they spent listening to the oral traditions of the Scriptures.

## **The Surprising Fulfilment**

So the prophet John has announced the arrival of the great, awesome Messiah, and now, in the very next verse, we see the fulfillment of that prophecy. The Messiah makes his entrance onto the pages of Mark's gospel for the first time. Let's see what kind of an entrance he makes. After that introduction, we should probably have a drum roll at this point – what is this arrival going to be like?

### **9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.**

What? That's his big entrance? In v.8 we saw Jesus through the eyes of prophecy, now Mark shows us the view from the angle of natural, human observation.

We left off last week with you bumping through the crowd on your way from Jerusalem out to be baptized by John. And you have no idea who it is, but this guy right in front of you in line looks like he's been on the road for a while. So you strike up a conversation with him, and right away you can tell from his accent that he's from out in the sticks. So you ask him, "Where are you from?" and you expect him to say some village in Galilee.

You already have kind of a dim view of this guy, and you're surprised that, being from Galilee, he would be interested in coming down south and being baptized. Galilee was mostly rural, and the people were generally uneducated, and had a reputation of not being all that interested in God's Word. Johanan ben Zakkai († A.D. 90) struggled for eighteen years to establish a rabbinic academy in Galilee and failed – no one was interested. Another rabbi said, "Galilee, Galilee, you hate the Torah; your end will be seizure by the Romans."<sup>7</sup> Galilee is that whole region around I-25 north of Fort Collins.

So anyway you ask where he's from, thinking it might be Capernaum or some other town up there. And this stranger says, "I'm from Nazareth." "Nazareth? Where's that?" Jesus was used to that response – he'd gotten it his whole life. Especially when he came down here to Judea (the Denver Metro area).

### **9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee**

Why does Mark say Nazareth in Galilee? Because most of the people probably had no idea where Nazareth was. It was an utterly obscure place. It was on the southwest fringe of the region of Galilee. On our map it would be right inside Fort Collins. But it was way smaller than Fort Collins. And it had no significance at all. It's never mentioned in the OT, Josephus never mentions it, and it's never mentioned in any rabbinic writings. It's an incredibly obscure little village. The other day I saw the Sheriff of Timnath. Has anyone here ever heard of Timnath? I looked on a map and it's right off I-25 on your way to Fort Collins. I've lived here all my life and I've never heard of Timnath – and we live in a much more mobile society than they did.

And the people who had heard of it weren't impressed by it. When Philip first told Nathanael that they found the Messiah, and it was Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael's response was:

### **John 1:46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"**

The only thing the people knew for sure about Nazareth was that the Messiah couldn't come from there. Everyone knew that the Bible is clear that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem – which is in the Judea area (south of Jerusalem – around Englewood).

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<sup>7</sup> See Lane on v.9.

So that's where Jesus is from, and when he arrives, it says he **was baptized by John in the Jordan**. What happened to being greater than John? What happened to John not even being worthy to touch his feet – now he baptizes Jesus? What happened to Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit and setting up the kingdom and bringing restoration to the kingdom and bringing the people out of the spiritual desert into the glorious paradise of God? None of that happens. He's just dunked under the water just like everyone else in a baptism of repentance. Why is Jesus baptized, and when does he get around to baptizing with the Spirit?

## Why Was Jesus Baptized?

The baptism of Jesus is an incredibly important event. It's one of the few events that is reported in all 4 Gospels. And it's mentioned multiple times in the book of Acts. So it's a very big deal, but Mark just mentions that it happened without saying anything about the meaning. And it's a little troubling, because the only thing Mark says about John's baptism is that it was a baptism of repentance. Why would this spotless lamb of God, who never sinned, do something that was a gesture of repentance? Jesus didn't have anything to repent of.

This is such a humbling picture of Jesus. The fact that he would be baptized with a baptism of repentance – and in the Jordan River no less. Remember, in the ministry of Elijah, Naman came to Elijah to be cured of his leprosy and when Elijah told him to wash in the Jordan, he almost just went back home. He'd almost rather have leprosy than to dip in that river. And the rabbis taught that water from the Jordan could not be used for purification.<sup>8</sup> So the Jordan was not a highly esteemed river – certainly not for religious, ceremonial purposes.

Things like this are strong evidence of the truthfulness of the gospel writers. Because no one would make this up. No one would invent a perfect, sinless God-man and then have him undergo a baptism of repentance. There are some things about what Jesus said and did that are very hard to explain, but the writers of Scripture reported them anyway, which shows that these were honest men telling the truth about what happened.

So what is the explanation? Theologians have suggested various theories. The one that has always made the most sense to me is that Jesus was identifying with sinners, which would be a picture of the work he would eventually carry out. And I still think there's some truth to that.

Another explanation is that Jesus did it as the one perfect baptism on behalf of all the people. Everyone is committing to be obedient to God, but only Jesus does so perfectly, and so he does that as the one true Israelite – the representative of God's people, on behalf of the whole nation to consecrate the people to God, paving the way for God to come in restoration. Back in the time of Moses we read in Exodus 19 that God would not come down from heaven and visit the Israelites until all the people were consecrated. And like Moses in Exodus 32:23 Jesus does not separate himself from the sin of people. He identifies with it even though he himself wasn't guilty of it.

I think there may be some validity to that as well. But I think there's more to it than that. I told you last week that the Jews would baptize Gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism. They did that, not only to symbolize cleansing, but also as a public statement that that person is now identifying with a new people. He's saying, "This is who I am now. This community now defines me. This is what I am - a member of this group."

We tend to miss that aspect of baptism because in our day baptism has become so individualized. We've lost the communal aspect. Now it's just all about me and forgiveness of my sins and my relationship with God. But it's important to realize - your baptism is bigger than you. Your baptism is not just about you. It's about the whole community. Now, the individual aspect is still important. But there's also a very important community aspect.

And if we understand that, that might help us make better sense of why Jesus was baptized by John. He wasn't baptized because he had to repent of anything or he was having any of his sins forgiven,

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<sup>8</sup> Lane, 50, n53.

because he never sinned. It wasn't any kind of turning point in his relationship with God or conversion of any kind. None of that would make sense, but it makes perfect sense to think of Jesus as joining the community of people defined by the preaching of John the Baptist. Someone might ask back then, "Who are you? What community do you belong to? Are you part of the Jewish religious establishment? Or do you side with all those John the Baptist types? Are you one of those people who buys into all that preaching of John the Baptist?" And by being baptized, Jesus was saying, "Yes." He's identifying with that community. "Yes, I'm a John the Baptistite. I believe in all that stuff he preaches. I'm in that group. When John the Baptist says you need to repent in order to come to God, even if you're a Jew, I'm totally on board with that. When John the Baptist rails against the current religious leadership of Judaism, I totally agree. All that stuff John preaches about the one who will come after him, the mightier one who will dispense the Holy Spirit, I'm on board with all that. The whole community of people that bought into John the Baptist preaching – that's the community I'm identifying with."

In John's gospel, the Pharisees asked John, "If you're not the Messiah, why do you baptize?"<sup>9</sup> That question implies that it would take a lot of authority – like messianic type authority to require a baptism for Jews, because it's more than just a cleansing ritual. It's the creation of a whole new community, such that if anyone was a true follower of God, he had to join that community.

And if the focus is on the communal aspect, then Jesus being baptized by John makes perfect sense. It would also explain why everybody had to be rebaptized after the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Acts 19 Paul runs into some believers who had been baptized with John's baptism, but not into the name of Christ. So they had to be re-baptized into Christ. Why did they have to be re-baptized? Have their sins become unforgiven and now they need to be re-forgiven? No, but there was a new community they needed to join.

John made it clear that his ministry was temporary. Once Jesus has been fully revealed, and his death and resurrection is understood, and he has poured out his Holy Spirit on the church, it wouldn't make sense for people to still be identifying with the John the Baptist community. We would identify with the Christ community. Christ is the greater light who then becomes the center by which the community is defined.

Have you ever struggled to define the community of the people of God during the lifetime of Jesus? It's kind of tricky, isn't it? Is that New Testament or Old Testament? It almost seems like kind of a no man's land in between. It's kind of like it still Old Testament times, because Jesus has not died or raised from the dead yet. The Holy Spirit hasn't been poured out on the church yet. So that makes it kind of Old Testament-ish. But on the other hand, Jesus is preaching the gospel, and it's definitely something new. He's giving parables about the kingdom that described the church age. He gives instructions about church discipline. So all that seems really New Testament-ish.

So if you're in that time, What are you? Are you a Christian? Are you in Old Testament saint? What defines the community of God's people during that time? Answer, it's the John the Baptist community. The true people of God are the people who submitted to John's baptism and repented of their sins, and believed the preaching of John, and were prepared to receive the mightier one who would come after John.

Ok, so John the Baptist was calling people to a life of obedience to God. For everyone else, the first step on that path is repentance – turn from your sin back toward God. But for Jesus, committing to a life of obedience to God didn't require repentance, because he wasn't engaged in any sin. But it was the same path – a path of obedience to the law of God.

## **Jesus the Trailblazer**

One of the reasons Jesus came into this world was to blaze the trail for the rest of us to follow in his steps. What are the three legs of the Gospel message as Mark presents it?

- 1) Jesus is powerful and authoritative

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<sup>9</sup> John 1:25

- 2) Jesus came to suffer, die, and rise from the dead
- 3) Jesus calls us to follow in his steps.

That third part is important here. Jesus' life was an example for us, but not just an example – more than an example. When I was a little kid I used to go hunting with my dad, and sometimes we would walk through really deep snow that had melted and refrozen multiple times so it was really hard to walk through. I wouldn't have been able to make it very far on my own, so I followed behind dad. He would break through the crusted snow, and I would walk behind him in his path.

If dad were just an example for me, then that would mean I would watch him break through the snow, then I would follow his example and break through the snow myself. But he was more than just an example; he was blazing the trail for me.

We also talk about Jesus living a righteous life in our place, which is definitely true. But that's not all there is to it either. If dad walked through that snow in my place, instead of me, that means I would just sit back at camp while he was out there hunting. But that wasn't it. I was out there working up a major sweat just following behind him.

That's the picture of what Christ did for us. And so step number 1 in the path through this deep snow was to join the community of people that John was calling into a life of obedience to God. And Jesus took that first step ahead of us for us to follow behind him.

So what's the application for us? Remember your baptism! Romans 6 tells us that remembering our baptism will help in your struggle against sin. Remember the public commitment you made to leave the world and join the community of those who strive to walk in obedience and repentance when we disobey. And when you're tempted to withdraw from the church or from fellowship, remember your baptism into the community of the people of God.

## Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Ok, so those are some thoughts about why Jesus was baptized. What about the other question – what about the baptism of the Holy Spirit? John said Jesus would come and baptize with the Holy Spirit – when is that prophecy fulfilled in the book of Mark? It wasn't.

The Holy Spirit is a big deal in this opening prologue to the book. John says the Messiah will baptize with the Spirit, then, after Jesus' baptism the Holy Spirit appears bodily and comes upon Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit sends Jesus out into the wilderness to be tested. Lots of focus on the Spirit in the prologue.

Then, the whole rest of the book, the Holy Spirit almost disappears from Mark's account. Mark mentions the Spirit in passing only three times the whole rest of the book, and none of them give any sense of a baptism with the Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

Mark was written about 30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, and so the readers of Mark would have known all about the arrival of the Spirit in the book of Acts. They knew that the baptism of the Spirit came later – after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. After the transition period in the book of Acts, from then on, every believer is baptized by the Spirit at conversion. So by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (which was probably before Mark wrote his gospel), Paul said, **we were all baptized by one Spirit** (1 Corinthians 12:13). So every Christian reading Mark would know about the baptism of the Spirit because after the book of Acts, it happened to all believers when they were first converted.

But Mark is writing about Jesus' earthly life, so he doesn't get into that. When he's showing us who Jesus is from the angle of God's Word, he tells us that Jesus is the one who will bestow the Spirit on God's people. But now Mark's showing us Jesus from the human observation point of view, and all we see there is some nondescript face in the crowd being dunked under the water by John. And without the perspective of God's Word about Jesus in John's prophecy, that will just cause confusion about who Jesus is.

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<sup>10</sup> The three references are 3:29 ("blasphemes against the Holy Spirit"); 12:36 ("David ... by the Holy Spirit declared"); and 13:11 ("it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit"). The third may possibly be connected to the baptism of the Spirit, but it is a future reference. The baptism is not spelled out in the book of Mark.



## The Awesome Inauguration

So, Mark gives us an awesome prophecy about Jesus, showing us Jesus' glory from the angle of God's Word, then he shows us the fulfillment of that (at least the beginning of the fulfillment with Jesus' arrival onto the scene), but he shows us that from the human point of view and, if you detach it from the prophetic perspective, it's ... disappointing. Jesus shows up as a pretty underwhelming deliverer.

Now Mark's going to do that same thing with the inauguration of Jesus' ministry. We read in Matthew's account that John didn't like the idea of baptizing Jesus. And I can totally understand John's concern. If Jesus lets himself be baptized by John, isn't that going to run the risk of making it look like John is greater than Jesus? And isn't it going to run the risk of making it look like Jesus is just another sinner in need of cleansing and repentance? John the Baptist argued with Jesus – "I don't think this is a good idea Jesus." And Jesus just says, "Let this happen *for now*." Why, what was special about right now? Was something just about to happen that would make the whole question of whether Jesus is a sinner a nonissue? Was there something that was just about to happen right at that moment that would take care of the whole problem of people potentially thinking of Jesus is just another sinful man? Let's watch. John dunks Jesus down under the water, and when he pulls him up, what happens?

**10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."**

Wow! That's awesome! That's spectacular!!! Talk about a grandiose portrait of Christ! So that whole fear that Jesus would look like he's less than John, or like he's a sinner in need of repentance, or that he's just like everyone else – it turns out that's not a problem. Jesus is clearly not just like everyone else. Everyone else gets baptized and the only thing that happens is they get wet. Jesus gets baptized and heaven cracks open! And the Holy Spirit appears bodily for the only time ever in history, and comes down on Jesus! And God the Father speaks audibly from heaven! And he states specifically that he is pleased with Jesus, and that Jesus is his one and only beloved Son!

That is overwhelming. We're out of time now, so we'll have to wait until next time to look into the significance of all that, but for now I just want to point out that this event, which is the inauguration of Jesus' ministry, was absolutely awesome – at a cosmic level. Not just earth-shattering, but heaven-shattering.

But notice, Mark is back to describing it from the point of view of God's Word. God the Father is speaking. Now we're looking at Jesus through the lens of God's Words, and what we see is staggering glory.

That's the announcement of Jesus' inauguration as King. Now let's look at the fulfillment. What happens next? Mark tells us what happens, but goes back to the human, natural point of view.

**12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, 13 and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals**

Does Jesus go from that spectacular inauguration and ride into Jerusalem on a white horse and take the throne? No, he gets sent out into the desolation where there is no food, lots of danger, and he is attacked by Satan for a month and a half. Bummer. That's not very glorious. Now we're back to seeing the old lady in the picture.

## Conclusion: What Do You See?

We'll see next week that Jesus testing in the desert really is a wonderful thing. But for now, I just want to ask you – which Jesus do you see? Last week I asked, in the drawing of the woman, how many see the beautiful young girl and how many see the haggard old lady? And I'll ask the same question about Mark's drawing of Jesus. When you look at his portrait, do you see the amazing Messiah? Or the nobody

from Nazareth? Do you see the spectacular Son of God? Or the disappointing let-down from nowhereville? It all depends on whether you look through the lens of God's Word.

And please understand – the two perspectives Mark gives us of Jesus are both accurate. This is where the analogy with the picture of the woman breaks down. That picture is two different, contradictory images. You can't be a young girl and an old woman at the same time. But both pictures of Jesus are accurate. We will see Christ's glory in his lowliness and obedience. Tonight we saw that his baptism was far more than it appeared, and next time we'll really see that in his 40 days in the desert. (I can't wait for that. We're going to see some very important principles – if you can possibly make it next week, please try not to miss that one.) So his glory can be seen in his lowliness, but only if you look through the lens of God's Word. That's the only way to see Jesus through the eyes of faith. Otherwise, all the proofs and evidences of his glory will do is confuse you, which is exactly what happens throughout Mark. People are confronted with proof, and they walk away perplexed and confused about who Jesus is.

So much of our confusion in life comes from viewing the events of life through the lens of our natural, human perspective instead of seeing everything around us through the lens of God's Word.

We struggle with doubt, because we live from the natural perspective. In that drawing of the women, when you see one image and you're trying to switch over to see the other one, how do you do it? You have to look at certain features and focus your eyes on those with a certain mentality before you can see that perspective. I see the young girl, and after that, the only way I can get back to seeing the old lady is by focusing on the cheek and telling myself, "think of that as a nose." Then the old lady emerges and the young girl disappears. I can't see her anymore unless I focus on that same spot and say, "Think of that as the side of her cheek."

Doubts come when we look at something from a non-biblical perspective, and we allow that to be our focus. And the result is both doubt and confusion. So strive to learn what God's Word says about everything. What is the biblical way to think about North Korea firing missiles over Japan, or DAKA, or the cold front that came in today, or that person at work who is hostile to you, or your aching back or knees, or your last paycheck, or your car or house? The Bible teaches principles about all those things – about everything in life.

When you are confused about something in your life, ask yourself, "Am I looking at this too much from the temporal, natural, earthly point of view?" "Am I thinking about the aspects of this issue too much like an atheist would think about it?" And if you don't know what the biblical point of view on it is, pray, and ask God to show you the biblical perspective. Ask wise people around you who know the Scriptures. Because the more time we spend looking at the objects and events and people in our lives through the lens of God's Word, the more glory we will see, and the stronger our faith will become.