

## INTRODUCTION

This is the second message from the Gospel According to Mark. According to strong tradition, it could be called the Gospel According to Simon Peter as told to Mark.

In this message we're going to look at the baptism of Jesus. Through the years, I've had some interesting baptism experiences. Mike and I have had the joy of baptizing people in the Black Sea off the coast of Yalta in the Crimea. We had to time the baptism to coincide with the big waves to help lift the person up. I will be baptizing folks in the Jordan River next week, which is always a thrill.

When I was a young pastor, I used to just lower people back in the water, no matter how large they were. Early on in my ministry, I had just lowered a really large guy into the water when I realized I couldn't lift him up with one arm. So, I reached around with my other arm to help pull him up. That was a mistake. At that precise moment gravity took over and I lost my balance and soon I was underwater with the guy. I was wearing fishing waders, and they filled up with water. I like the way we do it now; we have a simple platform people can sit on in the baptistery!

Mark 1:4-13. "And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 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. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.' At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him."

Jesus' baptism went smoothly. In this passage there are three important episodes in the life of Jesus. He undergoes baptism, there's a voice from heaven, and then Jesus is tempted by the devil. Each one of these experiences has a personal application to our lives.

### I. JESUS WAS BAPTIZED AS AN EXAMPLE FOR US

We read, "Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." The message of John the Baptist was preaching was simple. He said, "Repent, you sinners, and turn to God. Give proof of your repentance by being baptized. Of all the individuals who have ever walked on planet earth, Jesus is the only One who wasn't a sinner, and didn't need to repent. There was really no need for Him to be baptized. So why did He?"

We find the answer in Matthew's account. "Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to

me?' Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.'" (Matthew 3:14-15) Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. That means He did it because it was the right thing to do. He was setting an example for us. Baptism is an important part of the gospel. Jesus launched His ministry by being baptized, and His last command to His disciples was to go into all nations making disciples and baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The first message from the newborn church on the Day of Pentecost was, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) And on that day, 3,000 new believers were baptized. Because baptism is important, let's notice three things the Bible teaches concerning baptism.

### **A. The sequence of baptism: believe and be baptized**

The sequence is that you repent, believe, and then you are baptized. Baptism is for people who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. I certainly don't want to be critical of any Christian group, but if you were baptized as an infant, you have not experienced Bible baptism. It's certainly not your fault, because you didn't have a choice in the matter. And I admire your parents for their desire to want you to be dedicated to God at an early age, but that's not baptism. We dedicate newborns and their parents do God, but we don't use water.

Ray Stedman wrote: "I will barely touch on the problem of infant baptism because you can't find a single verse in the New Testament which even suggests that it is proper. Baptism is an expression of faith by the individual. It cannot, therefore, be practiced by an infant who is incapable of expressing any faith of his own. Only the baptism of believers is authorized in the Bible."

During the first 300 years of the church, only young people and adults old enough to place their faith in Jesus were baptized. When did churches start sprinkling babies and calling it baptism? In 313 A.D. Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, and he wanted everyone to be baptized. The Romans were very efficient. It was impossible for all of his soldiers to be dunked. It was much more efficient for a priest to take ordinary water, and bless it so it became holy water. Then he would then fling the water over the troops, calling it baptism. Then it was even more efficient to sprinkle babies soon after they were born.

Most of our European culture evolved out of the old Holy Roman Empire, which practiced infant baptism, often called christening. So even after the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, John Calvin and other reformers couldn't break away from their Catholic roots enough to reform baptism back to its biblical mode.

To be baptized you need to be old enough to be able to profess your faith in Jesus. A few years ago, there was a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade student who accepted Christ during our Vacation Bible School. His parents were happy and they arranged a time for his baptism. They brought the little boy to me in the Bethany Suite, and it was obvious they had told him what to tell me. He was still a little confused about the word "baptized." So, he took my hand and said, "Brother David, I've invited Jesus into my heart and now I'm going to be advertised." His parents corrected him, but I said,

“He’s right. Whenever a person is baptized, they are advertising that they are a follower of Jesus.” Have you been advertised for Jesus by being baptized?

## **B. The meaning of baptism: a symbol of salvation**

There are other well-meaning groups that believe baptism is necessary for salvation. We believe a person is saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest anyone could boast. Baptism is an act of obedience. If I could boast that I’ve been baptized therefore I’m going to heaven, it would be a salvation by works. No. Believers’ baptism is a beautiful symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It also symbolizes our new life in Christ. The water is a picture of a grave. When you go under the water, it’s symbolizes the death and burial of the old person you were before Jesus saved you. When you come up out of the water, it’s a picture of the new person you’ve become in Christ. When we baptize a believer we quote that beautiful verse from Romans 6:4 that says, “Buried with Him through baptism...you are raised to walk in newness of life.”

When we say baptism is a symbol, that doesn’t mean it’s not important. Symbols are powerful. The American flag is just a piece of cloth with stars and stripes on it. But what it represents is so powerful that I don’t want anyone burning or mistreating our flag. Baptism is the same way. It’s important in the Bible, because it symbolizes our salvation.

## **C. The method of baptism: by immersion**

The word “baptize” in the Greek language wasn’t a religious word. It just meant to immerse, dip, or plunge. It was a word used of women who went to the river to baptize their clothes in the water to wash them. It was a word used of a cloth merchant who would baptize a piece of clothing into dye to change the color. In Greek law records, there’s even a case of a man who was arrested for baptizing (drowning) a man in a river.

So you may wonder why some churches still sprinkle. Well, part of the reason was from the efficiency of the early Roman church. But there’s another interesting reason. In 1609, King James VI of England commissioned some scholars to translate the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into English; we still call it the King James Version. When the translators came to the Greek word *baptizo*, they were in a pickle. When they were translating Mark 1, if they had said, “When Jesus came to John to be immersed in the Jordan River,” they would be in trouble with the King. The King belonged to the Anglican Church and he had never been immersed. He had been sprinkled as a baby. They couldn’t translate it “sprinkle” because there’s an entirely different word for sprinkle. So they just didn’t translate it. They created a new English word—baptize. The English word “baptize” didn’t exist until then.

Besides the meaning of the word, we have other proof that John baptized by immersion. The Bible says, “Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.” (John 3:23) I’ve seen the Jordan River many times. The mighty Jordan isn’t mighty in size; it’s mighty in significance. There are many places where it’s a shallow stream you can wade across. Now if John had baptized by pouring or sprinkling, he could have gone anywhere on the Jordan. But he chose this particular place where the Jordan is deep enough to dunk people under water.

On February 28, a new movie is coming out called "The Son of God." I had the privilege of meeting the producers, Mark Burnett and Roma Downey, in Orlando a few weeks ago. They produced the hit series The Bible on the History Channel. They both love the Lord and this is a very accurate portrayal of Jesus. I got to preview parts of the movie and I'm glad to report that they got the baptism correct. John plunges Jesus under the water and Jesus comes up with a great smile on His face.

Jesus was baptized as an example for us. Have you been baptized since you placed your faith in Jesus?

## **II. JESUS WAS IDENTIFIED BY A VOICE FROM HEAVEN**

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

It's important to know who you are. Years ago, President George H.W. Bush, was taking a tour of a nursing home. As he walked down the hall with his entourage there was an old man slowly shuffling toward him. President Bush stopped and shook his hand and said, "Sir, do you know who I am?" The man stared for a moment trying to recognize him. He finally said, "No. I don't know who you are. But if you ask one of the nurses they can tell you."

It's good to know who you are, but it's more important for you to know who Jesus is. There are many theories about the identity of Jesus. To Muslims, Isa is a great prophet, like Moses. They believe he was born of a virgin, but He never went to the cross. To some, Jesus was merely a wise teacher, like Confucius, who left us some ethical rules. But if you had been at the Jordan the day Jesus was baptized, you would have heard a voice from heaven identifying Jesus as the beloved Son of God.

There were three times during Jesus' ministry when God spoke from heaven verifying His identity. At His baptism God spoke directly to Jesus. But on the second occasion, God spoke about Jesus. One day Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to a high mountain. Jesus was transfigured before their eyes, and Jesus was seen talking to Moses and Elijah. On that occasion God said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5)

What does God's voice sound like? When He speaks, His voice thunders from heaven. The third time God spoke was in the days before the cross. Jesus had been predicting his death so the Father would be glorified. Suddenly Jesus broke out in prayer. Jesus said, "'Father, glorify your name!' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, 'This voice was for your benefit, not mine.'" (John 12:28-30)

What do we learn from this? First, we should listen to what God said. He confirmed for those present that Jesus really is the Son of God, the Messiah. But there will always be skeptics who even though they might hear from God, they're going to blame it on thunder.

But there's another application I want to make to parents. God is the perfect heavenly Father, and He gives us a great pattern for parents to follow. He said, "You are my son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased."

### **Advice to parents: Tell your kids you love them and you're proud of them**

God the Father took the opportunity to brag on His son, not once, or twice, but three times. Moms and dads, one of the worst things you can do is to criticize your kids in front of their peers. But one of the best things you can do is tell them how much you love them and why you're proud of them. Some of you are thinking, "Well, my kids are grown now, I've missed my chance." Remember, Jesus was thirty years old when His Father spoke these words to Him. So wherever your kids are you can still tell them to their face, call them, text them, or face time them and say, "I love you and I'm proud of you." Do it today, and do it often!

### **3. JESUS WAS TEMPTED TO SHOW US HOW TO RESIST THE DEVIL**

The Bible says, "At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan." I'm calling this message "The Devil after the Dove." In the river, Jesus experienced the blessing of baptism, the voice of God, and the Holy Spirit descending on Him like a dove. But then, the same Spirit immediately led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. That's the devil after the dove.

Sometimes after we experience some of our greatest spiritual victories, we're faced with our greatest spiritual challenges. My mentor, Adrian Rogers, used to say: "Be prepared. As soon as the God opens the windows of heaven to bless us, the devil will open the doors of hell to blast us." That's good advice.

Think about Jesus' temptation for a moment. Remember, Jesus was God in the flesh. He was the creator of the heavens and the earth. Jesus created Lucifer and all the other angels. He had the power of life and death. So, Jesus could have just snapped His holy finger and Satan would have disappeared, forever. So, why did Jesus endure forty days of fasting, and then this temptation? He did it for our sake.

Here's the key to the strategy against Satan: As God, Jesus could have destroyed Satan, but, as a man, He defeated him by quoting scripture. Jesus chose to use the same weapon we have available against Satan, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Mark doesn't go into the details of Jesus' temptation. But we know from Luke and Matthew that Satan attacked Jesus on three fronts. He attacked his physical desires by suggesting He turn stones into bread. Jesus defeated Satan by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, IT IS WRITTEN (swish swish), "Man does not live on bread alone." Then Satan attacked his pride by daring Him to do something sensational to get people to accept him. He said "Why don't you bungee jump off the temple, but with no bungee. Angels will save you—just think how popular you'll be!" Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, IT IS WRITTEN (swish swish) "Do not test the Lord your God." Then Satan attacked Jesus' capacity for greed, which we all have. Satan showed Jesus all the riches of Rome, Egypt, China, and the Aztecs. "I'll give you this if you'll worship me." Satan is

a liar. He didn't own any of it. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6 again, IT IS WRITTEN (swish swish), "Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." Even in a weakened condition after forty days of fasting, Jesus defeated Satan by using the Sword of the Spirit.

Mark tells us Jesus was in the wilderness with wild animals. Peter writes that the devil is like a roaring lion on the prowl wanting to devour you. Mark also wrote that angels came and attended to Jesus after His temptation. The word "attended" means they served Him food. What was on the menu? It was angel food cake, of course.

When we face temptation, God always gives us a way out. In other words, Satan points us to a door of sin, and it has flashing lights, and the smell of Cinnabonn wafting out. But on the other side of that door there are just rocks that look like bread. There's another doorway—it's God's way. It's not flashy, but it is the doorway to life. So whenever you're tempted, make your choice. You can have the devil's stones, or you can enjoy God's angel food cake.

The best way to overcome temptation is to just draw close to God. The Bible says, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you." (James 4:7-8)

We know from the writings of Martin Luther that he was constantly in warfare against the devil's temptation. Some have claimed there are remains of an ink spot on the wall of his study at Wartburg Castle. The story goes that Luther became so enraged at the devil that he threw an ink bottle at him, and it broke on the stone wall, leaving a stain. We're not sure if that story is true or not. But Luther had a more effective way of resisting the devil than throwing ink bottles.

He wrote, "When the devil comes knocking upon the door of my heart and asks, 'Who lives here?' the dear Lord Jesus goes to the door and says, 'Martin Luther used to live here but he has moved out. Now I live here.' The devil, seeing the nail prints in His hands, and the pierced side, takes flight immediately."

## CONCLUSION

What is God saying to you today? Do you need to identify with him in believer's baptism? Do you recognize Jesus as the beloved Son of God? If you're a parent will you tell your children that you love them and that you're proud of them? And don't forget the devil after the dove principle. You're going to be tempted. We all are. Remember to quote the Word of God and keep your eyes on Jesus.

I have a friend who has a highly trained hunting dog. He has trained the dog to do all kinds of tricks. I've seen him put a morsel of meat on the floor and hold up his hand and say, "Wait." The dog can smell the meat, and I'm sure he wants it. But the dog is looking into the eyes of his master. He's not looking at the meat. He's waiting for the command. Then the owner says, "Eat" and points at the meat and the dog devours the treat. When I saw that I noticed that as long as the dog was looking at the master, he wasn't interested in the meat. Satan's temptations are like that. He puts a tasty morsel in front of us. But if we keep our eyes on Jesus instead of Satan's bait, we can have power to resist the devil. So when you're tempted, don't look at the sin; Turn your eyes

upon Jesus; Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will go strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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