

The Inauguration (Mark 1:9-13)

Notes from a sermon preached by Pastor Matt Privett at Covenant Baptist Church

Here Comes the Increase

Mark is writing to show his readers Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that is good news (1:1). In verses 2-8 he writes about John the Baptist, whose entire purpose is shown to be thoroughly Christ-centered. John the Baptist himself told his own disciples in John 3:30 that "He (Jesus) must increase and I (John) must decrease."

That necessity begins to come to fruition in Mark 1:9-13, in which Mark records two important events which effectively usher out the ministry of John the Baptist and usher in the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the One mightier than John who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

We live in a heated, volatile political climate, but the world watched in January 2009 as Barack Obama was sworn in as the 44th President of the United States. Rarely, and perhaps never, had there been so much excitement from so many people over a changing of the guard in this country. Over 2 million people flooded the streets of Washington, DC, and over 170 million dollars were poured into an event that ushered in the inauguration of a new era in American history, a new President. It was such a historic and huge event that one study indicated the 2009 inauguration had received 35 times more media coverage than the previous two.

The previous November the majority of this nation's voters had voiced their approval of Obama as the man to lead the country for the next four years. There is no doubt that his inauguration carried added significance because it was the first time an African-American had won the presidency. There is, no matter your thoughts or political leanings, a definite sense of vindication that many in this country now feel because Obama is the president.

Yet, there is also no doubt many people are discouraged with the direction the country is headed. People are not content with their own lives as well. Many people believe that the President will help solve their problems, and as a result there is a lot of hope invested in his administration. The anticipation of his inauguration on January 20, 2009, was palpable. It was intense. Many people looked forward for a long time to the day there would be a new President, and so when Obama won the election it is almost as if he was anointed, fairly or unfairly, as the one who will deliver America from its problems.

Nevertheless, no matter what your political affiliation might be, our hope is not in who governs or doesn't govern. Our hope is not in the Republican or Democratic Party. Our hope is not in who wins elections. Our hope is not in the presidential administration, but in the administration of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And it is in Mark 1:9-13 that we see, in a sense, His inauguration -- the inauguration of the administration of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

He does not become the Son of God at the Jordan River. He has always been the Son of God. But in these verses we read of an event that signifies the anointing of God the Father on His Son, to establish His earthly ministry.

It is no accident that, after the thesis statement in verse 1 and brief introduction via John the Baptist in 2-8, the Gospel According to Mark really begins here, because this is the inauguration of Jesus' ministry. Therefore, in this study we will see not only the anointing of the Anointed One, the inauguration of Jesus Christ into His Messianic office, and the beginning of the opposition which He would face... but we will also see the power of God unto salvation to depend on for eternity, as well as an example to follow each and every day.

Jesus' Identification with Sinners

In verses 4-8 John the Baptist is in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He was preaching to God's chosen nation, the people of Israel, who had sworn an oath to be a holy people. And what was he preaching to them? Repent of your sins. Don't trust in your Jewishness for salvation.

Israel, like all of the world, was a nation of sinners in need of a Savior. Here, then, was this baptizer, John, promising that One who was mightier than he was coming, and this One would baptize (or immerse) people, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit.

So in verse 9 we read, “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”

Aside from the opening sentence of the book, the thesis statement about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, this is the first mention of Jesus – His baptism. It’s interesting that the inauguration of Jesus’ public ministry doesn’t tell us about what Jesus does as much as it tells us what God does to Him.

From the earliest days of the church it was the baptism of Jesus that was regarded as a defining and indispensable moment in Jesus’ life. In Acts 1, when the disciples found it necessary to choose a replacement for Judas, the main qualification they set forth was that it had to be someone who had followed Jesus all the way back to when He was baptized. They had to be there all during His ministry.

And it’s interesting Mark records that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee. That’s quite the contrast from the Jerusalem and Judea crowd that had flocked out to the wilderness to hear John the Baptist and be baptized by him. If Jerusalem was the New York City of Israel, then Galilee was the back woods. And the people of Galilee, while real Jews, were not known as those preoccupied with keeping the Law. They weren’t known as the hardcore, devout Jews.

Galileans in general, and particularly those from Nazareth, were kind of looked down upon. After all, it was Nathanael who in John 1 quipped, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” So it is quite the irony to first century Jewish eyes... John was born in the hill country of Judah, closer to Jerusalem, but the One mightier than John the Baptist came not from Jerusalem, but from Galilee. The perfect Jew, the embodiment of everything the nation of Israel was supposed to be, was this Nazarene.

But if Jesus was perfect... if Jesus was the Son of God, then why did He need to be baptized by John?

It’s a legitimate question. It’s the question that John himself asked of Jesus. Mark doesn’t record it, but Matthew does. “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to Me?” Remember that John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. Why then did Jesus need to partake of it if He was without sin? Jesus Christ did not need to be forgiven of anything.

In verse 8 John says that the One coming would be the giver of the Spirit. He would be the giver of life. This One would be actively creating the people of God. Certainly that One would not need to repent. Certainly that One would not need forgiveness of sins!

It’s a question John the Baptist himself asked in Matthew’s account. And in Matthew 3:15 Jesus says, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” It’s clear that this was the will of God the Father for His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness by perfect obedience, perfect submission, to His Father.

But beyond that, think about Christian baptism. When we are baptized it is a public act when signifies that we have identified with both the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by faith. Jesus was identifying with someone as well, actually a group of people, when He was baptized. In verse 9 Jesus is in the role of a lowly, penitent man receiving baptism... receiving the sign of repentance... not for Himself, but on behalf of the people of God. Jesus Christ, the Anointed One of Israel, was acknowledging the judgment of God upon the nation of Israel.

From this point of introduction in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus Christ is seen sharing the history, the status, and the predicament of the people. The One who bestows the baptism of the Spirit humbled Himself to receive the baptism of repentance. Jesus, upon the start of His earthly ministry, immediately shows Himself in Mark to be the “suffering servant” Israel was to be looking for, the one Isaiah prophesied about.

Now that was and is important for the nation of Israel, but it is important for you and me as well. As the writer of Hebrews states, “He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation (to absorb the wrath) for the sins of the people.”

Jesus was baptized, beloved, not to repent or be forgiven for His own sins (of which there were none), but to identify Himself with sinners. The people of Israel were sinners. You and I are sinners. And because He identified with you and me to the utmost, by leaving His glory in heaven and taking on flesh, becoming a Man, and fulfilling perfect righteousness, never sinning, He was able to absorb the wrath of God against your sins, if you have believed upon Him.

Jesus identified Himself with sinners by being baptized in the wilderness, in the very river, the Jordan River, that the people of Israel crossed over some 1500 years or so earlier to enter into the land God promised them. And Jesus’ identification with sinners now allows those same sinners to enter into an eternity of promise.

Thank God for Jesus’ identification with sinners! Through Him we enter the Promised Land!

Jesus’ Validation from God

When Jesus was baptized He came out of the water and experienced three things which the Jews associated with the inauguration of the kingdom of God... three things which validated not only the baptism of Jesus, but Jesus Himself as the Son of God. Three things: the opening of the heavens, the Spirit descending like a dove, and the voice from heaven.

Many had come and been baptized by John, but only in the case of Jesus was coming up from the water answered with a coming down from heaven. There was something different about this Man.

Jesus came out of the water according to Matthew, and Luke adds that He was praying, right when this event happened. Immediately the heavens opened up. The word Mark uses here literally refers to the heavens being “torn open,” as if the glory of God could no longer be contained and had to burst forth into time and space. The beginning and the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry were marked by a tearing. Here as the ministry of Jesus was inaugurated heaven was torn open. And when His ministry concluded at the cross it was the temple veil which would be torn in two from top to bottom. Those are the only times in the entire New Testament we find that Greek word for “torn.” These were unique, significant events in which God’s glory was revealed.

This was a cataclysmic display of the power of God, for any and all who were there when this happened to see. The Jews had come to believe that with the end of the age of the prophets, which was about four hundred years earlier, that God had ceased to speak, especially in supernatural ways. But here He did... in a way not seen for centuries. God showed His power to reveal His Son to the world.

The heavens were torn open and then the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove. The significance of this event has been the subject of much theological debate for centuries. It is clear from the Scriptures that Jesus was sinless and that He was a student of the Scriptures, and it seems He had some sense of His purpose from an early age. Luke’s account of him at the temple as a twelve year old shows He was already acknowledged God as His Father.

But it is equally clear that something significant happens right here and that the descending of the Spirit is integral to that something. Mark literally says that “the Spirit was descending into Him.” This indicates that it was at this particular time Jesus was completely filled and equipped for ministry by the Spirit. Perhaps that is why we don’t have much information about His life between about age 2 and age 30, because His official Messianic ministry had not yet commenced until this baptism.

The Spirit certainly did not need to appear like a dove to descend into Jesus, but this physical display for Jesus and for others to see showed those who did see that this was a real event. There was something extraordinary about this particular baptism, something extraordinary about this particular Man.

But that was not all. Then came a declaration out of heaven, saying, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”

The pronoun “You” is emphatic in the Greek language here. It’s like God the Father is sticking His finger out and pointing it right at Jesus for all to see. “YOU are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.” There are echoes of Psalm 2:7 here, in which God says about the King He has installed upon His holy mountain, “You are My Son.”

Jesus Christ is that unique Son of God, the special object of His elective love, and here God the Father is reaching down into earth with voice to announce that *this* is the One... this is His beloved Son... this is His Anointed One to whom He will give the very ends of the earth as His possession. “You are My Son whom I have installed upon My holy mountain!”

Abraham was called a friend of God, Moses a servant of God, Aaron a chosen one of God, David a man after God’s own heart, Paul an apostle. Only the nation Israel, and the king as Israel’s leader, had been called “My Son.” But where Israel failed, Jesus would take its place.

Jesus is the true Israelite, the true Son of God, the King who would not disappoint. But He would also be a suffering servant who was fully obedient to the will of God. And so here God was announcing to the world and telling Jesus Himself that He was well-pleased with Him. It was a proclamation that God was satisfied with Jesus’ life up to this point. But not only that, it was a divine endorsement to the world of what Jesus was about to do.

Presidents usually have the approval of a majority of the nation when they are inaugurated, but Jesus is better. Jesus had the visible and audible approval of Almighty God. This is God the Father presenting His Son, the One the apostle John would call the *λογος* (logos), the Word, the Message. The baptism of Jesus Christ is God’s political television advertisement. This is the Father presenting His Son and saying, “I Am God the Father and I approve this message.”

So Jesus was identified with sinners in His baptism, but He was also definitively validated by God.

Jesus’ Confrontation with the Adversary

When President Obama took the oath of office at noon on January 20, 2009, he immediately took on all of the rights and responsibilities that come with the office. Had terrorists tried to fly another plane into the Pentagon at 12:01pm that day, it would’ve been on him right there and then to be the President, because he was then the President, to do something about it.

Well as Mark puts it, Jesus was baptized, and then He was immediately confronted with the crisis of evil. Jesus was “impelled” by the Spirit to go out into the wilderness, where for forty days He was being tempted by Satan. Here we have this glorious event, the baptism... this glorious validation of Messiahship, and then BOOM! Jesus is put right smack dab into a cosmic battle.

That word translated “impelled” in the New American Standard is the Greek word *ἐκβαλλει* (ekballei). It literally means “thrown out” or “cast out” or “drove out.” The Spirit impelled Him. It’s like me grabbing my cat by the scruff on the back of his neck and tossing him off the bed or something. The Holy Spirit pushed Jesus out, or picked Him up and threw Him out to where He would be tempted.

Jesus didn’t get any of the lavish inauguration balls we’re used to seeing after new presidents are sworn in. Jesus had no celebratory parade. His entire ministry would be a battle against sin and the forces of darkness, and immediately upon being inaugurated into this ministry He would take on evil in the wilderness.

The wilderness in the Scriptures is a place of trial, a place of testing, a place of suffering. In the Old Testament blessing is associated with inhabited and cultivated land. The wilderness is the place of the curse, where seed and fruit don’t grow, where there is no water. Man doesn’t live in the wilderness, but withers away. And that is where Jesus’ first order of business commenced.

The same Spirit which descended into Jesus at the baptism had an appointment for Him with Satan himself. For forty days Jesus was “being tempted by Satan.” Mark doesn’t give us the details of the temptation. His synopsis of this event is short, succinct, and focuses not on the things Jesus was tempted with, but on the fact that there was a confrontation with Satan.

Satan literally means “adversary.” Satan is the adversary of God, the adversary of the Trinity. From his fall from heaven, Satan has been working to undermine God. If God’s greatest purpose is to glorify Himself, then Satan’s chief end is to steal as much of that glory away from God and try to claim it for himself. And so, immediately upon the inauguration of the ministry of the Son of God, the Messiah, the King to whom God would give everything, Satan tries to subvert the King’s reign.

But notice something that isn’t there as well. Mark does not tell us that the temptation came to an end. We do know that Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days being tempted by Satan. We do know from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke what those temptations consisted of. We even know from Matthew and Luke that Jesus Himself appealed to Scripture to counter the temptations of the devil. But Mark intentionally leaves open the fact that the temptation did not come to an end.

We read elsewhere that Satan left Him at the end of the forty days to wait for an opportune time. Jesus would be confronted by Satan’s forces and temptation throughout His ministry on earth. He never succumbed to temptation, but it was there. It was around because sin and death are around in this world. And Jesus did not defeat sin and death until the cross. It is at the cross where he cried, “It is finished!” The wilderness was, then, the beginning of His earthly battle.

The one aspect of the temptation in which Mark gives us more detail than anyone else is that added tidbit about Jesus being with the wild beasts. Why did he add that detail? It seems curious, superfluous. Maybe even unnecessary.

But there is a definite irony here when one compares this story to the account of the Garden of Eden we get in Genesis 1-2. There man lived side by side with every animal in tranquility. Man named the animals. But sin not only brought about doom for man, but brought about the deterioration of the entire creation, including man’s relationship with the animals.

The Old Testament has many examples of animals harming or killing men. When Joseph’s brothers needed a story to feed their father after they sold him into slavery, they said a beast tore him up. God used two female bears in 2 Kings 2, called by Elisha, to judge the youths who mocked God’s prophet. God uses lions to judge sinners in Kings. Yet here is the Son of God, dwelling in a desolate place with ravenous animals. He is the Perfect One, bringing the kingdom of God, in a most dangerous place.

Note also that God the Father did not abandon His Son in the midst of His trials, just as He does not leave us nor forsake us in ours. Jesus had answered Satan’s temptation for Him to throw Himself off a cliff with Psalm 91:11-12: “For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, That you do not strike your foot against a stone.” The Son of God had the angels at His disposal, and here they were to provide Him His needs when Satan left Him to tempt Him again at an opportune time.

God was with Jesus when He faced the adversary, and He is with you, if you trust in Him, when you face trials and temptations. First Corinthians 10:13 says that “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.” That promise is seen fulfilled in His own, only begotten Son, in Jesus’ confrontation with the Adversary.

Conclusion

King Jesus was anointed. He was inaugurated. Then, He was tested... and He responded according to righteousness.

Presidents respond to their inaugurations by making decisions, and hopefully they make those decisions according to righteousness. God is the Judge. But the fact of the matter is we are all going to be judged as to whether or not we are righteous, and the cold reality is that none of us is.

We need Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We need His perfect righteousness; perfect righteousness of the inaugurated King. So as the writer of Hebrews says, beginning in 4:14, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

The Second Person of the Trinity descended to earth, and then the Holy Spirit descended into Him. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, held fast to righteousness. He passed the test. He went through what we go through, yet He did not sin. So now, upon believing in Him, we can be made right in the eyes of God.

Praise God that Jesus identifies with sinners! Praise God that Jesus was vindicated by God! Praise God that Jesus confronted the adversary! He is the Son of God and has won the battle and the war!

And now we can claim victory in Jesus, our Savior forever! Has He sought you and bought you with His redeeming blood? I pray He has. Come before the inaugurated King today. Humble yourself before the One who humbled Himself.