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Jesus Is... God's Son

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TEXT: Mark 1:9-11 (ESV)

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from Heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Dear friends,

I would like to have you complete this sentence for me, are you ready? "Jesus is..." Now you fill in the blank. What word or phrase came to mind for you when I said, "Jesus is"? If you're a believer, perhaps it was "Lord," "savior," "my friend." Or if you're an unbeliever, the response might be "a fraud," "a hoax." Or someone who's undecided might think Jesus is a great teacher, great man. People have all sorts of answers and ways of filling in that blank. As I think about this "Jesus is" statement, I'm reminded of something humorous I ran across years ago. It was found among the graffiti on a wall at St. John's University, and it went like this:

And Jesus said onto them, "Who do you say that I am?"

And the systematic theologian replied, "You are the eschatological manifestation of the ground of our being, the kerygma in which we find the ultimate meaning of our interpersonal relationship."

And Jesus said, "What?"

Well, we're going to spend the next few Sundays of Epiphany having God's word shed some light on how to fill in this blank, "Jesus is ____." It's an important subject for each and every one of us. You see, Christianity is not just a doctrine, but it's the knowledge of a person – it's knowing the Lord Jesus. And so we're going to get to know Him better over the next several weeks. We'll be using the Gospel of Mark to accomplish that. I love Mark's gospel because it moves right along at a fast clip. It was also the first gospel written after the resurrection of Jesus, and it is said to be written from the Apostle Peter's recollections of his time with Jesus.

Our first story that we're examining is the baptism of Jesus. We're told Jesus came from Nazareth, His hometown, and was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Now the question that's frequently been asked for 2000 years: why in the world was Jesus baptized? He was sinless, wasn't He? So why bother having John's baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins? And it's a good question because, yes, Jesus was sinless. He was conceived by the working of the Holy Spirit of God. He didn't need to repent and receive forgiveness like the rest of the people that came out to be baptized. Well, then why? Matthew has a version of this story which tells us that Jesus was going to John as an act of obedience, to fulfill all righteousness, to fulfill God's plan. Some say that this is Jesus identifying Himself with a sinful people that He came to save. But in Mark, we're not really given a reason, per se, we're just told John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Perhaps it's because what mattered in Mark's mind was what happened at the baptism – more importantly. So, let's take a look at it.

We know that Jesus was immersed in the Jordan River, as Mark describes Him coming "up out of the water," and then immediately the heavens were "torn apart." That takes us back to the Old Testament book of Isaiah, chapter 64, where Israel longingly prays to God all "O, that you would rend the heavens, tear apart the heavens and come down." This is a cosmic event, an answer to prayer. And then the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. And there we're reminded of Genesis 1, the creation story, where we're told that the spirit of God was hovering, which means (literally in the Hebrew) fluttering like a dove, over the face of the waters. And finally, the voice of God was heard, which is the climax of the whole narrative. "You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased." First, we're taken back to the very first verse of Mark's gospel, the opening statement, "This is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God." So this is an affirmation of who Jesus is right off the bat. As readers were given a peek behind the curtain and hear God say, "this is the son of God," – there's no mystery here. And God's

announcement in today's story, then, is an affirmation, a confirmation for us of who Jesus is: He's unique – God's son. "You're my beloved son," God says. And He goes on to say, "...who has done something great," that God approves. What would that be? Was it the baptism that God approved, which would make it an act of obedience to God's plan and explain why Jesus did this? Or is it something that Jesus is starting that will soon get accomplished – the rescue from sin and death at the cross? That makes sense, doesn't it?

Something else in the scene that's important for us to notice: who's there? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are present. This is a Trinity event. People wonder, what is the Trinity? It's a Christian doctrine. And Trinitarianism holds that there is one God in three persons who know and love one another. So we had this touching, beautiful scene of the Trinity at the River Jordan, loving and glorifying Jesus. When Jesus comes up out of the water, the Father envelops Him and covers Him with words of love and approval and affirmation. Meanwhile, the Spirit is covering him with power. Jesus, the Son, is glorified by the Father and the Spirit that day, and thus we see just how special Jesus is. He is the Son of God, the second member of the Trinity. To see Him is to see the face of God.

But there's even more here than meets the eye at first. The Father's pronouncement upon Jesus is loaded with meaning in regard to His task that's ahead. This is a preview of Jesus' career to come. Those words of God, "You're my beloved son. I'm pleased with you," contain echoes of some Bible verses out of the Old Testament. There is a fusing together of two Old Testament references in this statement. "You are my Son," is a line lifted from Psalm 2, which is a royal messianic psalm used by Israel in the anointing of a king at his coronation. Kingly authority is being conferred in this psalm upon Jesus. As He begins his ministry, He'll announce His kingdom and call people to repent and believe and enter in. He came as a king to rule. The second part of God's statement, "with you I am well pleased," is a take off from Isaiah 42. This chapter contains one of the messianic servant songs of Israel. We learn what kind of king Jesus is to be: a servant king, who rules gently. He rules with a different set of values than worldly rulers. He's on a mission of mercy and service and even suffering on a cross in order to save sinners like us, as Isaiah 53, another servant song tells us. Also, I'd be remiss if I didn't point this out: there are echoes of another passage in the Old Testament, in God's announcement: Genesis 22. There, God says to Abraham, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, your beloved, and offer him up as a sacrifice on the mountain I choose for

you." That's interesting, isn't it? Now we have Jesus, the beloved son, the son of Abraham, who later on will be the sacrificial offering at Mount Golgotha for the sins of the world.

So we're back to fill in the blank now, "Jesus is: the son of God, who has come to serve and save and rule." He's someone worthy of everyone's total attention and devotion. The next important question then, in light of this, is: what are we to do with Jesus, the son of God, who has come to seek and save and rule over us? You see, this Son of God came to enter your story; not just to have you know about Him, but to know Him personally. He wants to have a relationship with you and me and give you a new life, a life that will last forever... to have the Father lovingly say the same thing to you as was said to Him at his baptism: "You are my beloved son/you are my beloved daughter. With you, I am well pleased." He wants you to enter into and enjoy that circle of love that we saw at work in the Trinity that day, God's love.

And that takes trust, then, on your part. We have a hard time with trust in this old sinful world of ours. People disappoint us with their promises. And then we oftentimes will place our trust in wrong things that we think will take care of us in life and get us where we need to go, and we find that they're not trustworthy. There's a story that's told about a national magazine who assigned a photographer to take pictures of a forest fire. They told him a small plane would be waiting at the airport to fly him over the fire so he could take his pictures. The photographer arrived at the airstrip just an hour before sundown. And sure enough, there's a small Cessna airplane waiting. He jumped into it with his equipment and shouted, "Let's go." The pilot, a tense looking man, turned the plane into the wind, and soon they were in the air, though flying erratically. "Fly over the north side of the fire," said the photographer, "and make several low level passes for me." "Why?" Asked the pilot. "Because I'm going to take pictures," yelled the photographer, "I'm a photographer, and that's what photographers do, they take pictures." The pilot replied, "You mean you're not the flight instructor?" Now, that's what I call some poorly placed trust. That's a dangerous dead end, if you ask me. There are a lot of people who put their trust in the wrong things, and Jesus wants you to trust in Him. And you can trust Him for your salvation. He suffered and died for your sins and rose again so that you could have the gift of eternal life. So, trust him, this king, the son of God. It also involves giving him total control of your everyday life, for you see, He came to rule over you, and to show you the way of life, real life.

There's a testimony from Tim Hansel's book "Holy Sweat" that I want to end with today, and it goes like this:

At first I saw God is my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong so as to know whether I merited Heaven or Hell when I die. He was out there sort of like a president. I recognized his picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know Him. But later on, when I met Jesus Christ, it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride. But it was a tandem bike for two. And I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal. I don't know when it was that He suggested that we change places, but life has not been the same since we did that. When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring, but predictable. It was the shortest distance between two points. But when Jesus took the lead, he knew delightful, long cut up mountains and through rocky places at breakneck speeds. And it was all I could do to hang on. Even though it looked like madness, he'd say "pedal!" I worried, it was anxious, and I asked him, "Where are you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer and I started to learn I could trust Him. I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure. And when I'd say, "I'm scared," He leaned back and He touched my hand. He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing and acceptance and joy, and they gave me gifts to take on my journey, my Lord's and mine. And we were off again and He'd say, "Give the gifts away, they're extra baggage, too much weight." So I did, to the people we met. And I found that, in giving, I received; and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Jesus, at first, in control of my life. I thought He would wreck it. But Jesus knows bike secrets, knows how to make a bend to take sharp corners, knows how to jump to clear high rocks, how to fly to shorten scary passages. And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places. And I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breezes on my face with my delightful, constant companion, Jesus Christ. And when I'm sure I just can't do any more, He just turns and smiles and says, "Pedal. Pedal."

Jesus is the son of God, the king, who came to save and rule over us and show us what makes life work best and to give us eternal life with Him forever. Oh, people, won't you trust in Him today and turn your life over to His loving care?

Amen.