

Mark 1

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon on Mark 1 explores the significance of Jesus' baptism, His ministry, and the revelation of the Trinity, emphasizing the themes of grace, obedience, and the call to follow Christ.

Scripture: Mark 1:4

Topics: "The Trinity", "Jesus' Ministry"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the beginning of Jesus' ministry as a fulfillment of God's purpose, marked by John's testimony and baptism. He highlights the significance of Jesus' submission to baptism, illustrating His identification with humanity and His role as the perfect man before God. The sermon reveals the Trinity's manifestation at Jesus' baptism and underscores the importance of Jesus' ministry in proclaiming the kingdom of God, calling for repentance and faith. Darby also contrasts the gospel of the kingdom with the gospel of salvation, urging believers to follow Christ's example and share His message with others. Ultimately, he stresses the love and compassion of Jesus, who, while performing miracles, remains humble and focused on fulfilling God's will.

Transcript

We have already said it begins with the Saviour's ministry. It is preceded only by the testimony of John. The latter prepares the way of the Lord, preaches the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and announces a more glorious Servant of God, the latchet of whose shoes he is not worthy to unloose: He will baptize with the Holy Ghost. The baptism of fire is not mentioned here, because the subject is the Lord's service in blessing, and not that of exercising His power in judgment. Fire always signifies judgment.

The Lord submits to John's baptism; this is a fact full of importance and blessing for man. Here He takes the place of His people before God: I need not say that the Lord could have no need of repentance; but He wishes to accompany His people in the first good step they take, that is, in the first step they take under the influence of the word. For Him it was the fulfilling of all righteousness. Everywhere where sin had brought us, love and obedience led Him for our deliverance. Only here He comes with His own: in death He took our place, He bore the curse, He was made sin. Here He takes His place as a perfect man in relationship with God - with the Father; that place which He acquired for us by redemption in the which we are placed as sons of God.

235 The heavens are opened: the Holy Spirit descends upon man. The Father recognises us as His children; Jesus was anointed and sealed by the Holy Ghost, even as we are; He, because He was personally worthy of it; we, because He has made us worthy by His work and by His blood. For us heaven is opened, the veil rent, and we cry, "Abba, Father!" Marvellous grace! Infinite love! The Son of God has become man in order that we also should become sons of God, as He Himself said after His resurrection: "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God." Glorious unspeakable purpose of God to place us in the same glory, in the same relationship as His own Son: in the glory to which He has a right by His own perfection as being God's own Son. "In order that he might shew in the ages to come the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness towards us, in Christ Jesus." This will be fully accomplished when that which the Lord Jesus has said shall come to pass: "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them . . . that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me." Oh! what ought to be the love of Christians for the Saviour, who by His sufferings, even unto death, has acquired such a position for us, and the blessed assurance of being with Him and like Him for all eternity!

It is also important to remark that here the Trinity is fully revealed for the first time. In the Old Testament we read of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; but here, where we have the position of the second Man according to grace, the Holy Trinity is fully revealed. At the same time the revelation is clear, and the three persons appear together; the Son is revealed as a man, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove, and the Father's voice owns Jesus in whom He is well pleased. We may notice here the difference between man's responsibility and the purpose of grace. God's purpose was fixed before the world was created, but it was fixed in the last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the book of Proverbs (chap. 8) it is shewn that Christ, as Wisdom, was with God, that He was the object of God's delight, and that His own delight was found in the sons of men. But before revealing His counsels, or accomplishing the work which was to produce all the effects of this love, God created responsible man - the first Adam. But Adam failed to accomplish his duty, and all the means that God has employed have only brought out the wickedness of man, until the second Man should come. Thus the delight which God had in man has been manifested.

236 Nevertheless man has not been willing to receive it; there remained only the personal object of the perfect satisfaction of God; and thus in His person He has taken a position which we find revealed in this passage; that of Son of God, with the heaven opened, being sealed by the Holy Spirit. But He was alone. Upon the cross He did all that was necessary as regards our responsibility; and has done more - has fully glorified God in His love, in His majesty, in His truth, and has acquired for us the participation in His own position as man in the glory of God; not indeed as the right of God, that is, His own right as Son, but to be like Him in glory, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. This is God's purpose: and when the work of Christ was accomplished, this purpose was brought to light. As to its being fulfilled in us upon the earth, we have an example of it in the passage we are considering. Compare 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2, 3.

But this is not all. As soon as Jesus had taken His place before God as man, and when He had been manifested as Son of God in human nature, He is led by the power of the Holy Ghost into the wilderness, and there undertakes the struggle with the devil in the which the first Adam had been conquered. It was necessary that He should conquer in order to set us free; and notice too that His circumstances were very different from those in which the first Adam found himself. The first Adam was surrounded with God's blessings, of which He had full enjoyment; they were a present testimony of His favour. Christ, on the contrary, was in the desert with the consciousness that Satan was now reigning over man, and all outward

comforts are wanting; outwardly there was no testimony of God's goodness: indeed all was contrary to this.

237 In Mark the details of the temptation and the Lord's replies are not given, but only the fact is recorded (a precious fact for us) that the Lord has passed through this trial. He presented Himself according to the will of God, led of the Holy Ghost to meet the powerful enemy of mankind; immense grace! He first shewed our place before God, having taken it in His own person; and then He entered into conflict with the devil who held us captive. The third fact that we observe is that the angels have become the servants of those who shall be heirs of salvation. Here, then, are the three testimonies in connection with the manifestation of Jesus as man in the flesh; - our position as sons of God, Satan conquered, the angels our servants.

The Saviour (v. 14), having taken His place in the world, begins the exercise of His ministry, but not before John's imprisonment. After that this forerunner of the Messiah was cast into prison, and not before, the Saviour began to preach the gospel of the kingdom. The testimony of John was very important to draw the people's attention to Him; but it would not have been right that he should have borne testimony to the Lord after that He Himself had begun to bear testimony to Himself. "I receive not testimony from man," saith the Lord, speaking of John the Baptist; John 5:34. He bore witness to John! He was the Truth in His own person, and His words and His works were the testimony of God in the world. "What sign doest thou?" said the people; "our fathers did eat manna in the desert" And the Lord replied, "I am the bread come down from heaven."

The preaching of Jesus announced the kingdom, shewed that the time was fulfilled, that the kingdom of God was at hand, that the people must repent and believe the gospel. We should distinguish between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of our salvation. Christ is the centre of both; but there is a great difference between the preaching of a kingdom which is drawing near, and that of an eternal redemption accomplished upon the cross. It is quite possible that the two truths should be announced together. And indeed we find that the apostle Paul preached the kingdom, but he certainly also proclaimed an eternal redemption accomplished for us upon the cross. Christ prophesied of His death, and announced that the Son of man should give His life for the ransom of many; but He could not announce an accomplished redemption during His life. Men ought to have received Him and not to have put Him to death: hence His testimony was about the kingdom which was drawing nigh.

238 This kingdom in its public power has been delayed, because Christ has been rejected (see Rev. 11:17); and this delay lasts all the time that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, until the time when He shall arise from the throne of His Father to judge. God has said, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool," Psalm 110. It is nevertheless true that the kingdom was already come in mystery according to Matthew 13; this goes on during the time that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. But when God's appointed moment shall come, the Lord will arise and set up the kingdom, and with His own power will judge the living; and peace and happiness shall be established upon the earth. And we who have received Him, whilst the world has rejected Him, shall go to meet Him in the air, we shall be for ever with the Lord, and shall come with Him in glory when He shall appear before the world, and shall reign with Him; and, what is still far better, we shall be like Him and always with Him in the heavenly places in the Father's house.

The development of these truths and of these events is only found in the word of God after the Lord's ascension, after that the foundation for the accomplishment of God's purpose had been laid in the

Saviour's death. Here He announces only the drawing nigh of the kingdom, for men should have received it. But although Jesus taught in all the synagogues, there were not only those who heard Him, or who believed what He taught, but some who also followed Him. It is of the greatest importance to notice this: many in the present day profess to have received the gospel; but how small is the number of those who follow the Lord in the path of faith, in that humility and obedience which characterised the Lord's steps in this world! Let us try to follow Him: perhaps we cannot literally forsake all, as the first disciples did; but we can walk in the spirit in which they walked, and esteem Christ as the all for our souls; and that all other things are but as dung in order that we may win Christ in glory. The Lord here calls men to make them fishers of others; let us also seek others, that they too may be able to enjoy the ineffable and glorious happiness which the Holy Spirit gives. We may not be apostles perhaps, but whoever is full of Christ will give testimony to Christ; out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Rivers of living water shall flow from the belly of him who comes to Christ and drinks; John 7.

239 The Gospel by Mark does not present the person of Emmanuel, and then the grace of His mission, as that by Matthew; but sets forth rapidly His ministry in its application to men. Necessarily the ministry is the same, but the development is different. His word and His works testify equally to the authority with which He taught the people. While He was speaking, the audience in the synagogue was astonished, for His speech was not like that of the scribes who insisted upon opinions, but He announced the truth as One who knew it and could present it from its very foundation. Even evil spirits were afraid of His presence, and prayed that they might not be destroyed. Nevertheless they were obliged to leave the wretched men whom they held as their prey under their power: so that the people said, "What is this? what is this doctrine?" A testimony was raised that God had intervened to set man free, and to communicate His perfect truth to him. Grace and truth had come by Jesus Christ.

His fame spread all over Galilee. Leaving the synagogue He enters into the house of Simon and Andrew: the apostle Peter had a wife, and her mother was sick of a fever. The Lord takes her by the hand; the fever disappears, and the woman begins to serve them in a perfect state of health. As soon as the sabbath is ended, all the city is gathered together at the door of the house: the Lord heals the sick and casts out demons; the demons recognise Him although men have not. Still He remains the Servant of God, and gets up before sunrise to go into a solitary place to pray. Peter seeks Him and, having found Him, says, "All seek thee": but Jesus, always the Servant, does not seek numbers and fame for Himself, but goes away elsewhere to preach and to bring freedom from the yoke of Satan.

It is important to remark that here the Lord's miracles are not simply a sign and proof of power, but also of the goodness which was acting in divine power. It is this which gives the true divine character to the miracles of Jesus. All His works are the fruit of love, and bear witness to the God of love upon the earth. There is only one apparent exception, which, after all, is a proof of the truth we are remarking. This exception is the cursing of the fig-tree; but this was a figure of the people Israel, and one may say of human nature, under God's cultivation, which did not produce fruit - there were only leaves, that is, hypocrisy. Hence it was judged and condemned, and will never bear fruit again; the gardener dug about it, and dunged it, but all was useless; and then it was given up of God. Man must be born again - must be created again in Christ Jesus.

240 Of the love manifested in the works of the Lord Jesus we have a beautiful proof in that which follows. A leper comes to Jesus well persuaded of His power, having seen His miracles, or heard tell of these mighty works; but he was not certain that he would find willingness in Him to heal him. He says to Him, "If thou wilt, thou canst." The Lord, not content with being willing and with doing, touches the leper. Now

leprosy - terrible disease! - was a figure of sin, and he that was ill of it was shut out of the camp as unclean; and even a man who might have touched him was shut out too, because he became contaminated by it. No means could be employed to cure the leper; it was Jehovah alone who could cure him; and then, when cured of Jehovah, the priest pronounced him clean, and he could, after certain ceremonies, partake of divine worship. Here the Lord comes in with this divine power and the love of God. "I will, be thou clean." The willingness and power of God were there, and were exercised in favour of the poor excommunicated man. But there is something more - He touches the sufferer. God is present; Jesus cannot be contaminated; but He has come so near to the unclean man as to be able to touch him - true Man amongst men, God manifest in flesh. God, but God in a man, love itself, the power which can do all necessary to deliver man from the effect of Satan's power. undefilable purity is found upon earth - but love as well, that is, God is here, but Man also - and works for man's blessing. The leper is healed immediately, the leprosy disappears.

But although God be manifested in His work of power and love, He does not leave the servant's place, now that He has taken it; He sends away the healed man, saying, "See that thou say nothing to any man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded." We may remark another circumstance in this history - that the Lord was moved with compassion when He saw the leper. God, in His love, is man touched with pity in His heart for the wretched state in which He finds man: we often find this fact in the Gospels. Now the cleansed leper spreads abroad the fame of Jesus all around, so that the testimony of the power of God present with His people makes itself felt in men's minds. Jesus did not seek human glory, but to accomplish the will of God and the work He had given Him to do. Surrounded by all, He cannot enter into the city, where the astonished crowd would have assembled itself around Him.

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