

## Jason Upchurch - Mark 1:9-11 - The Good News of Jesus's Baptism - Part 2

So before we begin this morning, I want to spend just a few minutes talking about the geography of Israel. I've wrestled a little bit with how much time to spend on geography - but I feel compelled to talk about it for just a few minutes. So if you would, I want you to turn to the very back of your Bible to your maps. And I want you to find a map called the 12 Tribes of Israel. Most of our Bibles have the same set of maps.

And while you're turning I'm going to let you know that I want to include maps occasionally on the screen as we go through Mark. One of the most helpful things for me in understanding the Bible stories is understanding the geography of Israel. Knowing where people are is often helpful to add color and context. It's like knowing where things are in Spokane county.

If I told you I had to drive from Deer Park to Airway Heights, but 395 was closed and I actually had to drive to Spokane Valley, then over to Airway Heights you'd probably groan at how long that would take because you know the geography. What if I told you Jews walked from Galilee to Jerusalem but went around Samaria to avoid the Samaritans. If you knew that that detour was like us driving to Spokane Valley then to Airway Heights it might tell you how much the Jews hated the Samaritans - that's a long ways around. So geography often helps us understand the significance of the stories.

The two maps that are most helpful for the OT and the gospels are the "12 tribes of Israel" map, and then the "Palestine in the Time of Jesus" map. There's a lot of data on those maps and I wouldn't recommend just trying to commit everything to memory all at once. But if you're reading and come across a town or a country come across a town and each time take the time to find it on the map, it will help solidify these places as you read.

What I might encourage you to do is make a copy of these maps - maybe shrink the copy a little - and use the copy as your bookmark for where you're reading. Make one copy of the OT and one for the NT. **Look** at the **Palestine in the Time of Jesus** map. These are the cities we'll see most often in Mark's gospel.

We're going to start seeing a lot of geography. I don't want to get too bogged down in the geography. But I think it's helpful to consider as we move along. The maps I put on the screen will usually only have the points of interest relevant to our passage - I'll try to keep them as clean as possible

Several points of interest. First, the land of Israel in NT times is divided up into 3 basic areas. Galilee in the north, Samaria in the middle, and Judea in the south. These are general geographic areas - kind of like counties. The first half of Mark's gospel centers on Jesus's ministry in Galilee. We know from the other gospels he went down to Jerusalem and other parts, but for most part Mark discusses Jesus's ministry up in the north in the first half of the gospel. It's not until chapter 10 that Jesus moves into Judea and around Jerusalem.

The star represents Jerusalem. Jerusalem is basically the center of all Jewish life. The house icon is Nazareth where Jesus grew up. And the droplet is probably where Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River which flows from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea.

Hopefully this is somewhat helpful for you to orient yourself to the movement of Jesus.

As we look now at the passage before us we have the coming of Jesus. **Read 9-15**

Now, you might want to put your theological seat belts on this morning. This passage is an amazing passage. And part of the reason I believe this is an amazing passage is that many times we have a very simplistic view of the person of Jesus and we don't even realize we have a simplistic view. But we're diving into deep theological water and so I want to walk slowly through this section.

Because I think the baptism of Jesus is often misunderstood and yet it is a crucial aspect to who he is as a man, the Messiah and our Savior. But there really is a lot going on here.

Now, I'll be honest, I had a difficult time trying to put together a cohesive outline about this passage. So what I want to do is just walk through this section almost Bible Study style.

Let me start off by saying that of all the gospels, Mark is the most abrupt at just having Jesus show up on the scene out of nowhere.

And to be fair Jesus's upbringing is not all that important to any of the gospel writers. We have very little about Jesus's life in Nazareth: almost nothing on his childhood or young adult life. Nothing about his 20s. Luke says he's about 30 when he begins ministry so his first 30 years is barely recorded.

We know he was circumcised on the 8th day, we know he was presented at the Temple shortly after that because he was the firstborn son. We also know later from Luke's gospel that Jesus went to the Temple when he was about 12. Remember that's when the family was headed back home, they couldn't find Jesus, but he was in the Temple teaching the teachers and asking them questions which really revealed he had amazing insight into the Scriptures. If you recall his parents were somewhat upset about his not coming home and he just says, "Did you not know I must be in my Father's house?"

We learn early on he knew he had a special relationship with the Father. He had a keen understanding. Luke even says that Jesus "increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with man and God." He grew in wisdom? Wasn't he God? Yes, but he was also man. He grew in favor with God? How is that possible? Isn't he God? Yes he is. Nevertheless as he grows he is responsible for more and more things and his absolute obedience to the Law of God is more and more comprehensive and amazing.

What Mark wants us to home in on is that something special happened at Jesus's baptism. At his baptism, something changes in the man Jesus. Whatever his life was before his baptism is not nearly as important as after he is baptized. This is the transition.

And it's really 2 transitions at once: one for John and one for Jesus. Once Jesus is baptized, John's ministry is basically over. **Read 14**

John's done. We don't know exactly how long after Jesus is baptized that John is arrested but clearly his ministry is in the past. And we know that he'll be beheaded in a few chapters.

But also this is a transition for Jesus. He's going from relative obscurity in an almost unknown town to the foremost preacher in Israel.

His meteoric rise to fame happens precisely as a result of his baptism.

Now, something we should call attention to is that Jesus is baptized as an outsider. Notice where Jesus comes from. **Read 9**

Where does he come from? Nazareth. That's 70 miles north from where John is baptizing. Notice who is coming to John. **Read 4-5**

People are coming from Judea and Jerusalem - all in the south. The Samaritans aren't coming and Samaria.

Mark is noting a big contrast between John's typical audience and Jesus. The people coming to John were locals. All these people in Jerusalem and Judea. That was a lot of people. So many that the religious leaders ask him if he's actually the Messiah.

But Jesus, from 70 miles north in Galilee, comes to him for baptism. He's the odd man out. Something compels Jesus to go to John. Jesus would likely have known John, they were family after all. But we don't know how he heard about John or precisely what compels Jesus to go to him for baptism. But he goes 70 miles south to John when no one from that area was going to John.

Now, we asked last week "why did John come baptizing?" He came to prepare the people, he came to reveal the Messiah. And he came to point people to Messiah. That's why John came.

But usually the question people ask is “Why did Jesus get baptized?” Which is a good question. John’s preaching repentance and Jesus doesn’t need to repent but he gets baptized anyway.

Now if you ask a bunch of scholars why Jesus got baptized one of the first reasons they give you is that Jesus had to identify with his sinful people. Jesus wasn’t sinful, so being baptized he was just saying “I affirm what John is doing in calling Israel to repentance and I’m with you.” ESV Study Bible / Reformation Study Bible / MacArthur Study Bible all say that. A bunch of commentaries also say that.

Here’s the reality: the Bible never actually says explicitly that that’s what he’s doing. When we get baptized were identifying with Jesus, so maybe it’s a mirror of what we do. But I find it pretty amazing that we never have that connection made for us in the Bible.

What we do know is that Jesus is baptized to be identified as the Messiah and anointed by the Spirit.

Now, there’s a fantastic thing that happens here. Jesus goes under the water and comes up out of the water and then this amazing cosmic thing happens: the heavens are torn open and the Holy Spirit comes down out of heaven like a dove and lands on Jesus. It’s this huge cosmic vision.

And you think: man that would have been amazing! Here’s the Son of God, the heavens are ripped open and the Holy Spirit’s coming down and the Father is speaking! I would have loved to have been there and seen all that?”

Can I tell you something, if we were there when Jesus was baptized, I don’t think we’d have noticed anything unusual happening. Take a look at who saw this. **Read 10**

**Vs. 10** doesn’t even really answer the question, does it? “He” - could be Jesus or could be John. But it seems on a slow read it’s Jesus. All the pronouns “he” in this section are now focused on Jesus. He came up out of the water, he saw the dove descend, the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness.

Why does this matter? Because I think there were only 2 people who see this fantastic vision on the day that Jesus was baptized: Jesus and John. I don’t believe anyone else saw it.

Here’s why. In John’s gospel, the apostle John doesn’t actually record the event of Jesus’s baptism. He records probably the day after the baptism when John the Baptist sees Jesus again. And remember he points to Jesus and he says “Behold the Lamb of God!...I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove...and I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God.” He’s make a sworn statement under oath.

Why does he do that? If everyone in the area saw that amazing vision of the heavens opened and the Spirit descending and the Father speaking from heaven John wouldn’t have to say anything because everyone would just gravitate to Jesus. But starts pointing to people and saying “Hey I saw something amazing with him!”

Something else is odd, that makes me believe only Jesus and John saw this. You remember later when John is put into prison by Herod he sends messengers to Jesus and John’s like “Are you really the Messiah or is there someone else? **Look at Luke 7:18-23**

This is that incident. John’s in prison and he hears about Jesus’s fame. But he’s still in prison. He’s probably thinking “If Jesus is the Messiah, why are the godly people locked up? Aren’t you going to take the government on your shoulders now?” **Read 18-23**

If you’re Messiah why am I locked up?” And we’re like “John, you saw heaven being ripped open and the dove and voice, you know this is Messiah. What’s your deal?”

Why does John lose confidence? Because this was a private vision that only he and Jesus saw. No one else saw it.

Imagine if you saw a fantastic vision and then a year or two later things were going very differently than what the vision seemed to indicate. You'd probably rethink that vision. Did it really happen? What did it really mean?

Interestingly, we have no other recording that Jesus and John ever speaking directly to one another after the baptism. They weren't over in the corner months later like "Okay, John, preaching is going well, this Messiah gig is pretty good. Those Pharisees are pretty crazy but that's just the role." And John's like "Well, keep up the good work. We both now this is what you were called to do. Remember the baptism experience? Man that was amazing."

No, they never talk again directly that we know. There's just this vision that John is relying on.

And this vision is very similar to other prophetic visions in the Bible.

Prophetic visions are often amazing and fantastic and so grandiose they might feel dream like. Remember John the apostle in Revelation "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day?" And then he gets this massive revelation of the heavens and all the visualization of heaven. Jesus is transformed and talks to him with a voice like many waters?

Or like the Transfiguration when Jesus is on the mountain with Peter James and John and the same kind of thing happens where Jesus is transformed into blazing glory - his face like the sun, robes are pure white, voice calls from heaven. We know it happened and it was amazing but only Jesus, Peter, John and Andrew saw it. No one else saw the vision. Isn't it odd that their on a mountain and Moses is up there and Jesus is up there - like on Mt. Sinai in Exodus - but the people down below don't hear God booming from the mountain? It's a vision. Is it real? Yes, but it's a spiritual vision.

The baptism vision is a little glimpse and I think from John's perspective when he's in jail, he's wondering: was that all real? Was it just a dream? Was he mistaken?

What about Jesus? Well, it seems clear that this vision is for him. **Look back at Mark 1:10. Read 10**

In Mark's gospel, the focus is that Jesus saw the Spirit and heard the voice. Matthew's version makes it super clear as well that this vision is focused on Jesus.

**Matt. 3:16-17:** And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened **to him**, and **he saw** the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus sees the Spirit come down and land on him. What is that about? Isn't Jesus one with the Spirit and the Father already? That's the Trinity, isn't it? One God, three persons - Father, Son and Spirit? Well, yes. It's not as though Jesus is devoid of the Spirit altogether. But this is a special anointing of the Spirit on the man Jesus.

What's that about? Why is that such a big deal? Because what's really happening here is Jesus is being anointed for ministry. This is not the Spirit finally rejoining Jesus. This is the Spirit anointing him as Messiah - remember Messiah means anointed one - and this is where he's actually anointed by the Spirit.

The OT prophesied that Messiah would be specially filled with the Spirit.

**Isa. 11:1-2:** There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

**Isa. 42:1:** The chosen servant - the Messiah - the Lord would put his Spirit upon him.

**Isa 61:1:** The Spirit of God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to who?

To the captives. John becomes a captive and where's his liberty?

But all these prophecies point to the fact that Messiah will be anointed by the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit to do this work. But remember, who sees this vision? John and Jesus. We know why John sees the vision: because he now knows Jesus is Messiah.

But the gospel writers focus on the fact that Jesus sees the vision. Why does Jesus need to see this? Why is this vision so important for him to see?

Hang with me a minute. I think Jesus goes down to be baptized - fully fully God, fully man - but I don't think he knows 100% knows exactly what's going to happen. I'm not 100% sure he knows for sure he's Messiah. Hang with me.

Here's a little side note on theology about Jesus that makes the gospels really hard: Jesus is fully man and fully God. He has 2 natures. We call this is the hypostatic union. Truly man, truly God.

You say "I know that" - but the rub is that sometimes those natures seem to create conflict in our minds - like trying to push 2 magnets together from the same end, we can't get it to stick.

If we're honest, understanding how those natures work together is very difficult. And many people have fallen into grave error trying to figure this out. So we have to be careful.

But it's something Christians have wrestled with since the time of Jesus is: When did the man Jesus understand that he was the Messiah? When did he understand that he was fully God?

Our answer is usually "Well, he always knew it." Did he know it when he was 2? Or 5? See, we usually uphold the full deity of Jesus, but sometimes it's to the detriment of understanding his full humanity.

The Bible says Jesus learned things. He grew in knowledge and wisdom. Luke says that twice. How does God grow in knowledge? Doesn't he know all things because he's God? And the answer is yes, kind of.

There are times even after he is baptized when Jesus doesn't know things. He didn't know who the woman was who touched his garment for healing the issue of blood. He didn't know the day or the hour of his coming. He didn't know the name of Legion when he cast them out of the man because he kept asking "What's your name?"

So we have to be careful. The man Jesus has 2 natures in 1 person. Human nature, and divine nature. And it seems that upon his incarnation Jesus sets aside the independent use of his divine attributes. He is divine - he is fully God - with all those attributes. But those divine attributes are only used when the Father and especially the Spirit prompt him to use them.

In John's gospel, Jesus says I do everything I see my Father doing. So Father sets the direction. But here's what we see in the rest of the gospels: Jesus operates completely in the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is something dramatic that changes when Jesus gets baptized. There is something fundamentally different about the way Jesus acts once he's baptized.

Wayne Grudem: those people who knew Jesus best, the neighbors with whom he had lived and worked for thirty years, saw him as no more than an ordinary man—a good man, no doubt, fair and kind and truthful, but certainly not a prophet of God who could work miracles and certainly not God himself in the flesh. Although in the following sections we will see how Jesus was fully divine in every way—he was truly God and man in one person—we must still recognize the full force of a passage like this. For the first thirty years of his life Jesus lived a human life that was so ordinary that the people of Nazareth who knew him best were amazed that he could teach with authority and work miracles. They knew him. He was one of them. He was "the carpenter's son" (Matt. 13:55), and he was himself "the carpenter" (Mark 6:3), so ordinary that they could ask, "Where then did this man get all these things?" (Matt. 13:56). And John tells us, "not even his brothers believed in him" (John 7:5).

He was so fully human that even those who lived and worked with him for thirty years, even those brothers who grew up in his own household, did not realize that he was anything more than a very good human being. They apparently had no idea that he was God come in the flesh.

We know that afterward Jesus didn't hide this at all and his brothers and mother reviled him and thought he was crazy. There was never any of that before his baptism.

When you put all those pieces together I have to conclude that I'm not sure Jesus knew before he was baptized - at least not 100% - that he was Messiah. I'm not sure he knew he was God in the flesh.

Watch the dramatic change. **Read 9-15**

Immediately Jesus sees this vision of the Spirit of God landing on **him**. Messiah is going to be empowered by the Spirit.

And immediately he hears "You are my beloved son." No one else hears this, except John. Why does God say this to Jesus if Jesus knows this? Why doesn't God say this so everyone else can hear?

Because he's revealing to his Son that he is the beloved Son of **Psalms 2:7** - the Messianic king who is anointed. He's revealing to his beloved Son that he is the son of **2 Sam. 7** - the Davidic covenant.

I think this is a self-actualizing moment for Jesus. And now he knows this. And now he is fully empowered by the Spirit for his service as the divine Messiah.

He comes all the way from Nazareth, gets baptized and only he and John see this vision. And at that moment Jesus - who has always been the God-Man, at that moment he learns he's the Messiah. He knows he's God. And immediately the Spirit compels him into the wilderness for 40 days to be tested. He passes and he comes back transformed. He now preaches with the power and doing the miracles that we're used to seeing.

You say what do I do with all this? What we do with this is stand in awe of the humility of the Son of God who though he was in the very form of God did not count equality with God something to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

He doesn't empty himself of divinity. He empties himself by taking on a fully human nature - human flesh. And if you think humbling himself in this way is big, the real humility is at the cross where God dies an excruciating death in our place. His divine nature doesn't die. His human nature dies while experiencing divine wrath.

The Bible says he was made like us in every way, yet without sin, that he might make propitiation for the sins of the people.

**Pray**