

The Baptism – Mark 1:7-11

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How many here read the Bible EVERY day? (Please don't raise your hands) Not a book ABOUT the Bible, but actually read the Bible itself? Okay. How many here who read the Bible every day can say it is ALWAYS meaningful and quality time with God. If we are honest with ourselves, I'm not sure any of us can say we read God's Word EVERY day and EVERY day feel like it was quality time. But this is a noble goal. And one that I believe God would have all of us experience.

It is my goal that EVERY Sabbath that we come here to worship the Lord together we will read the Bible. And I pray that the time we spend here will be quality time - a highlight of your week.

As we continue our journey through the book of Mark today, I'm going to share something with you that I hope will make this a reality. We will consider four questions of each story that we read. These are in your bulletin in case you would like to use them in your own reading of the Bible. First, "What is the story?" Second, "Who is in the story?" Third, "What do the individuals in the story experience?" And fourth, "How does this story reveal Jesus as a healthy and dangerous Christian?"

So, here is our story today, found in Mark 1:7-11: John is baptizing people in the Jordan River. He is preaching about the coming Messiah. One day Jesus appears on the bank of the Jordan River. He is baptized by John. Immediately, the heavens are torn back. The Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove. And a voice from heaven says of Jesus, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

There are three individuals highlighted in this story. Certainly, there is a crowd of people present, as well as a voice, which reveals the presence of God. But for the sake of time, we will only consider the experiences of the three individuals who are mentioned by name: John, the Spirit, and Jesus.

What does John experience in this story? He has been baptizing and preaching now for about 6 months. People from all over Judea have been coming to be baptized, confessing their sins. Some have been the most vile. He has heard many evil and wicked sins confessed. John has told these people about the Messiah, who would soon come. In verses 7 and 8 of Mark chapter 1, John describes how the Messiah would be superior to him in every way. "In fact, John says, I am not worthy to untie His sandals." The job of untying someone's sandals was the work of a slave. A student wouldn't even untie the sandals of his rabbi. This was reserved only for slaves. And John says, "I am not even worthy of doing this. I am not worthy to be His slave. I have been baptizing you with water. But the Messiah will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. This water is only a symbol. It can't cleanse your souls. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. And the Messiah will immerse you in His power."

Then one day as John is baptizing, he looks into the face of One who is completely pure. In Mark's account the focus at this point turns to Jesus Christ, the Messiah. John is no longer the central figure. In fact, Mark doesn't say, "John baptized Jesus." He says, "Jesus was baptized by John." Jesus is first and John is now second. How strange it must have been for John to baptize Jesus, the sinless One. Surely he must have felt unworthy to baptize the One whom he had declared himself unworthy to untie His sandals. And yet he surrendered his agenda and his

feelings to the One who came to him to be baptized by him. He didn't allow his feelings of unworthiness to stand as a barrier to the request of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself declared that there had never been a prophet greater than John. The people of Israel had thought John might himself be the Messiah. He baptized the Lord of glory. But John saw himself as unworthy to be His slave and untie His sandals.

This is John's experience in this story. What about the Spirit? Verse 8 of chapter 1 contains Mark's first mention of the Spirit. We will consider three texts to understand who the Spirit is and what His work is. First, Job 33:4 says it was the Spirit who gave us life when we were created. So, the Spirit is the life, the breath, of God. Luke 1:35 says the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb took place by the Spirit. The power of God in the virgin birth came by the presence of the Spirit. The Spirit is the life and the power of God. Romans 8:11 says it was by Spirit that God raised Jesus from the dead. And it will be by the Spirit that our bodies will be changed at the resurrection. So, the Spirit is the life-giving power of God.

In our story today (verse 10), the Spirit comes down from heaven and rests on Jesus like a dove. Mark is not saying that a dove landed on Jesus' shoulder, like you might see in some of the movies that have been made. Mark says the Spirit descended like a dove. The dove was one of the animals used in the sacrificial system. Like a lamb, it was sacrificed as an offering for sin. It represented the Messiah who would lay down His life for the world. So why did the Spirit, the glory of God, come down from heaven like a dove? Perhaps one reason is found in Jesus' own words. In John 16:14 Jesus says, "The Spirit would come to glorify Me." Perhaps the Spirit took the form of a dove in order to call people's minds to the One who was represented by the dove in the sacrificial system. John himself would declare, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And by descending as a dove, the Spirit similarly directs those looking on to Him who takes away the sin of the world.

And now, our third individual in the story – Jesus. Mark says in verse 9 of chapter 1 that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John. Jesus has lived in Nazareth for close to 30 years. He has worked there as a carpenter. But now He leaves. He comes to the Jordan River in order to be baptized by John. He has no sins to confess. He has no need to repent. But He is on a mission. He is living out the life that the Law requires of us. Mark says immediately after coming up out of the water, Jesus saw the heavens opened. I like how the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary puts it: "Momentarily the gates of the unseen world swung ajar." What a picture this must have been for Jesus to see. God gives Him a glimpse of His home beyond the stars. Surely this must have inspired Him! And the voice! God Himself verbally speaks. He gives Jesus words of affirmation – "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Is there anything a son needs more to hear from his father? "I think the world of you," says so much. Jesus must have recalled this moment often. How often He would hear criticizing and hateful words from the people He had come to save.

Here we have the experiences of John, the Spirit, and Jesus as told in our story today. And now, our fourth question, "How does this story reveal Jesus as a healthy and dangerous Christian?" Jesus Himself was not a Christian. He was the Christ. But His life is the only life we have to look at to know what a healthy and dangerous Christian looks like. I believe there are four ways in this story in which Jesus reveals the life of a healthy and dangerous Christian. First, He **responds** to the call of God. He leaves the carpenter shop. He leaves His comfort zone, as it were. No one has ever had such an enormous task to accomplish in such a short time. But Jesus is not intimidated. He answers the call. A healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who goes where God calls. Second, Jesus **accepts** what is not His. He asks to be baptized by John. This baptism was meant for sinners. Jesus was without sin. But He accepted what was not His, so we could have what was. A healthy and dangerous Christian is someone

who is not too full of themselves to do what someone else should have done. Third, Jesus is **empowered** by the Spirit. The Spirit brought life-giving power into Jesus' life. This power was not for Himself. It was for His ministry. It was to equip Him for His work. A healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who has responded to God's call. They are equipped and empowered to accomplish what is humanly impossible. The same Spirit that gave life to the form of Adam in the Garden of Eden empowers the ministry of a healthy and dangerous Christian. The power of the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead enables a healthy and dangerous Christian to accomplish God-sized tasks. And last of all, this story in Mark reveals Jesus as Someone **accepted** by God. God said of Jesus, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." A healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who has peace with God. Knowing that God sees everything they do doesn't bother them. Knowing that God sees who they are on the inside doesn't worry them. They know God is ok with them now. Not because they have achieved the perfection He requires, but because Jesus has. They believe that Jesus really has reconciled them to God. The guilt and barriers are gone.

Picture yourself at Jesus' baptism. As you witness this event, what does it do to you? Is it just a good show? Or is it an experience that moves something inside of you? What Jesus experienced that day was not for Himself. Jesus did not come to earth and walk to the Jordan River that day for His own entertainment and enjoyment. As glorious as that day was for Him, it was nothing compared to what He could have enjoyed in the courts of heaven. All of this was for US! Everything that He experienced was so WE could experience it. He was empowered by the Spirit so that we might be empowered by the Spirit. He was given words of affirmation from heaven, so we might experience what it's like to be loved and affirmed by God. This whole story is for US!

So, as I'm standing there in the crowd of people around the Jordan River, what do I **experience**? Do I realize that my redemption is taking place right before my eyes? That all that I have lost is being restored to me? That all that is missing in my life, is being given back to me in the life of Jesus Christ? What a moment this is. Father, Son, and Spirit all in one place working out my salvation. What do I **feel** inside? Gratitude? May God save me from indifference and unbelief. May God not let me walk away without being changed and moved in my heart. As I see God reconciling me to Himself, may I be reconciled to Him. How does this experience change how I spend the rest of my day? Do I **live** any differently? Surely, I tell my circle of friends and family what I saw take place, what IS taking place in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. How can I not say anything? This is good news for everybody.

I would like to close with the lyrics to a song entitled, "This is Your Life" by Switchfoot.

Don't close your eyes, don't close your eyes.

This is your life and today is all you've got now.

Yeah, and today is all you'll ever have.

Don't close your eyes.

Don't close your eyes.

This is your life, are you who you want to be?