

## Mark 1:9-13

### Introduction

Mark's Gospel began with the appearance of John the Baptist in the wilderness calling the people to come and start again with God. His message was a call to repentance and a fresh start. And Mark has told us of the crowds who came to him, confessing their sins and being baptised in the River Jordan.

People are talking of a Quiet Revival going on in the UK: a return to church by those in their 20s, particularly young men. I don't know whether you've heard about that. You may not have done. It is a *quiet* revival after all. But this was far from a quiet revival in Israel. People were coming to John from the whole Judean countryside. Jerusalem was emptied as its inhabitants went out to him. And in our passage this morning, Mark tells us about one man, who slips in among the crowd. John the Baptist has prepared the way. And finally, Jesus comes. That's our first heading: Jesus comes.

### Jesus comes

Please look down at verse 9. **At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan.**

For those of us who have been around Christian things for some time, those words may have lost their shock value, because they're very familiar. If you're here to investigate the Christian faith and to find out about Jesus, you may well have a head start on the rest of us, this morning, because this may strike you as odd. And that's right. It *is* odd.

John is calling people to repent of their sins and have a fresh start with God. He's calling them to come and seek forgiveness for their sins and go back to the beginning with God. So, why is *Jesus* there among the crowd? Mark has told us that he is the Messiah, the Son of God. He is the Lord himself. So, why does he, of all people, need a fresh start with God? Why is he among those being baptised? He bears no guilt. He has committed no sin. Yet he comes to John and takes the place of a penitent sinner. That's not what we might have expected. What's going on?

If you're going through a hard time, a friend might get in touch. A mere acquaintance might express their sympathy. But a friend will act differently. A true friend won't just say how sorry they are to hear that you're having a hard time, they'll enter it with you. Because they're a friend, they'll come alongside you. They'll share your hurt. They'll feel your grief. Your pain will become their pain. And that's what Jesus is doing here. As the crowds come out to acknowledge their brokenness and failure, he doesn't just stand by and watch. He enters in.

That's what love does. Jesus comes to us in love.

And he does so not merely as a friend. He does so as our Saviour. As the people gather to confess their sin and seek a new start with God, Jesus comes to them and says, 'I'm in this with you. That's why I'm here.' It's what we've been learning about on the 321 course that some of us are doing. As Jesus goes into the waters of baptism, he's saying, 'Your brokenness will be my brokenness. Your failure will be my failure. Your sin will be my sin.' Though he had done no wrong, he enters our darkness and despair. And he does so to lift us out of it.

If you've got a problem, you don't want someone merely to come alongside you and sympathise. You want someone to fix it. And that's why Jesus has come. This is the God we worship. He doesn't stand far off. He doesn't keep himself at a distance. In his love, he comes and enters our mess to give us new life and a fresh start.

When someone says they love you, that means a lot. When a close friend who knows you well says they love you, that means even more. Even so, you might fear that if they knew you as you really are, with all your secrets, all your faults and failings, their view of you might change. But when the God who made you, who knows you as you truly are, who knows all your secrets, all your faults and failings... when *he* says that he loves you despite it all... when he comes to stand with you in your sin and failure and deal with it for you... that's when you know you're really loved.

As we read of his baptism, we should marvel at Jesus. We should marvel that the Son of God loves us so dearly that he would come and stand with us in our brokenness and sin, as he takes the place of a penitent sinner and goes down into the waters of the Jordan.

We should marvel at Jesus. And we should delight in him. That's our next heading: the Father's delight.

### The Father's delight

Please look down again at verses 10 and 11. **Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the 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.'**

There are few verses in the Bible that speak as clearly as these of the three-ness of God, the Holy Trinity. Here are Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not three gods but one God in three persons, who have existed eternally in a divine family of love and joy. And that love couldn't be clearer here.

As Jesus comes up out of the water, he sees heaven being torn open. It's the same word Mark will use at the end of his book to describe the tearing of the temple curtain as Jesus dies on the cross. That curtain was a symbol of separation from God. It stopped worshippers from entering the Holy of holies, the place where God was present in a unique and special way. It was a sign that the way into God's presence was closed. But Mark's

book ends with the curtain being torn in two, to show that the way to God is now open because of the cross.

This one word connects the beginning to the end. First the heavens are torn open and God comes to us. Then the curtain is torn open, so that we can go to God. These two acts of tearing frame the whole book. They show us why Jesus has come. He has come to open the way into his family. And this voice from heaven, declares the Father's delight in his Son, as he willingly takes on the work the Father has given him to do: **'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'**

If you're a parent or grandparent, or perhaps an auntie or uncle, you'll probably have lots of memories of special moments with children you love. Perhaps you've stood on the touchline to watch one of your children playing football, and been delighted when they've scored a goal, or made a save, if they're the goalkeeper. Perhaps you've been in the audience and watched them compete in a dance show, or a gymnastics event, and held your breath as they've carefully executed their routine. Perhaps you've watched on as they've recited their lines in the school nativity play. Or been in the congregation at their wedding. And there will have been many other moments, just like them, when these children you love have made your heart sing with joy.

In those moments, the joy we feel is just a taste of the Father's joy in his Son. It's a constant, unwavering joy with which he has loved the Son for all eternity. And he expresses it now, as the Son comes up out of the waters of baptism: **'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'**

Those words contain echoes of other parts of scripture. They remind us of the words of Psalm 2, where God calls Israel's king his son (Psalm 2:7). They remind us of the suffering servant of Isaiah, in whom God delights (Isaiah 42:1). And they remind us of the book of Genesis, when Abraham takes his only son, whom he loves, to sacrifice him on Mount Moriah, the very place where Jesus would be crucified many centuries later (Genesis 22:2).

Those echoes remind us how the Old Testament has been pointing forward to Jesus all along. They tell us who Jesus is. He is God's Son, his appointed King. And they point to what Jesus has come to do. He has come to suffer and die for his people, as a once-for-all sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. It's not what we might expect God's King to do. But that's what it would mean for him to take our sin upon himself and deal with it for us. It would mean dying on a cross. That how he would open the way to God. And as he comes forward to begin that work, the Father's heart sings with joy: **'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'**

Mark's inviting us to share the Father's delight in his Son. He's inviting us to believe in him and delight in everything he does and says in the rest of his book. There's plenty more to come. But as we begin reading Mark's book, he wants us to be delighting in Jesus, just as

the Father delights in his Son. And he wants us to delight in Jesus, especially, as he introduces a battle that will be waged throughout the remaining chapters.

Our final heading is 'Battle commences'.

### Battle commences

Please look down again at verses 12 and 13. **At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.**

One of the devil's greatest achievements is to get people to ignore him or even to doubt his existence altogether. In the introduction to his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis says:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

I suspect that for most of us, it's the first of those two errors that is most likely.

The devil isn't like God. He isn't all-powerful. He isn't all-knowing. And he can't be present in all places at once. He needs a whole army of helpers to do his work. Nor is he a little red cartoon figure with two horns and a tail. But the Bible tells us without embarrassment that he is real and dangerous. It says that he holds humankind in his grasp as slaves to his will, and leads us in our rebellion against God, even as we laugh at the thought of his existence. We can see the results of his work in ourselves and in the world around us, even though we can't see him. He's like the conductor of an orchestra, directing us in our disobedience to God, without us even knowing he's there.

So, if Jesus is to deal with our sin and give us a fresh start with God, he needs to release us from Satan's grasp. That's what he has come to do. It's a conflict that will run all the way through Mark's book. But it begins here. As Jesus comes up out of the water, at once, the Holy Spirit propels him into the wilderness where he is tempted by Satan. With the affirmation of his Father's love still ringing in his ears, Jesus joins battle with his enemy, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Mark doesn't tell us the details but that isn't to minimise the significance of what's going on. This isn't a minor skirmish but an all-out attack. Satan is seeking to destroy Jesus before he can get started on the work he has come to do. And it's an attack that lasts for forty days.

Forty is a significant number. It's a number that's associated with defining moments in Israel's history. Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days, when he received God's Law. Elijah travelled through the wilderness for forty days before reaching Mount Horeb and an encounter with God. It calls to mind the forty years of testing that Israel endured in the

wilderness. Those were all defining moments. And we're to understand *this* as a defining moment in Jesus' life. It sets the tone for the whole book. The whole of Jesus' ministry will be a battle with Satan. He will encounter men and women who are demon-possessed. The opposition he encounters, though human, will have Satan standing behind it. He will even find Satan's influence among his own disciples.

That battle begins here, in the loneliness and isolation of the wilderness, where wild animals surround him and angels attend him. It will end with another period of loneliness and isolation at the end of Mark's book. It will end at the cross. Once again, as he dies, Jesus will be alone and isolated. He will be surrounded not by wild animals but by ferocious men. And there, finally and decisively, in the apparent defeat of death, he will triumph as he wins forgiveness and new life for his people.

### Conclusion

Mark's just getting started. He's got lots more to tell us about the things that Jesus said and did. But as he begins, he's inviting us to marvel at Jesus, to delight in him, and put our trust in him. Just as Jesus comes to side with us, Mark is inviting us to side with him.

Perhaps, at the moment, this is all very puzzling for you. Perhaps the things we've been looking at today raise all kinds of questions. That's a good thing. I hope Mark has got your attention and that you'll keep coming back. Stay with us as we find out more about Jesus. And I hope we'll find the answers you're looking for, as we meet him in the pages of Mark's book.

Or perhaps you've already made your mind up about Jesus, that he is who Mark says he is. You've already sided with him and put your life in his hands. In which case, let Mark's book deepen your love for him. Mark started by describing the message about Jesus as good news. As we read his book together, pray that God would help you see just how good it is, so that you would love him and delight in him even more.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, thank you for Jesus. Thank you that he came to enter our brokenness and lift us out of it into a new relationship with you. Please help us to understand how good the news about him is. Help us to delight in him as you delight in him. And please teach us to trust him as our King and Saviour. We ask it in his name. Amen.