

JESUS CAME

by Ray C. Stedman

We are studying Mark's record of what happened when Jesus came to Israel. Those two little words, "Jesus came," are always a formula for dramatic and radical change. I spent a delightful evening this week listening to a man tell about what happened in his life -- the changes in his home and family -- when Jesus came into his heart.

In our last study we looked at the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as Mark relates it to us, in the ministry of John the baptist -- that strange and wonderful ministry which zeroed in on the need for repentance, on repentance as the place where God meets man. Repentance always is the place to begin with God. A change of mind, a different way of thinking about yourself, about the way you have been and the way you are acting and what your needs are, an acknowledgment of guilt and of your need before God -- that is repentance, and that is where God always meets man.

In the next two paragraphs in Chapter 1, Verses 9-15, the phrase "Jesus came" occurs twice. In Verse 9: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee..." And again in Verse 14: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee..." These two occurrences form the structure of our study today. We are looking at the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Mark said that when Jesus came, he came in this two-fold way:

1. Verse 9 begins the record of the baptism and temptation of Jesus. Jesus came, he was baptized, and he was tempted, says Mark. Mark puts the latter two in the passive voice, i.e., they were done to Jesus. This indicates therefore, something in the way of preparation for his ministry. Two things were necessary before he began: he needed to be baptized and to be tempted.
2. After that, Verse 14, he came into Galilee preaching, and in that one word is recorded the content of the activity which marked the entire career of Jesus: he came preaching.

This will be the outline of our study. Let us look at the two acts of preparation Mark records which Jesus found necessary before beginning his ministry:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." {Mark 1:9-12 RSV}

All four gospels record the baptism of Jesus. Therefore it evidently was very significant in the life of our Lord. Yet there is something strange about this baptism. As we saw last time, a remarkable spiritual awakening had broken out in Israel. Literally thousands of people were leaving their homes, their jobs, their families, and streaming out of the cities down into the desert to listen to this strange, remarkable man, John the baptist, rugged prophet that he was -- elementary, even rudimentary, but nevertheless saying things that touched the core of the souls of people, and spoke to their need. They were coming out of the cities because they felt the torment of their guilt, their inadequacy, their lack of a sense of acceptance before God. John was offering a way out, and they responded in great numbers. And John baptized all who repented, acknowledged their guilt, and sought forgiveness of sins. As we saw, this was the emphasis of John's ministry. He granted baptism as a sign of the cleansing of God only to those who genuinely acknowledged their need before God by confessing their sins. And there were thousands of them.

Yet, when Jesus came out of Galilee to John to be baptized, John protested. Matthew tells us that when Jesus came, John said to him, "Why do you come to me? I have need to be baptized by you," {cf, Matt 3:14}. That is a remarkable statement, especially if you remember that John did not know at this time that Jesus was Messiah. In fact, the Gospel of John tells us that John the baptist knew this only when he saw the Spirit of

God descending upon Jesus and remaining upon him, for that was the sign God had given to him. Then he knew that this was the One who was to come, the One he had been announcing. Now, John had known Jesus ever since boyhood, for they were cousins. And if you can't find fault with your relatives, whom can you find fault with? Yet it is most remarkable that when this relative comes, John says of him, "You don't need to be baptized. Why are you coming to me?" {cf, Matt 3:14}. There was nothing in Jesus' life that John had seen which required repentance and confession of sins.

Jesus answered John in a most remarkable way, recorded in Matthew 3:15: "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Why was Jesus baptized by John the baptist? We cannot spend a lot of time on this, but in this brief account Mark seems to suggest three things which will help us answer that question:

First, Jesus' being baptized was an act of identification. Jesus was associating himself with us. He took our place but he began with his baptism, not the cross. This was the first step leading to that relationship in which he was ultimately to be made sin for us, i.e., actually become what we are. This was the first sign of his intention to do so, when he took the place of a sinner, and was baptized with a baptism of repentance and confession of sin.

I like the way Dr. H. A. Ironside explained this: He said that we are like paupers who have accumulated so many debts that we cannot pay them. These are our sins. These tremendous claims are made against us, and we cannot possibly meet them. But when Jesus came, he took all these mortgages and notes and agreements we could not meet and endorsed them with his own name, thereby saying that he intended to pay them, he would meet them. This is what his baptism signifies, and is why Jesus said to John the baptist, "...thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness," {Matt 3:15b RSV}. He declared his intention to meet the righteous demands of God by himself undertaking to pay the debts of men. So the baptism was clearly an act of identification.

But it was also, as you will note from Mark's account, an empowering moment: "And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove..." ("Immediately" is Mark's favorite word, by the way. He uses it again and again, all through this account.) It is very significant that the moment Jesus begins to take our place, the Father gives him the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is no greater gift God can give to men. There is no greater need that we have as individuals than to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is by the Holy Spirit that man is able to live as he wants to live, and longs to live, and is able to overcome the power of sin and guilt and fear within us. Therefore the primary, elementary, most fundamental need of guilty men is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus when Jesus began to take our place, there was immediately given to him the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now, this is not the first time Jesus *had* the Spirit -- we must not think of it that way. It is recorded of John the baptist that he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. And certainly if that was true of John, it was also true of Jesus. He lived by the Spirit during those quiet years in Nazareth. He submitted himself to his parents, grew up in a carpenter's shop and learned the trade. And through those uneventful days, living in ordinary circumstances in that little village, Jesus lived by the power of the Spirit in his life -- there is no question about it.

Then what is happening now, when the Spirit comes upon him like a dove? The answer is that he is given a new manifestation of the Spirit, especially in terms of power. To use the language of Scripture, Jesus was *anointed* by the Spirit at this point. In Old Testament times they anointed kings and priests by pouring oil upon their heads, committing them to the function and office in which they were to serve. This is the picture of what is now occurring in Jesus' life. He is being anointed by God through the Spirit with power -- power to meet the demands of the ministry upon which he is about to launch. That is why the Spirit, in this sense, is always associated with the coming of power into a life. Our Lord is anointed with power. Some weeks later, in the synagogue at Nazareth, Luke tells us, Jesus quoted a passage in Isaiah 61 which dealt with this, and applied the words to himself:

**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.**

**He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering the sight of the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." {Luke 4:18-19 RSV}**

These were the ministries that were his during the next three and a half years, and now his public ministry begins with the anointing by the Holy Spirit with power.

Do not think of this as something remote from us?

Remarkable as they may be, nevertheless all these things that happened to Jesus *can* happen, and, indeed, *must* happen *to us*. That is the whole thrust of this teaching. He was taking our place; therefore what happened to him must happen to us. That is why Jesus, standing with his disciples after the resurrection, said to them, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth," {Acts 1:8 RSV}. This is true. The Spirit of God must come upon us. The gift of the Holy Spirit must be given to us, so that we might have the power to live as God wants us to live.

This is not so that we can perform dramatic acts, but, rather, is a new quality of life which is beautiful and resistless, and yet quiet and gentle. Notice the symbol of the kind of power that is given here -- it is a dove.

Football teams sometimes use birds as emblems, signs of their power and ability. We have the Falcons and the Eagles -- even the Ducks. But did you ever hear of a team called the Doves? No, no team would ever use a dove as a symbol of its power.

Jesus later emphasized the fact that doves are harmless, said we are to be harmless as doves. But what is a dove? A dove is a gentle, non-threatening bird, one that does not resist, does not fight back, and yet, amazingly enough, is irresistible.

This is the power that Jesus is describing -- the power of love, of course -- love, that can be beaten, and battered down, and put to death, and yet can rise again, until it wins the day -- that amazing love Jesus released. The greatest force in the world today, without a doubt, is love. And yet it is the kind of power that does not threaten or break apart or destroy; it gathers and heals. It is rejected, turned aside, and beaten down; yet it rises again and again. So the dove is an apt symbol of the new life our Lord came to teach.

In the world we are taught that life is lived by the principle of the survival of the fittest. "Beat your way to the top of the heap, trample others down to achieve what you want. Might makes right, and every man for himself" -- this is the philosophy of life advocated by the world. But Jesus came to introduce another way, in fact, the only way that truly works. You could describe it as "the survival of the humblest." The virtue Christians must always be seeking is humbleness, humility. "If any man would be first, let him become the servant of all," said Jesus {cf, Matt 23:11}. Peter put it very precisely: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you," {1 Pet 5:6 RSV}. Humility brings all of the power of God into our lives, whereas pride makes him our enemy, who works to cast us down, to overthrow us in every way he can.

The third aspect of his baptism is that it was a sign of assurance to Jesus. There came a voice from heaven: "Thou art my beloved Son, with thee I am well pleased." In Matthew it is stated a little differently: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," {Matt 3:17 RSV}. This was said as a testimony to those who were watching the scene. But Mark {1:11} and Luke {3:22} report that the voice said, "Thou art my beloved Son ..." -- as addressed to Jesus. There have been all kinds of quarrels among scholars as to which was correct, which indicates how little we understand of the ways of God.

It is my belief that both are right, that those who were standing around heard the voice saying, "This is my beloved Son," as the stamp of God's approval upon the thirty years he spent in Nazareth, those quiet years of Jesus' life about which Scripture is silent. Men have wondered, "Perhaps he was just like everybody else; perhaps he sinned in the same way. Perhaps he was disobedient to his parents, got into fist-fights, maybe did

even worse things -- we don't know." But God knew. God the Father says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It was a testimony to the purity of those years.

But when Jesus heard it, it was, "Thou art my beloved Son," and was addressed to him directly as a ground of assurance and security for him. We must not think of Jesus as being automatically empowered against all obstacles and threats and fears. He was a man -- that is what Scripture says. He was like us. He was assaulted with every pernicious threat that humans ever feel. He felt like us, and he needed to be treated as we need to be treated. He needed the assurance of the Father's recognition of who he was.

Psychologists tell us that if we do not know who we are, we have little poise and confidence. We have to know who we are before we can have security in our speech and actions. This is what God has given to Jesus, the security of knowing that he is his beloved son.

And, you know, this is exactly what he says to us. The glory of this gospel message is that God is ready to treat us exactly as he treated Jesus. Every one of us ought to say to ourselves every morning, "This is what my Father is saying to me: 'Thou art my beloved son, or daughter, in whom I am well pleased.'" That is what gives us a sense of security and identity, a place to stand, which means we can be calm and unthreatened when everything goes to pieces around us. This is where it comes from -- there is no other source.

That is why Jesus could begin his ministry with this sense of assurance from his Father that all was well in his life. Mark then brings us to the second act of preparation, which was Jesus' temptation, Verses 12-13:

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him. {Mark 1:12-13 RSV}

Part of the preparation of Jesus was this temptation he went through. Both Matthew and Luke record this as well as Mark; John leaves it out. But it was necessary that our Lord experience this testing. Notice the strong language Mark puts it in. His account is very brief, but it is highly suggestive. There are three things here:

First, the Spirit immediately (there is that word again) drove him out into the wilderness. Drove him. That means Jesus felt a strong inner compulsion, a powerful urge to go into the wilderness and face the tempter on his own ground.

Last week I watched a group of high school boys turning out for football practice. They were evidently a freshman team, with young, eager faces, intent and alert, obviously interested in what they were about to do. It took me back to the year I first turned out for football practice. I could not help but remember how I felt about it. It was something I felt I had to do to prove my manhood. Yet it was something I was a bit scared to try. I didn't know what it would do to me. I remember turning out for practice that first morning along with all the others, eager to do it, wanting to do it, feeling I had to do it, and yet inwardly scared, but not willing to admit all my fears.

This is something of what Jesus faced as he went into this temptation. He felt a strong compulsion that he had to prove his manhood before he came to that ultimate encounter with the devil on the cross. He had to be tempted, had to undergo it for his own sake. He did not dare go out to a ministry while he was yet untried. In order that he might know what was in himself, what he could and could not stand, he was driven by the Spirit out to this place. This was intended to toughen him. This is what God always does with his men and women -- toughens them by driving them out into these kinds of experiences. This is what happened to Jesus.

We are told that he went through a very severe and thorough testing. He was tested in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. Forty days is a long time to go without food.

At times I have fasted for as long as three days and have found it quite endurable. Nevertheless, hunger increases as you go along. After awhile it disappears. But then it comes back in intensified form. And forty days is a long time!

Forty days ago from today {the date this message was delivered} was August 20. Gerald Ford had been President for less than ten days. All the tumultuous events which have crowded in upon us since have all occurred within that forty-day period. If Jesus had begun his fasting forty days ago, how long ago it would have seemed! The intervening events have served only to dramatize the severity of this testing.

Mark suggests what other writers do not -- that all through this forty-day period he was tempted by the devil. In other words, the devil came to try him out in every possible way -- body, soul, and spirit. He probed and assaulted and sifted and scrutinized and assailed him, and bombarded him with every thought and every temptation that we human beings are subject to. When you read the other accounts you can see that Matthew and Luke gather up the final temptations, the final mighty tests that Satan gave to Jesus. But these indicate the nature of the tests which came throughout this entire forty-day period, devised by the master tempter of all, the one who knows how to find the weakness in our hearts, knows how to get at us and upset us.

There in the desert Jesus was tempted and pressured and probed and assaulted in every way. His physical hunger gathered up all the experiences we have when our circumstances go against us. How many of us have been overthrown by that alone? I do not think Jesus knew that he was going to be forty days in the desert. He probably didn't know how long it would be. He expected at any moment God would supply his needs. And yet his privation went on, week after week, while he grew weaker and weaker in body. The tempter would come and say, "God doesn't care for you any more. He's abandoned you. You say you're the Son of God? Why, he's made no provision for you at all!" Finally that last subtle suggestion: "Why don't you turn the stones into bread, if you're the Son of God?" cf, Matt 4:3, Luke 4:3}. That is the way Satan gets at us, isn't it? Things go wrong, provision does not come. We lose our job, are out of money, or tremendous obligations strike us. We do not have what it takes to meet the need, and we say, "Where's God?" That was the temptation Jesus faced.

Then the loneliness of spirit -- all alone for forty days without human companionship. It made him long to prove himself before men and gain their acceptance, their admiration, even. This culminated in the tempter's taking him to the pinnacle of the temple and telling him to cast himself down: "Men will follow you when they see God support you and sustain you in this supernatural way," {cf, Matt 4:5-6, Luke 4:9}. Jesus was sorely tempted to gain the approval of men by the exercise of power apart from the will of God. And how we are tempted that way! There is no difference at all.

Then the last temptation. With Jesus vulnerable, the devil suggested that there was a way he could gain what he wanted, a short cut, which would not involve death to himself. He could have it without the cross. He took Jesus to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world -- what Jesus was after -- and said, "You can have it all if you fall down and worship me," {cf, Matt 4:9}. Our Lord met every temptation in the same way that we can meet them -- by simple reliance on and trust in what God has written in his Word: "It is written..." Three times he said it. In the physical, the mental, and the spiritual areas of life, it stands written.

You know, God does this all the time. He is not through testing people. It is designed to toughen us and strengthen us. Let me share with you a poem I ran across:

When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man,
And skill a man;
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part,
When he yearns with all his heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch his methods, watch his ways
How he ruthlessly perfects
Whom he royally elects.
How he hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows, converts him
Into trial shapes of clay
Which only God understands,

While his tortured heart is crying,
And he lifts beseeching hands.
How he bends but never breaks
When his good he undertakes.
How he uses
Whom he chooses,
And with every purpose, fuses him,
By every act, induces him
To try his splendor out.
God knows what he's about.

Yes, he does. That is what he did with Jesus to toughen him and test him and prove him.

Mark records one other thing about Jesus' temptation. Despite the fact that he was without human help, and assailed by the tempter in all these ways, nevertheless he was not alone. He was sustained by a ministry of comfort which came in unusual ways: He was with the wild beasts, and the angels came and ministered to him. Do not read "wild beasts" as though he were afraid of being attacked by them. Leopards, lions, bears, and other wild animals were all around throughout that wilderness area. But Jesus was not afraid of them; he was with them, Mark says. They were his companions. They comforted him and helped him. I can picture Jesus, his body cold from hunger, snuggled up between two mountain lions, ministered to physically by the animals.

And further, the angels ministered to him. That means his thought-life was sustained, his inner life, his emotions were upheld, his mental faculties kept clear. That is the ministry of angels -- invisible yet very real. Many of us have experienced the ministry of angels without even knowing it. Sometimes when your spirits are suddenly uplifted, and you do not even know why, that is the ministry of angels. And Jesus was upheld that way.

Finally, equipped by the Spirit, toughened, tested, Jesus comes into Galilee:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." {Mark 1:15 RSV}

Here Mark passes over a full year of Jesus' ministry. You have to get the details from John's gospel, for John alone records it -- his encounter with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the wedding at Cana, etc. Mark passes over this in silence, and begins his account of the ministry of Jesus with the calling of the disciples by the Sea of Galilee. But he stresses two things about Jesus:

First, he came preaching the gospel of God: His method was preaching. I do not think preaching will ever be superseded by anything else. For preaching, in its essence, is the revealing of reality. It is letting people see what is actually here in life around us, the real truth about life. True preaching is always that. In the words of Paul, "by the open statement of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God," {2 Cor 4:2b RSV}. That is true preaching. And that is what Jesus came to do. He came to open the eyes of people to what was really happening in their lives.

Second, his message was, "The kingdom of God is at hand." "The time has come, the kingdom is at hand." What did he mean by "the kingdom of God"? Well, he meant all these things we have been talking about. The fact is that we are surrounded by an invisible spiritual kingdom, with great forces, both of evil and of good, playing upon us. In that kingdom, Jesus is Lord, Jesus reigns supreme. And that kingdom governs all the events of history, and all the events of our daily lives and circumstances. So that when we are related to the kingdom of God, we are related to the ultimate force which governs everything we are and have, and thus we are related to reality.

Jesus came with the good news that all the power of God is now available to break the helpless deadlock into which man has fallen. Scripture tells us that man in his natural condition is helpless. No matter how much we like to think we are able to do something to correct our condition, we would be absolutely helpless and

hopeless without the aid of God. In fact, human life would be impossible. Without God's mercy, without his restraining hand on forces that affect us, we could not even sit in the same room together -- we would be at one another's throats, gouging out each other's eyes, hateful, and hating one another -- animals, destroying ourselves.

But it is the mercy of God which keeps us from that. The good news is that a breakthrough has occurred. God's power has broken through. Jesus came to announce that the King is at hand, the One who can master a life, put it in order, bring peace and harmony into it, and supply a power which will produce a character no one else can rival. That is the kingdom of God. It is not meat and drink, says Paul, "but righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit," {cf, Rom 14:17}. The kingdom is at hand. And the place to gain it is the place of repentance, acknowledgment of need. To anyone and everyone who wants it, God's help is available, when you are willing to acknowledge that you cannot get along without it. That is why Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," {Matt 5:3}.

Prayer:

Thank you, heavenly Father, for the good news that Jesus came preaching, the amazing good news that a way has been found out of the human dilemma, that the hopelessness and helplessness of our natural condition has been broken into by the God of glory and of grace. May we accept that, Lord, from the hands of Jesus the king. Help us to believe him, to believe in the gospel, to rest ourselves upon it -- not merely to believe it as true, but to act upon it and live thereby. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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