

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 1:1-13

Topic

Out in the wilderness, John the Baptist preaches a message that transforms the lives of those who believe in the coming Savior

Title

"Operation Desert Transform"

Introduction

In an iconic line of dialog from the movie, *The Untouchables*, Sean Connery's character accuses his attacker of "bring[ing] a knife to a gunfight."

His quick-witted quip has become a popular way of describing being poorly or wrongly equipped for the task at hand.

The task at hand, for every Christian, was stated by Jesus when He said,

Mat 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Mat 28:20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

A little later on, Jesus told His followers that this task was no knifefight. It wasn't a gunfight, either. It would be more like a nuclear war.

That's because we don't wrestle against natural forces. As we're told by the apostle Paul,

Eph 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

We need to show up with something supernatural in this fight; and that is exactly what Jesus went on to tell His first followers:

Act 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

They *did*, and they *were*:

- They **did** "receive power" on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon them.
- They **were** "witnesses to [Jesus]... to the end of the earth," in the preaching of the Gospel that continues to this day.

By listening carefully to the opening words of the Gospel of Mark, we will see that he highlights the baptism with the Holy Spirit, mentioned in verse eight, as a sort of doomsday weapon that gave Jesus, and that always gives Christians, the advantage against Satan and the rulers of the darkness of this age.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Are Guaranteed The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit By Which You Are Enabled To Serve, and #2 Jesus Manifested The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit By Which He Was Enabled To Serve.

#1 You Are Guaranteed The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit By Which You Are Enabled To Serve

(v1-8)

Mark is the Spirit-inspired author of the second Gospel. He is the well-known John-Mark of the Book of Acts.

- John was his Hebrew name.
- Out among Gentiles he was called Mark.

He was the son of a Jerusalem widow whose large home was a meeting place for the believers during the early days of the church. Big-hearted Barnabas was his cousin.

He was well-known, at first, for deserting Paul and Barnabas on one of their mission trips. When Barnabas wanted to take Mark on their next trip, Paul refused, and it led to the two men parting ways.

Mark was well-known, in the end, for being restored to fellowship, and to ministry. In his letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, Paul sent greetings to Mark. In Philemon, Paul included Mark among those whom he called "my fellowlaborers." These references indicate that full reconciliation had taken place between Paul and Mark, and that Mark was actively laboring with Paul.

In Second Timothy 4:11, written shortly before his death in Rome, Paul requested Timothy to come to him and added, "Take Mark, and bring him with you: for he profitable to me for the ministry."

Mark also spent considerable time with the apostle Peter. In First Peter 5:13 Peter sent greetings to the churches in Asia Minor and added greetings from "Mark my son." He was referring to Mark as a son in the faith, not as his biological son.

It was from Peter, from his eyewitness accounts, that Mark compiled this Gospel.

At one point, Mark was an utter, embarrassing failure. But he was restored to fellowship. He got back into the fight. God used him to write an account of Jesus Christ that has ministered to multiplied millions of people.

Maybe you've failed, or are failing. Or maybe you're just hesitating for some reason. You're needed in the fight. I pray that these studies in Mark will refresh you.

Mar 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Gospel began when God came into the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned, promising to come as a man to die for their sins and redeem what they had forfeited.

Mark was announcing the beginning of the active ministry of Jesus Christ.

It is generally agreed that Mark was writing to a Gentile audience to emphasize the fact that Jesus was a servant.

By stating right away that Jesus is "the Son of God," Mark was saying something truly remarkable. He was saying that God, the Creator and Sustainer of life, is a servant at heart.

Some therefore say the key verse in Mark is 10:45, where Jesus said He did not come to be served, but to serve, by giving His life as a ransom for the human race.

You're going to notice that Mark's Gospel moves rapidly. In that respect, it feels like a servant's Gospel.

Mar 1:2 As it is written in the Prophets: "BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU."

Mar 1:3 "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS: 'PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD; MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.'"

Mark puts together portions of two "prophets" in this quote, Malachi and Isaiah.

Fulfilled prophecy sets the Bible apart as unique. Any other religious writings are like knives brought to a gun fight in that they can make no such claims. It's offensive, really, to put the writings of other religions in the same category as the Bible.

In these prophecies, God the Father was promising His Son that, before His earthly ministry began, He would send an appropriate messenger to announce Him, and to prepare the people.

Mar 1:4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Came from where? Came how? I'm only asking to emphasize how rapidly Mark is moving. No background; no history. Just the facts.

Let this encourage you that, although we want to be ready to give answers to what we believe, sometimes just the strait-forward telling of the facts is what the Holy Spirit wants to use in reaching hearts. You don't have to be a scholar, or know the answer to every question, in order to preach Jesus to people.

The Jews had any number of rituals involving water. But the only people who were immersed under water, who were baptized, were proselytes. These were Gentiles who wished to convert to Judaism. They were circumcised, then after seven days, baptized in running water by full immersion.

For a Jew to submit to baptism was a big deal.

The proper reading of these words is, "repent, and be baptized *because of* the remission of sins."

- "Remission" means *sending away, a dismissal*. It speaks of the cancellation of your sins without demanding the deserved punishment.
- "Repentance" is a change of mind with regard to your sin. You acknowledge you are a sinner, that you sin, and you consciously turn away from it.

Remission of sin is part of the salvation which God gives the believing sinner when he places his faith in the Lord Jesus. Remission of sins cannot be the result of baptism, but rather, are its reason. Baptism is the believer's testimony to the fact that his sins have been remitted.

Those baptized were the ones who had **already repented** of their sins.

It's the same today. Baptism does not save. It can not save. It is not necessary for our salvation. We are baptized out of obedience, because the Lord commands it, in order to publicly testify we have been saved. You might call it believers baptism.

Mar 1:5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

A steady stream of people went out into the wilderness, listened to John's simple Gospel message, and submitted to baptism.

The wording indicates that John himself did all the baptizing.

The "confessing [of] their sins" didn't necessarily happen as they were being baptized. It means those who were baptized were agreeing with the message - that they were sinners in need of forgiveness.

Mar 1:6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

Let's just say that his dress and his diet were consistent with someone preaching repentance.

The Gospel should affect your lifestyle choices. You should dress and diet, i.e., live in all aspects, like someone whose sins are remitted, who has repented, and who is inviting others to do the same.

I don't know what that looks like for you, only for me. I'm simply saying that the Gospel should dictate your decisions.

Mar 1:7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.

The verb tense for "comes" speaks of imminence. There was an urgency in John's presentation.

Since we don't know what life holds for us, we ought to be urgent in presenting the Gospel. We cannot assume we have tomorrow.

John thought of himself as the lowest possible servant. He wasn't worthy to perform footwashing; not even to remove the sandals, but only, maybe, to "loose" the sandal strap.

A quote by C.S. Lewis has been circulating on social media. "Humility isn't thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."

Mar 1:8 I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The "you" looks beyond those whom John had baptized in the Jordan. It is a statement to anyone, to everyone, who hears the Gospel.

John's physical baptism was a symbol of a spiritual work that was coming after the Messiah finished His work of paying the debt in full for sin owed by the human race. John called it a baptism "with the Holy Spirit."

This is a highly charged phrase which, sadly, divides Christians. We argue over the precise ministries of God the Holy Spirit, and about the scope of His continuing work in the world today, and in the future. We disagree, within our own saved ranks, with what, exactly, the baptism with the Holy Spirit is, and just exactly *when* and *how* it occurs.

It may not be completely possible, but let's try to set our biases aside for a moment and hear what John said, in light of what we know Jesus said and did.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit, to indwell them:

Joh 20:22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

To these same, now Spirit-indwelt, believers, He would go on a few days later to say:

Act 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

(A few verses earlier, Jesus referred to this as a baptism with the Holy Spirit).

After the Holy Spirit was in them, and after He had come upon them, the Christians kept on asking for Him to empower them, and He kept on manifesting Himself to them:

Act 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

I would add for our consideration this passage, where Jesus was addressing believers:

Luk 11:9 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Luk 11:10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Luk 11:13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

You can look at all that through a theological bias, or presupposition, and draw all kinds of conclusions. Or you can take it as it is, simply and descriptively, concluding that the normal Christian life is one in which the indwelling Holy Spirit Whom you receive at the moment of salvation wants to come upon you to empower you for your service, and Who wants to go on refreshing you in new fillings of His power.

You have been guaranteed the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Without it - without **Him** - you're holding a knife while facing a nuclear warhead.

It sounds funny, but too much that passes as spiritual in ministry is really just our own energy clothed with Bible terminology.

Having begun in the Spirit when we are saved, we must seek Him to continue in Him in our serving.

#2 Jesus Manifested The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit By Which He Served

(v9-13)

I never realized how fast they drive in a presidential motorcade. To protect the president, officers are instructed to crash into suspicious vehicles, if necessary. The high rates of speed, and the defensive posture that is assumed protecting the president, has led to several deaths - especially of motor officers.

If it's such a big deal to prepare the way for POTUS, you'd think it would have been a really big deal to have the Son of God come from Nazareth to the wilderness where John was baptizing.

Mar 1:9 It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

No escort; no entourage. Jesus walked the fifty plus miles by Himself, camping out along the way.

Again please notice the bare-bones approach Mark takes. No record of the conversation John had with Jesus, initially refusing to baptize Him because, as he said, "I have need to be baptized by You."

No record of Jesus responding by telling John it was necessary to fulfill all things.

Still there is enough here to communicate that Jesus, the Son of God, Who would die so sins could be remitted, was identifying with the human race. He was God, but He was also man - the unique God-man Who alone could die for the sins of the world to save us.

Mar 1:10 And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.

Mark repeatedly uses the word "immediately." It keeps the action moving in this fast-paced Gospel.

We might jokingly say that Mark puts the "Go" back in Gospel.

Jesus saw the heavens, literally, "torn open." How far He saw we cannot say.

Have you seen the first Avengers movie? There's a tear in space through which an intimidating alien invading force comes threatening earth.

Through the tear at Jesus' baptism came... A dove. Not very dramatic, or intimidating, but far more powerful than anything the world had ever experienced: The Spirit of God upon the God-man.

The Spirit had been a part of Jesus' life from conception. This was something new. It was a baptism with the Holy Spirit to empower Jesus for His ministry.

If Jesus needed this, don't you think we do?

And if Jesus was identifying with us, don't you think this is an experience we also *can* and *should* have?

Why a dove? It was the animal associated with humility and innocence, but also sacrifice, as it was commonly used in the Temple, especially by the poor.

Mar 1:11 Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

The meaning is "You, and You alone." Jesus had been eternally with the Father and the Spirit, in Heaven. Here He was, the God-man, on the earth, as promised in the Garden of Eden - the Seed of the woman Who would crush Satan.

This phrase, "in whom I am well pleased," can mean two things, and I say it's both:

1. It can mean God the Father was, and had always been, pleased with Jesus - in eternity past, and in His life as a man for some thirty obscure years.
2. "Well pleased" can also mean *to select*, implying that His incarnation, and the whole plan of redeeming the human race, is a thing pleasing to God.

Mar 1:12 Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness.

"Drove" is a strong term. It doesn't, however, mean that Jesus was driven against His will. It means He had a strong sense of the Holy Spirit sending Him, or leading Him, if you prefer, out into the wilderness.

We might say that God spoke to Him. Do you ever say that? That God spoke to you? It doesn't mean you heard His voice, audibly. It means you had this strong sense of His leading you. There are times you might even say He drove you.

Have you had such experiences? If not... You're not listening.

If you have had such experiences... When was the last time you had this sense of being led, of being driven?

The Savior Who was promised to our original parents when they were in a beautiful garden paradise was driven out into a rugged, dangerous wilderness.

The contrast is intentional. What the first man forfeited in a garden would be regained by the Second Man in the desert.

We're not done with this word "drove," not just yet. One commentator wrote, "The present tense [of the verb drove] marks the first occurrence of the historical present in this Gospel, a characteristic feature of Mark's style. It vividly depicts the action as though taking place before the reader's very eyes."

It is to writing what 3D is to movies. Or, better yet, it's like virtual reality. Mark writes in a way that makes you feel you are there, with Jesus, in the wilderness.

Mar 1:13 And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.

Mark portrays Him as being constantly tempted - not just the three great temptations Matthew mentions at the end, when Jesus was at His weakest from fasting.

How long are rounds in MMA? Or in boxing? Or in wrestling?

This was a forty day, day-and-night, contest that involved the spiritual as well as the physical.

Satan may have felt he had the advantage. After all, he knew Jesus well, from Heaven, as the glorious, eternal, Second Person of the trinity.

Now here He was, a puny human. Sure, He was the God-man, but what did that mean? It meant He was hungry... weak... thirsty... tired... temptable.

Mark is the only Gospel writer who mentions "the wild beasts." Kenneth Wuest writes, "The region abounded with boars, jackals, wolves, foxes, leopards, and hyenas."

"Angels ministered to Him." This was Satan's first clue, perhaps, that defeating the God-man would be no walk in the park. Still, the advantage, on the surface, belonged to Satan.

Wait a minute, you object; **you're not factoring in the Holy Spirit.**

Satan had faced Spirit-filled men before. Though any one of them could defeat him, and many did for a time, he was the master at overcoming them with temptation.

In the Old Testament, think of David, the physical ancestor of Jesus. Sure, he killed Goliath, and easily conquered Philistines, and captured Jerusalem.

But can you say, "Bathsheeba?"

With the exception of Joseph and Daniel, Satan always defeated the Spirit-filled man, at some point, with temptations.

Ah, but not this One. We will see that Satan is no match for the Spirit-baptized man.

You say Jesus was more than a man; that He was the God-man?

True; He was both God **and** man. But while He was on the earth, He voluntarily set aside the prerogatives of His deity, and lived strictly as a man.

Satan is no match for the Spirit-baptized man. We are going to see just what that looks like as we follow Jesus' footsteps in this Gospel. Demons will tremble; diseases will be healed; men and women and kids will be saved.

It will cost Jesus His life. Of course, by laying down His life, He's able to take up His life, in the resurrection.

Want to follow Jesus? It will cost you your life. You must lay down your life, die to self, and take up the Cross.

You, too, experience the resurrection - first, it's power in your life, and then, in the future, when you are raised or raptured to be with the Lord.