

I Am Second
Mark 1:2-11
Rev. Brian Bill
September 19-20, 2015

Prayer Transition: “Bless the Lord O my soul, worship His holy name”

Last week we camped in the very first verse of Mark’s manuscript and established the importance of being gospel-centric and mission-focused. We asked ourselves this question, “*Are we more like a cruise ship or an aircraft carrier?*” During the message I referred to our church as the U.S.S. Edgewood. That’s all Jim Sheese needed to hear as his photo-shop sense took over (actually, his wife Angela first alerted him to this idea). Here’s his latest creation [show pic of the crew of the U.S.S. Edgewood].

Our focus today is not on the Edgewood crew but on two individuals, John and Jesus. They were cousins and both had great birth stories, but they were certainly not equal. John MacArthur imagines the conversation that may have taken place when the moms got together. Mary says to Elizabeth, “*How’s your boy?*” Elizabeth might respond, “*Odd, really odd. You know, he’s lived his whole life apart from us, he lives out in the desert. How’s your boy?*” To which Mary likely said, “*You know, he’s perfect.*” That’s kind of a conversation stopper.

John was all about being second to the Savior and loved to point others to put their faith in Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God.

John the Baptist

We’ll look first at John the Baptist (he’s the first Baptist, just kidding) in verses 2-8 and then we’ll look at Jesus in verses 9-11.

Lets read Mark 1:2-8 together: “*As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached,*

saying, ‘After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’”

Becca and Megan, our youngest daughters, have heard me preach a lot of sermons over the years. I recently learned that they try to guess what my alliterated outline is going to be when the message starts. When we have lunch afterwards they often tease me about it. This week I made sure to show Becca three words that begin with the same letter that come right out of our text for today...I didn't have to get creative on my own.

I underlined these words right from the passage...

- John the Preparer** (2-3)
- John the Proclaimer** (4-5)
- John the Preacher** (6-8)

1. John the Preparer. John's first job was to prepare the way for Jesus. Mark tells us in verse 2 that Isaiah predicted exactly what John would do. The phrase, *“It is written”* is in the present tense, indicating a continuous result. What follows is a composite quotation from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3: *“Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”*

John is God's messenger, sent to come *“before your face,”* which literally means *“presence, in front of your eyes.”* Even though John ministered in the wilderness, he was highly visible to many people. His message was also very audible. We could translate it like this: *“Lo! A voice exclaiming...”*

Twice we read that he came to *“prepare the way of the Lord.”* In ancient times when a king would travel somewhere, his advance team would go on ahead to make sure the roads were passable. Preparing the way meant to level out the roads and to reduce twists and turns. They functioned much like civil engineers, fixing highways and even constructing bridges so the king would have no delays when he came to town.

The other day I was out on a long run. As I was gasping for breath I noticed an older woman ahead of me looking at the ground. When I got closer I saw her bend down and pick up a nail from the road. She was keeping the road clear and

removing something that could cause a flat tire. While I was oblivious she was keeping the way clean and clear. John the Baptist was like that. He didn't want anyone to have a blowout and have to pull over. He didn't want anything in the way of the One who is the way, the truth and the life.

The forerunner would also announce to the people that the king was coming so they better get ready to meet him. The word **“wilderness”** refers to the rolling badlands that made up a desolate area of barren chalky soil covered with pebbles, broken stones and rocks. What a metaphor for the barren hearts of people, like you and like me. John's job was to prepare hard-hearted people for Jesus the King.

2. John the Proclaimer. John prepared and he also proclaimed in verse 4: ***“John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”*** The word **“baptizing”** refers to immersion. The idea is to go totally under the water, not holding anything back. At that time Jewish people would use water for purification and even had baths called *mikvehs* but baptism was reserved for Gentiles who converted to Judaism.

It's interesting that these Israelites had to go out into the wilderness to be baptized. No doubt they would have been reminded of their history when their ancestors wandered in the wilderness for 40 years due to their disobedience.

There were two primary points to John's proclamation:

- **Repentance from sin.** The word repentance means, *“a change of mind that results in a change of action.”* To repent means to be going in one direction and then turning around and going in a new direction. We must always proclaim repentance in our gospel presentations. Too often we present Jesus as an “app” or an “add-on” to our lives and as a result we have more fans than true followers. We need more emphasis on repentance today because too many pastors are proclaiming a watered-down Christianity with no demands and no discipleship.

We need preachers who will tell the truth about sin and righteousness and judgment so that people will repent, experience remission of sins, and be ready for the return of Christ. We must be on guard because 2 Timothy 4:3-4 says: ***“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves***

teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

- **Remission of sin.** The word “*forgiveness*” means to be released, to have your sins remitted as if they had never happened. Acts 3:19 puts repentance and remission together: “***Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.***”

I had a brief gospel conversation with an older man at McDonald’s this week. He had just finished his coffee and I told him that I get a senior discount now. He told me I looked young (I’ll take that). And then he leaned in and said, “*I’ll tell you what. The older you get you’ll see that you have to pay for the sins of your youth.*” I smiled and said, “*That’s why Christ came so we don’t have to pay for them.*” He quickly changed the subject but I was grateful for the opportunity to have a conversation about Christ and was reminded that I always need to be ready to take advantage of every opening.

Let me be clear that people were not baptized to have their sins forgiven. They were baptized *because* they had repented and received remission of sin. Baptism is an incredible picture of a person dying to the life of sin and rising again to a new life. Baptism *always* follows belief in the New Testament. If you’ve been delivered through the new birth, it’s time for you to be dunked. This weekend two seven-year-olds and one man in his 70s took the plunge. If you’re saved, it’s time for you to get immersed. Baptism is a step of obedience and a public declaration that you belong to Jesus Christ. The main idea is one of *identification*.

If you’d like to learn more about baptism, I encourage you to pick up a copy of the Taking the Plunge booklet. In it, I looked up every passage where baptism is mentioned and then drew some conclusions.

Verse 5 tells us that John was baptizing multitudes of people: “***And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan.***” The word “*all*” refers to a totality of people living in Judea and Jerusalem – that’s a lot of people! The phrase, “*were going out to him,*” means there was a continuous steady stream. Can you imagine walking 20 miles, the distance from Jerusalem to the Jordan, to be baptized?

The Jordan River was not a mighty river like the Mississippi or even the Rock. It was more like Duck Creek or the Green River. The Jordan is only 10 feet at its deepest and 100 feet across at its widest. When Beth and I were in Israel we were frankly underwhelmed by the Jordan because we were expecting it to be much bigger. We know from [John 3:23](#) that John did his baptizing “*at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there.*” This is more evidence arguing for immersion because John wanted to find a place where he could totally submerge those being baptized.

The Jordan had spiritual significance to people. It was associated with deliverance because Joshua led the people across it as they headed to Wisconsin (the land of promise). People went from the Wilderness, which was associated with death and through the Jordan, which represented deliverance. One commentator estimates that as many as 300,000 people were baptized by John and his disciples over the course of many months. This is amazing because John treated the Jews like they were Gentiles, confronting them with their sins so that they would repent and experience remission. Look at the last phrase in [verse 5](#). They came: “*confessing their sins.*”

3. John the Preacher. John prepared people, he proclaimed repentance and remission, and he was also a preacher. Let’s look at his manner and his message.

- **His manner.** John was unusual in the way he looked and in what he ate. Notice his *garb* in [verse 6](#): “*Now John came with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist...*” His clothing was as rough as his message. In the tradition of prophets like Elijah, John stepped out of the wilderness looking a bit like a wild man. We know from [Luke 1:15](#) that he was a Nazarite, meaning that his hair and beard had never been trimmed (he probably looked like one of the guys from Duck Dynasty). Camel’s hair was rough and his leather belt held it all together (BTW, Pastor Andy will be preaching about the Belt of Righteousness as part of the Armor of God on Sunday night).

His *garb* was certainly not fashionable and for his *grub*, he “*ate locusts and wild honey.*” This is exactly what someone dwelling in the desert would eat. Bees made hives in the rocks and according to [Leviticus 11:21](#), locusts were on God’s approved menu. If you’re looking for a new diet, I commend it to you because locusts provide protein and honey has the carbs that we need. I

can already see a new breakfast cereal called, “Honey-nut Grasshoppers – The breakfast of prophets.”

- **His message.** Verse 7 summarizes his sermon: “***And he preached, saying, ‘After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.’***” John called people to repentance but the heart of his message was Jesus. Compared to Christ, he knew he was nothing.

In that culture the taking off of sandals was a job for the lowest slave. Hebrew slaves weren’t allowed to do it. Roads were covered in dust and dirt and often flowed with raw sewage, thus making feet filthy. John is saying that he is lower than the lowest servant, not worthy to do even what they do. In essence, he’s saying, “*I am nothing; but He is everything.*” Listen. You will never see the worthiness of Jesus unless you first see your unworthiness. You won’t be saved until you first settle the fact that you are a sinner.

This is pretty incredible because Jesus thought highly of John, saying in Luke 7:28: “***I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.***” Actually, John didn’t think of himself as second; he thought of himself as the littlest, the least and the last...and that’s what made him great.

I love serving with a team that is committed to Christ getting all the credit. This is particularly true of Pastor Tim, who had a small heart attack this week. When I visited him in the hospital we chatted about the sermon and he told me that his life verse is John 3:30 where John the Baptist said these words: “***He must increase, but I must decrease.***” If you know Pastor Tim you know that’s exactly how he lives.

Verse 8 shows us that John understood that Christ was number one: “***I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.***” John was using water to signify life change; Jesus brings life change through the Holy Spirit. Going under water signified cleansing but people can only have their sins washed through the blood of Jesus. Water might clean the outside but only the Holy Spirit can cleanse us on the inside.

The Baptism of Jesus

Notice that Jesus comes on the scene with no fanfare or huge announcement. He simply shows up at the Jordan River to be baptized by John. This is his first appearance since he was seen in the Temple at the age of twelve. Look at verse 9: ***“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”*** One commentator suggests that Jesus walked about 60 miles for His baptism.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus was baptized? He certainly didn't need to repent or confess His sins, did He? In fact, in Matthew 3:14, John tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized: ***“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”*** Jesus gives us the answer in verse 15:

“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus was baptized to identify with us. God the Father put our sins on Him and His righteousness was put on us according to 2 Corinthians 5:21. Jesus did absolutely everything that the Father required. Hebrews 2:17 says, ***“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”***

His baptism also shows His willingness to accept the mission given by His father. The Unger's Bible Dictionary points out that the Levitical law required all priests to be consecrated when they were around 30 years of age (Numbers 4:3) through a twofold process of washing and then anointing (Exodus 29:4-7). When Jesus was “washed,” or baptized in the Jordan, the heavens were opened and He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. We see this in Mark 1:10: ***“And when he came up out of the water [this is another indication of immersion], immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove.”***

The Greek word which describes the heavens ***“being torn open”*** means, ***“to set asunder, divide, rend, split.”*** It is used only one other time in Mark 15:38 to describe the thick curtain in the temple being torn from top to bottom when Christ died. This curtain kept people from getting close, dividing the holy place from the most holy place. Amazingly, the way is now open for us to come right into the presence of God!

Get ready for a spiritual goose bump moment because Isaiah 64:1 contains the cry repeated over the centuries as people longed for God to come down: ***“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down!”*** Psalm 144:5 says something similar:

“Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down!” Aren’t you glad that Christ has come down?

And now, after 400 years of silence from above (broken first about 30 years earlier when an angel appeared to Zechariah, John’s father), the heavens are ripped open after Jesus is baptized, and the Spirit ***“descends on him like a dove.”*** In the writings of Judaism, the Holy Spirit is compared to a dove in the Targums, which is a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that the Jews of Jesus’ time read. Tim Keller points out that Genesis 1:2 says the Spirit *“hovered”* over the face of the waters. The verb means, *“to flutter.”* The rabbis translated it this way: *“...the Spirit of God fluttered above the face of the waters like a dove...”* Seeing the dove descend would have certainly gotten their attention because God was about to initiate a new creation!

When the heavens rip open you might expect something cataclysmic was about to happen but rather the Holy Spirit comes down like a dove. Doves are gentle birds that descend delicately and rest in their place. A dove has no talons and is loyal to its mate. Doves also mourn when death comes and feel the distress of the hurting.

When the Holy Spirit comes down we see another fulfillment of Scripture, this time from Isaiah 42:1: ***“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.”***

BTW, we are prone as Baptists to not talk much about the Holy Spirit. That’s to our shame because He is fully God and active today. If you want to grow in this regard one of the most helpful books I’ve read is *The Forgotten God: Reversing our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* by Francis Chan. Here’s an excerpt: *“God put His Spirit in us so we could be known for our power. Sadly, most believers and churches are known for talent and intellect rather than supernatural power. What’s worse is that we’re okay with it.”*

Have you noticed that all three members of the Trinity are present at the baptism of Jesus? We serve one God, eternally existent in three persons. The Son physically comes up out of the water. The Holy Spirit descends visibly and the Father speaks audibly in verse 11: ***“And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”*** When God speaks it’s all about His Son. He’s not angry or upset but instead is delighted. The Father is actually quoting Isaiah 42:1: ***“My chosen, in whom my soul delights.”***

Application

How do we apply this amazing passage to our lives? Let me offer four ways.

1. Repent and receive remission of your sins. Heaven is open to you! The way has been made straight and clear. It's time to repent and have your sins forgiven.

2. If you're a born again believer your next step is baptism. Did you hear about the Georgia high school coach who is in hot water after organizing a baptism service on the football field? 18 players were baptized in a big tub before practice! He explained that a couple football players had gotten saved and then led others to Christ. They then asked him if they could get baptized and he agreed. Baptism is a step of obedience. Don't put it off any longer.

3. Consciously and continually tell yourself that you are second. The title of this sermon is "I Am Second." John settled this because he was in submission to the Savior. Are you like John in this regard? Or are you more like another guy named Diotrophes? 3 John 9: "...*Diotrophes, who likes to put himself first...*" Listen. Either Jesus is first, or you are. It can't be both of you.

4. Think of one person you will talk to this week in order to prepare the way for them to meet Jesus. See your conversations as ways to remove obstacles and to clear the path for people to see Jesus. Our purpose is to point people to Christ. See yourself as a messenger before Christ comes to them. You are part of the advance team. Who is that one person you will talk to this week?

I had lunch this week with Dennis Harker, the founder of the Quad Cities Missing Person Network to put together plans for our second annual memorial service to be held on Tuesday, September 29th at Lincoln Park in Rock Island at 8:30 p.m. We were talking about how to advertise the service when Dennis said something that really struck me: "*This is not for our self-glorification but to spread the word so that more missing people can be found.*" I love his humble approach and servant-like attitude.

A couple weeks ago a young woman went missing from Moline. We got a tip that she might be in Wisconsin so I sent Facebook messages to my family members who live in Packerland and asked them to spread the word. Others did the same. A couple days later a woman saw the information on Facebook and printed

off the information because the picture reminded her of someone she saw at her next-door neighbor's house. She took the picture over and sure enough, the young woman was there. She was told that her family was looking for her and she ended up being reunited with them.

Team, there are lost people everywhere. Dennis also told me that there are now 15 certified members of the Search and Rescue team in the Quad Cities. He told me that for their training they had to search some woods and find items that had been hidden there. For those who are not trained only about 25% of the items are recovered. But for those trained, over 80% are found. The key is lay the search field out in a grid and have searchers move very slowly. When they get to a certain distance they make a 360-degree turn, looking up, looking around, and also looking down. With that kind of attention they're able to find what is lost.

That got me thinking about how each of us live in a grid in the QCA. As we move slowly, turning around to look up, look around and look down, we will see the lost around us and be able to be used by God to find them. As we stay humble and care only that Christ gets the credit, we will see the lost found.

Invitation: "Here I am To Worship"

We're closing with a song called, "Here I am to Worship" on purpose because as we leave we must make the decision to worship. Worship doesn't end now...its just beginning.

*And here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that you're my God,*

New Members

- Nels Lindell – Saturday
- Ron and Mindy Silver – Sunday at 8 am
- Kerry Gomez – Sunday at 8 am