

Title: *When Jesus Said, “Yes”*

Text: Mark 1:9-13

Some of you may be looking at my sermon title and thinking that I’ve gone heretic on you, somehow. Maybe it’s like the young boy at Royal Ambassador camp who was studying Philippians 2 and was asked, “What kind of attitude did Jesus have? He replied, “Jesus didn’t have no attitude.” It is perplexing to ponder what happened when Jesus identified with those of us who unquestionably need to repent.

It’s interesting to think about what is going on in this account in Mark’s gospel. Mark hasn’t given us any of the Christmas birth narratives. This is the first time he mentions the name of Jesus. John tells us that there is one coming after him, the thongs of whose sandals he is not worthy to untie.

John was making a huge impression because of the spiritual hunger of the people. They knew that they needed something and John was something different and perhaps he was the one who could give them what they were hungering for.

The people who were baptized by John were submitting to a baptism of repentance. Since Jesus went under the water in the Jordan River, people have been asking the question – at least ever since they were able to understand who he was – why would the sinless one submit to a baptism of repentance? Was there anything from which the sinless one needed to repent?

We’ll come back to that question a little bit later. The image that Mark presents is that one will come. John says of himself, “as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”--³ “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

We mentioned last week that this isn’t necessarily a positive thinking message. You can’t fault John. It’s as if he wants to say, “I’d like to give you the good news, but you’re not ready for it yet. I have to give you some harder news first. The good news in that is, ‘He’s coming.’”

John came as the forerunner. He had no delusions of presenting himself as the Messiah. He knew he was unworthy. He was just grateful to have a place in God’s plan.

You may ask the question, “Why didn’t Mark tell us more about the birth of Jesus?” The easy answer is that he was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit didn’t move him to. The other, more thoughtful answer would be to say that Mark is more interested in showing Jesus’ messiahship by what he does. And, Mark is full of action.

In response to the preaching of John, Mark says in verse 9, “At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.” Those who came out to be baptized by John were doing so in response to a spiritual hunger. A recognition that there was something missing in their life. Why else would they make the journey from Jerusalem out to the Judean wilderness – not an easy journey. Some people have different motivations for wanting to be

baptized. Some have an incorrect view of what it means. Some say it will wash away your sins. Others say that's the moment when God comes into your heart.

For some years we have worked with a ministry to refugees in Athens, Greece. Athens is part of the "Refugee Highway," where people from around the world pass through on the road to a better life. In May 2006, one of the missionaries in Athens, Kallie Skaife, reported what happened to an Iranian man identified as "M."

In 2003, everything "M" knew was destroyed by an earthquake measuring 7.45 on the Richter scale. He was tortured by the question of why something like this would happen. "M" went to live with relatives in Afghanistan, was married, and had a daughter. But he was still filled with despair.

Leaving his family behind, "M" headed west and ended up in Athens, staying with more relatives. Though he and all his family were Muslim, "M" became interested in Christianity, finding himself strangely moved by the sight of the crosses he saw decorating the Orthodox churches in the city. "M" was given a Bible and started reading. Since his relatives forbade such a thing, "M" used a tiny flashlight to read during the night after his uncles were asleep.

He studied the Bible this way for two years. Finally, "M" realized God was calling him to be born again. He contacted the refugee ministry center, declaring his faith in Christ and asking for more information.

On Sunday, May 7, 2006, "M" set his alarm for 6 a.m. He wanted to spend time reading his Bible and praying that morning, because on that day he was to be baptized at a fellowship with other Iranian believers. But "M's" cousin had discovered the plan. Before "M's" alarm went off, the cousin boiled water in a saucepan and poured it on "M" while he slept, scalding both thighs and one arm.

"M" came to the baptism anyway. Standing before those gathered, the burns on his arms clearly visible, "M" declared, "No matter what they do to me, I will love Jesus."

After the baptism, "M" said he felt like standing in the center of the city of Athens and shouting to everybody, "I belong to Christ!"

For "M", baptism was a means of identifying with Jesus. In a similar way, baptism for Jesus was a way of identifying with us. There was no sin that Jesus needed to repent from, but for him, it was a way of identifying with us. William Barclay points out 4 things that are significant about the baptism of Jesus.

The first of those is Jesus' decision to be obedient to his father's will. Mark tells us that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee. The people who were coming to John were coming from the urban and religious areas of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was in Judea and was the center of religious activity. It was the place of the temple. It was the place later in Jesus' ministry where the religious establishment would harass Jesus.

Nazareth was an obscure, remote village in Galilee. The Galilee, even today is a pastoral place. If it weren't for the geo-political strife in the Middle East, you could characterize it as

peaceful. But as Jesus was there in the carpenter's shop at the age of 30, he surely heard about the activity of John. He was familiar with John, because after all, they were related. Hearing the news of John brought Jesus to that crisis of decision. Some would say, "It's about time for him to make his move." If you have someone who is getting close to 30 and they haven't entered their life's career track, don't you begin to kind of wonder when are they going to begin to make something of themselves?

It was in the decision to pursue His father's will that we could talk of Jesus repenting. It's not just turning away from sin. There was no sin for Jesus to turn away from. It is turning to. Jesus is reaffirming the decision to follow the call that God had placed upon the life and to embrace the purpose that God had for him. If you want to use the word repentance, you could say that for Jesus, it was the decisive moment of commitment when he set out to do His Father's will for him.

The next purpose for Jesus' baptism would be his identification. There are several places where Jesus identified. He identified with the movement of John the Baptizer which signaled for all that God was moving once again among His people. It is a show of support for the ministry of John the Baptizer, giving him legitimacy. Why would Jesus be baptized? To identify with John's movement and also to identify with us, to let us know that there is nothing that he would ask us to do that he is not willing to do. For him to know what we go through and what we experience.

Why would God come into this earth in the form of a little baby? So that he could experience and identify with every area of our humanity. Why would he open himself up for temptation and testing? So he would know what it's like for us and so that he could show us that we can be victorious over it.

Throughout this series from Mark, I want to emphasize what it is that makes Mark unique. It is helpful though sometimes to compare Mark's account with the other gospel writers. In Matthew, when Jesus goes to John and John resists baptizing Jesus and he says, "You should be baptizing me. I'm not worthy to baptize you," Jesus says, "It is fitting for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."

Jesus said, "Let it be so now because it is proper to do this to fulfill all righteousness." There are several suggestions that have been proffered as to why this was so. Jesus was acting on behalf of his nation much as people such as Moses, Daniel, and Ezekiel had done. He was showing support for John's ministry. He was inaugurating his own public ministry and he was identifying with the penitent people of God, not with the religious establishment who was only watching with a condemnatory glance at what was happening.

There are other suggestions that Jesus is talking about human righteousness. As the perfect man, Jesus, by this act of obedience to God is demonstrating that it is indeed possible to live in a right relationship of obedience with God. Jesus is saying that by his obedience, He will make it possible for human beings to live in right relationship with God and with each other.

One of the most encouraging things to me about the baptism of Jesus is the desire of

Jesus Christ to identify with fallen, sinful humanity. It's easy to talk about humanity in the abstract and to use the generic term to encompass all of us. It's like the Charlie Brown quotation, "I love humanity. It's people I can't stand." Do you realize that Jesus' desire was to identify with **you**?" He came as the lamb of God, the man of sorrows acquainted with grief when we had gone astray. Isaiah 53:12 says, "Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. Jesus Christ who knew no sin was made to be sin for us so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God. It was simply because God wanted to identify with us as his creations whom he loves and delights in. In coming and submitting himself to the baptism of John, Jesus was saying, "I am not going to ask you to do anything that I myself am not willing to do. I will live where you live. I will walk where you walk. I will live the life of an ordinary person and will be subject to the same temptations that they face simply so that I may identify with them.

As well as decision and identification, the baptism of Jesus represents a moment of approval. I alluded to it a few moments ago. What happened when Jesus was coming up out of the water? He saw the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit coming down like a dove. He heard that voice that said, "You are my Son. I love you. I am well-pleased with you." Last week in our Honor Begins at Home study, we talked about the need that we all have to win the approval of our fathers.

I heard about a girl's basketball game. As a ninth-grade girl climbed in the car following a recent game, she said, "Dad, it really made us all feel bad." She went on to tell how she and the girls on her team weren't sure what to do for the other team's star player. "She was crying, Dad, kind of doubled over sometimes, like she was too tired to keep going, but her coach kept yelling"

The father relating the story said, "Ah, the coach. How could you miss him? He was yelling from the moment the game began. He was barking commands and issuing demands with a harsh, guttural, barking tone. And with that method he got his results: The girl, through tears that none of us on the sidelines could see, and in pain that we did not recognize, had been skillfully weaving her way through all our defenders, and had scored all the goals for our opposing team. She, in fact, was the key reason for our defeat at the end of the day. Still, despite these successes, the coach kept yelling, and his criticisms for her imperfections echoed across the field.

"But the worst of it," my daughter went on to say, "is that the coach was her dad."

There have been plenty of critiques written about being too hard on our kids and parents who are too eager when it comes to sporting events. I do think it's possible to fall off the horse on the other side and have no standards for our kids and to be afraid to challenge them at all, too. What makes the difference is that our kids know that they have our approval. In *Courageous*, when the son finally shows some emotion over the loss of his sister, and says, "I wasn't a very

good brother,” the dad was right there to say, “You are my son and I love you.” Not just I love you when I approve of your choices. I love you when you’re making me proud. I love you when you score the winning basket, but I love you for who you are and I love you regardless.

When Jesus came out of the water, it was a signal that the prayer of Isaiah 64:1, “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!” That forms a parentheses for Mark because in 15:38, it says, “The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”

Equipping - in the desert. Temptations [were real for Jesus, he could have failed] strengthened him, strengthened by God’s messengers. . . .

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