

First Things First

Mark 1:9-13

Introduction – Four Events Prior to Jesus’ Ministry

As we continue our study of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is about to embark on His public ministry. Before He begins, however, four events have to take place.

Separation

The first event that occurs prior to Jesus’ public ministry is found in Mark 1:9, and that is: the point of separation.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

We looked, in our last discussion, at the baptism by John. Now, we find that Jesus Himself is submitting to that baptism. Why would Jesus Christ be baptized to reveal His repentance if He indeed, had no sin?

We need to dig a little deeper, for a moment, and remember, as we previously discussed, that John was a prophet of the Old Testament and this was, what we would call, the proselyte baptism. It was not a new believer’s baptism that we experience when we give our trust and faith to Christ, it was the proselyte baptism. When a Gentile would reject his paganism and turn to Judaism, he would be baptized by the prophet or the priest.

Jesus Christ, according to this verse, gets involved in, what we would call, the proselyte baptism. So, we need to answer the question, “Why?”

Why was Christ baptized?

Let me give three reasons that Jesus is given a proselyte baptism by John.

1. First, Jesus’ baptism represented a moment of announcement or declaration.

Isaac asked his father, centuries before, “Father, here is the altar and here is the wood, but where is the sacrifice; where is the lamb?”

John the Baptist would take that question, that had echoed down through the centuries, and would announce to all of those who watched, “Look! Behold! This man coming toward me is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

It was a moment of announcement.

I thought about John the Baptist and the opportunity that he had to announce to the world that the Lamb had come, or was coming. I thought, “Boy, I wish I could have said that myself.” Wouldn’t that have been fascinating and fantastic to be there on the verge of the New Covenant and announce to the people that it is coming?

Then, the Holy Spirit struck a chord in my heart, “Don’t you understand, *you* have been given the opportunity to announce to the world that He did come.”

You have that opportunity too.

So it was a moment of announcement.

2. Secondly, this baptism was a moment of decision for Jesus Christ.

At this point in time, Jesus would turn His back on His little home in Nazareth, the carpenter shop, and the work that He did. He would now, enter His

ministry full time. And, He knew He was headed to the cross.

3. Thirdly, this baptism was a moment of identification for Jesus.

When He was baptized, Jesus identified Himself with the believing remnant who were gathered around John the Baptist. Jesus put His stamp of approval on John's ministry and said, "You are indeed following the truth."

So there was the moment of separation.

Anointing

The second event that occurs before Jesus' ministry begins is found in Mark 1:10, and that is: the moment of anointing.

Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him;

This was the fulfillment of Isaiah 11:2. The prophet wrote,

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest on Him .

..

It is fascinating that the Spirit would take the form of a dove, isn't it? This is the Messiah; the King, who has come to establish a kingdom. The Spirit chooses the symbol of peace and of love because Jesus has come to establish this kingdom, not with the sword that remains in the sheaf, but as a dying Savior with a heart filled with love for His subjects.

Approval

The third event prior to Jesus' ministry is found in Mark 1:11, and that is: the moment of approval.

and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

This takes us back to Psalm 2:6-7, where God says,

But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain. . . . "You are My Son, today I have begotten You."

This is a fulfillment of that prophecy.

It is fascinating, as I have studied the life of Christ, that nothing happened by coincidence. It seemed like every step He took was a fulfillment of prophecy; was pre-ordained, and it was so. Yet, He was not unlike every man or woman today – every

step that we take is ordained by God. He is at the helm, if you will yield to Him; He is in total control, if you will give Him the control.

So, Jesus Christ comes up out of the water, the Spirit descends, and then, a voice comes from heaven. We know, from another gospel, that they did not understand the voice – they just heard what they thought was thunder. Yet, Jesus heard,

. . . You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.

It was a moment of approval. In other words, God the Father put His stamp of approval on this Person as being divine and being who He claimed to be, which was, the Messiah.

How can we find approval by God?

Let me give two ways that we can also find approval with God.

1. One is by studying God's Word, as we are told in II Timothy 2:15 (KJV),

Study to show thyself approved unto God

...

Do you know what you and I always do? We are always, constantly praying, "God, I want Your blessing; I want to feel Your presence."

How often do we kneel and say, "Oh God, I want Your approval; I want to live my life in such a way that You can put Your stamp of approval on it.?"

I think we should turn our heads away from the blessings that we seek and instead, like the old Puritans, seek the approval of a Holy God.

2. Secondly, II Corinthians 7:11 (KJV) says that we can be approved by purity,

. . . In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear [pure] . . .

Temptation

Finally, the fourth event that occurs prior to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry is found in Mark 1:12-13, and that is: the temptation.

Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.

This event is where I want to spend the majority of our time today. This is the reason I have hurried through the other three verses.

Turn to the Gospel of Matthew for a more detailed account of the temptation of Jesus Christ. There are several temptations and we will look at these in Matthew 4:1-11.

1. The first temptation is found in Matthew 4:3-4.

We will begin with verse 1 and read through verse 4. This is after Jesus' baptism. Take note of the word "if" in verse 3.

Then was Jesus led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

- This is an appeal to the physical appetite of Jesus.

Jesus has just fasted for forty days, alone in the wilderness. You would think that after His baptism, His approval, and His anointing, God would open the door to the ministry. That did not happen, but instead, there were forty days of testing.

Do you know what we tend to think? We think, "Well, Lord, I've been anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit. I've received the approval. I'm living life on a limb. Now open the door to ministry and let me walk right through it."

God says, "No, I've got a season of testing for you. I've got a season of difficulty for you."

It is strange, is it not? Yet, Jesus Christ faced the very things that we face and vice versa.

Now, note the word "if" in verse 3. It seems as if Satan comes to the Lord and says, "If indeed, You are the Son of God . . .".

Satan has just overheard the declaration by God the Father,

. . . You are My beloved Son . . .

He comes right in with an attack, "If indeed, You are the Son, what are You doing out here hungry? The Son of God, hungry? Ridiculous! If You really are the Son of God, then I want You to turn these

stones into bread. Take care of Your natural desire; take care of Your hunger. Why would God stand in the way of fulfilling what You need?"

- The primary thrust of Satan's attack is Jesus Christ's loyalty to the will of God.

Let us look at this a little deeper. When Jesus Christ left heaven, we often think He left all of the splendor – and that is right. We think that He left the very presence of God – and, in a sense, that is right. We think that He left the royal position of heaven's court – and that is also right.

Understand as well, that Jesus Christ also voluntarily gave up His right to independently use His divine attributes. Let me repeat that. He voluntarily gave up the independent use of His divine attributes. So, Jesus came to earth to live like man, although He was God.

Jesus could have snapped His fingers and a seven course meal would instantly come into existence. He could snap His fingers again, and an oasis would be created in the wilderness – with a nice palm tree and a cool breeze. He could have clapped His hands and servants would have been created to serve Him. He could have snapped His fingers and a plush couch would appear to recline on as He ate. He could have done all of that.

It would have been wrong for Him to do this, though, because He would have worked independently of the will of the Father. He would have used His attributes when it was not God the Father's will. It would have been just as wrong for Him to use His attributes to turn stone into bread as it would to create a pleasant world in which to sup.

Jesus Christ, and this is the thrust of this temptation, was totally committed to the will of God the Father. If God the Father did not give Him bread, He would not snap His fingers and create bread.

I am so glad because, ladies and gentlemen, you and I, as you well know, do not have the ability to satisfy our desires and our needs by snapping our fingers. He faced this in the same way we face it.

- Notice, in fact, Jesus' answer, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

Underline the word “man”. In other words, “You come to Me as if I’m the Son of God, and I am, but I’m meeting you head on as a man.”

There are three points in this verse that jump off the page to me.

The first point is His statement,

... *It is written* ...

Most of us would have problems finding the book of Deuteronomy. We might say, “I think it’s somewhere back here.”

However, Jesus Christ knew what was written so well that in all three temptations, He quotes something from that ancient, dusty book that we rarely even look at. He said, “It is written,” and on that, He hung His defense.

I am so glad Jesus did this because when we face the tempter, and we do face him, guess what our resource is? “It is written” – the Bible. Jesus faced him like a man and He defeated him the same way that you and I can defeat him – with God’s Word.

The second point that jumps off the page from this verse is the word that I have already mentioned,

... *Man* ...

Jesus faced the tempter, not as the Son of God, which would not have helped us, would it? He faced him as man.

Thirdly, this verse draws my attention to the highest purpose. Jesus says,

... *Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*

It is as if He says, “Listen, Satan, the highest purpose for Me on earth, and for all of those who will follow Me one day, is not to satisfy My earthly desire; not to satisfy a need I think I may have. The highest purpose for Me is to follow the will of My Father.”

This is the highest purpose in my life and in your life, as well – to follow the will of God. Every word that proceeds out of His mouth – to follow *this* is my highest purpose; to follow His Word.

Our purpose is not to satisfy our cravings. We live in a world that has gone mad in trying to satisfy the cravings of sensuality; of the physical appetite, whether it is in what we eat or what we wear or what we drive or whatever.

Jesus Christ simply ripped off the mask and said, “If I wanted to eat, I could snap My fingers, but that

is not My highest purpose. My highest purpose is to follow the will of My Father.”

2. Now, notice the second temptation in Matthew 4:5-7.

Look at verses 5 and 6. Underline the word “God” in verse 6, as this seems to be the emphasis this time.

Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You’; and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”

Satan says, “Okay, You want to draw out the sword of the Spirit, I know a few verses of scripture myself. It’s written, as well, that if You jump off here, He’ll give His angels charge over You. You see, I know the Book too.”

Satan quoted from one of the Psalms.

- The appeal in this temptation, unlike the first, is to the personal gain of Jesus.

Jesus Christ had just declared that His trust and His confidence was in the will of the Father. Satan comes along and says, “Okay, You have trust in Him, so why don’t You just prove that He can handle Your trust? Why don’t You just put Your Father to the test? Why don’t You just show me, and the world, that what You’re trusting in is a real and living God? How do I know? Are You really sure?”

- Jesus Christ’s confidence in God the Father was attacked.

Psalm 91:11 is the scripture Satan quotes. It includes the phrase,

... *to guard you in all your ways.*

Satan leaves out this phrase. Notice verse 6 again, as Satan says,

... *“He will command His angels concerning You”; and “On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.”*

He left out a phrase. Satan quoted the text, but twisted it to make his point. The text, literally reads,

He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways.

A righteous man, in his righteous ways, can claim trust in the Father. If you keep your ways righteous, God will keep His promise.

This does not mean you can think, “God will take care of me, and if I want to jump off a cliff, I’ll just go ahead. If I want to stand in the way of a locomotive, I’ll just go ahead and stand there. If I want to do something foolish like throw away the funds that God gives me, and then say, ‘Okay, Lord, You pay the bills,’ I’ll just go ahead and do it.”

This is not right. God will keep a righteous man in his righteous ways.

Satan, however, twisted the text. He said, “Why don’t You just put God to the test?”

Ladies and gentlemen, it is the individual who does not trust someone, who will put that person to the test to see if he will do what he says. It is the person who is unsure of another individual, that will devise some experiment to try to reveal whether they can be trusted.

- So, what was Jesus Christ’s response? Look at Matthew 4:7, quoting Deuteronomy 6:16.

Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord Your God to the test.’”

In other words, Jesus says, “Don’t put God to the test. My confidence in Him is so great, I don’t have to experiment; I don’t have to manufacture some test; I don’t have to jump off the cliff. I know He’s there. I don’t need to prove it.”

This is confidence. It is the person with confidence in God who does not need to experiment with God. It is the person with confidence in God who does not need to wonder if He is there – that person knows He is there.

Now, there is something else that I need to uncover. We cannot be exactly sure, but during the time of Christ, there was a rabbinical tradition. This is not in the scripture, but you may remember the tradition that we talked about in our last discussion. The tradition was that when the Messiah revealed Himself, He would stand at the top of the temple. Do you remember that?

Look back at verse 6a,

. . . If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down . . .

Notice in verse 5 that Jesus is at the top, or the pinnacle, of the temple.

It is fascinating that Satan knew the rabbinical tradition. The rabbis were expecting a Messiah, and said, “When the Messiah comes, He will be at the top of the holy temple to declare His kingdom promise.”

So, Satan takes Him right up to the very pinnacle. The word “pinnacle,” could be translated “wing”. It was the outer wing around the top of the spire, where people could go up and walk around. The Lord was not standing on the edge of a windowsill or something way up there. He was on an actual level area where people could stand and walk.

The fascinating thing is that it is possible, and likely, that below Him, in the courts of the temple, people were worshiping; people were sacrificing; people were doing what the Law commanded under the Old Covenant. They were doing all of that and Jesus Christ had come to reveal His kingdom. He had come to say, “If You’ll follow Me, I’ll set up My kingdom.”

So Satan says, “Look, if You’ll just jump off, the angels will come along and bear You up and will lower You right into the midst of the worshipers. Then, they’ll declare You as King. There will be no doubt – You will have the crown. They won’t question that You are Messiah. Why, they’ll see You coming down! Man, can You believe that spectacle? The moment Your feet hit ground, they’ll robe You.”

This was tempting, perhaps, yet Jesus Christ said, “Oh, I have complete trust and confidence in My Father that the way He has designed for Me is the best. I don’t need to put Him to the test; I don’t need to experiment with Him. I’m confident of Him.”

3. Now, notice the third temptation in Matthew 4:8-11.

Look at verses 8 through 10.

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and said to Him, “All these things will I give You, if You will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”

- This is an appeal to Jesus’ personal glory.

The first test was an appeal to His physical appetite. Did He really believe that He was the Son of God? Then, would He exercise His attributes independently of the will of the Father?

The second temptation appealed, “If You really believe that God exists, why don’t You put Him to the test?” Jesus overcame.

Now, the final temptation is, “Lord, just how confident are You about Your mission on earth? You’re confident about Your place as the Son. You’re confident that God, Your Father, exists in heaven. How confident are You in Your mission on earth?”

- So the primary thrust of Satan’s attack is Jesus’ commitment to His mission.

This is probably the most difficult of all the tests that Jesus faced. Notice that when Satan attacked Him, he shows to Him, as we are told in verse 8, all of the kingdoms of the world, and says, “All these things will I give You.”

We do not know how Satan did this. I do not know what multimedia presentation he gave to Jesus Christ. In some unusual way, Satan brought before the conscious mind of Jesus Christ, all of the kingdoms of the world – not just Judea; not just Jerusalem; not just that which He could see from the high mountain, but all the kingdoms, the unknown kingdoms, and all their splendor. China, across the seas, for example. All of the kingdoms and all of their glory were passed, in one instant, before the eyes of Jesus Christ. Satan claimed that he could give them to the Lord.

Notice that Jesus does not rebuke Satan. I would think that the Lord would say, “Hey, wait a second, they don’t belong to you, they belong to God the Father.”

He never does this. Why? Christ, in fact, will say, at a later point, that Satan is the prince of the world.

I want you to stop for a moment, ladies and gentlemen, and understand the implication of this. Satan was largely responsible for the growth; for the success; for what was being done in the kingdoms of all of the world. It is no different today. As one commentator wrote, “All of the kingdoms of the world still are asleep in the arms of the wicked one.”

That has some implications for our little kingdom in our country, doesn’t it? Who is in control? Ultimately, the sovereign God is in control, but He has given a certain right to Satan, until He comes back to manage the affairs of this world system. Satan promises rights to Jesus Christ, if He would only bow to him. Since Satan was kicked out of heaven, his

main desire has been to receive worship; to receive glory. Now, he says, “Look, if You’ll just kneel for a second, for just a moment, I’ll give them to You.”

- Notice Jesus Christ’s response, in verse 10, quoting Deuteronomy 6:13.

. . . You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.

You should underline the word “worship,” and draw a line to the word “serve”. Jesus Christ just took away the façade and said, “Wait a second, whom I worship, I ultimately serve.”

Do you realize, ladies and gentlemen, that which you worship is that which you serve? Jesus Christ could not have kneeled for even a second and paid homage to Satan without ultimately, having to serve him. The one whom you worship, you serve. There is a relationship between the two.

The thrust of this temptation, I think, was that Jesus Christ could have the crown without the cross.

Satan was saying, “Listen, Jesus, if You will bow to me, I will give You all the kingdoms of the world. Have You not come to establish Your kingdom? Have You not come to establish that kingdom which they have awaited for so long? If You bow, You can avoid the cross; You can avoid the suffering and the pain; You can have the crown now.”

Jesus turned Satan down and said, “Get gone. Get away. Go.”

. . . Go Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.”

Another look at the temptations

Let us take another look at these temptations. We will put them in contemporary language in order to apply this tremendously powerful passage of scripture.

1. The first temptation could read, “Go ahead, you deserve it.” This was commitment to God’s will.

The tempter is telling you and me, “Look, if you have a need, go ahead, fill it.”

Think about the fact that Jesus Christ had the physical need of hunger and He had the power to turn stones into bread. This was a legitimate need, so why would He question it? Because God the Father had not provided it.

The temptation, for you and for me, is to fill all of our desires and to leave God completely out of it. The problem is that so often, our needs can become our “greeds” and we have no way of checking and balancing the difference between a need and a greed. The check and balance is to go to the Father and ask, “Lord, do *You* want me to have it? Is this what *You* would be pleased with?”

The tempter says, “Go ahead, you deserve it.”

2. The second temptation was confidence of Christ in the care of the Father.

Satan says, “Do you really believe He exists? Well, if you do, you need an experience to prove it.”

“Do you believe God exists?”

“Oh, I do. You won’t believe all the wonderful things that are happening to me.”

“Do you believe that the Father really cares for you?”

“Oh, yes. My health is better than it’s ever been.”

What happens when your health is gone? What happens when difficulty strikes? What happens when problems knock at your door? Do you believe He exists? Do you live as though He does? Or, is your first cry, “Lord, I need You to prove that You’re really up there; that You really care.”

I think this is the temptation that most of us fail. We believe He is there when everything is good. However, when everything turns sour, we say, “He must not be alive. He must not care.”

3. The third temptation was commitment to the mission of Christ. It was to avoid the cross and get the crown.

Satan said, “Reach Your goal the easy way. You know why You’ve come, Lord. You know why You’re here. Circumvent all of that. Get around all the difficulty and the temptation and get right to the crown.”

Jesus Christ responded, “No. The Father’s plan is that I go through three years of difficulty and suffering.”

Do you know what the greatest commitment in our lives is? It is the commitment to be like Jesus Christ. So often, we say, “I’ll be like Him. Oh, yes, I’ll follow His way, just as long as it avoids hardship. I’ll be like Christ, if it’s convenient.”

Martin Luther, the great reformer, said that there are three great teachers in our lives: prayer, meditation, and temptation.

We would rewrite that: prayer, meditation, and blessing.

Admit that one of the greatest teachers in your life is the difficult time. When things are sour; when things are rough, that is when you learn to trust. Do not avoid this. If you want to become like Christ, march through it. Be committed to the mission that He has given you to become like Him.

Application – Our Response to Christ’s Temptation

Let me give three words, in closing application, for our response to Jesus Christ’s temptations.

1. The first word is, “Resist!” Resist and appeal to scripture; to the Bible.

Perhaps we should go back to the book of Deuteronomy and at least find out where it is. Maybe we need to reacquaint ourselves with the words of scripture. When Satan comes to me, the last thing I think about is a verse of scripture. This, however, is the answer – resist and appeal to scripture.

2. The second word is, “Remember!” Remember Christ experienced a conflict.

I love this. We have a High Priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities. When you are going through what you are going through, maybe even today, when Jesus Christ is conforming you and breaking you and molding you, He has gone through it; He has experienced it; He knows the feelings that you are experiencing today. So, remember that Christ experienced conflict.

3. The third word is, “Rejoice!” Rejoice, victory is available!

I Corinthians 10:13, says,

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

Let us get practical. We are looking for an escape hatch. We think if the temptation comes and God has promised an escape, maybe that means, if I pray, He will just snap it away and let me run.

What was the escape that Jesus Christ experienced? It was knowing God's Word and it was obeying God's Word. You have the same resource today.

Do you want to escape temptation? Are you in the throws of difficulty? In whatever situation you

might be, the solution; the escape is in knowing God's Word and doing God's Word. We should hide His Word in our hearts and then, when temptation comes, practice His Word.

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