

Bible Study Guide: Week of 2-15-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Mark 1:9-15

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” ¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

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This week’s reading for the First Sunday in Lent is comprised of three distinct sections. This first section should be familiar because it was also part of the assigned text for the Baptism of our Lord back in January. You can review my commentary from the January 4 Bible Study guide for additional information about this part of the passage. Here I want to focus on how this baptism story functions to prepare Jesus for the events of verses 12 and 13 (the testing in the wilderness) and the rest of the gospel. In particular, the voice speaking precisely to Jesus. Mark reports the words from heaven as “*you* are my Son,” as opposed to “*This* is my Son” as Mark reports later in Chapter 9 at the Transfiguration and as Matthew reports as the words at Jesus’ baptism [Matthew 3:17]. This voice here functions not so much to inform the crowds (who have disappeared from the narrative at this point) or the disciples or anyone else about Jesus’ identity, but rather to reinforce for Jesus his mission and identity. Thus, he is sent into testing and ministry both filled with the Spirit and confirmed as God’s Beloved Son.

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The Greek word for the Spirit “driving” Jesus out is *ekballo*—the same term used to describe the casting out of demons. This language may disturb us, making us wonder if Jesus had a choice in the matter. What should be clear here is that Jesus is indwelt by; in a sense “possessed” by the Holy Spirit. He was sent to do God’s will, by means of God’s power and strength. Thus, the Spirit compels him to contend with a time of testing in the wilderness. The 40-day testing calls to mind the 40 years of wilderness wandering done by the Israelites during the Exodus. Those chosen ones; those beloved people of God failed their tests, resulting in the extended time of wandering. Here, Jesus the chosen one; the beloved one of God passes the test with flying colors. In fact, notice that Mark doesn’t narrate any of the content of the 40 days for us. Nowhere does Mark tell us about any dialogue between Jesus and Satan (as Matthew and Luke do). Rather, the details he gives us besides the 40 day period and the fact that Jesus was “tempted” or “tested” are that he was with the wild beasts and that the angels waited on him. The reference to wild beasts brings to mind Adam’s original state of existence prior to the fall of humanity. Perhaps Mark intends for us to understand Jesus as the new Adam in this sense, able to survive among wild animals as God initially intended for humankind to exist. The beasts may also simply bring to mind the danger Jesus faced. Meanwhile, the reference to angels attending or serving Jesus shows that although he faced great danger, he also enjoyed divine favor and protection.

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Having endured a time of testing in the wilderness as Israel had done, Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming that the time is right for the kingdom of God to come near. Such a proclamation would have been provocative in Galilee—a region ruled by Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. Herod Antipas is the king who had arrested John and would eventually consent to his gruesome execution. Thus, for Jesus to enter this realm of Galilee, proclaiming a new kingdom had come near would potentially be an inflammatory action, especially in light of John’s arrest (since John was a forerunner of Jesus’ own ministry). His command for people to “repent” is not fully conveyed by this English translation. While the English word “repent” is often used to mean “show contrition” or “apologize,” the Greek word *metanoete* means to change one’s mind and actions. It can carry the connotation to change one’s inner self and submit to the will of God rather than the self-will. It is a complete turnaround in behavior and thought that Jesus is claiming the Gospel demands. The parallel command to “believe in the good news” literally means “put your trust and faith in the gospel”—that is, God’s message. Jesus’ ministry will be a call for people to change and reform their lives to conform with God’s ways. This, along with the 40 day temptation narrative, is the reason why we get this text the first Sunday in Lent this year. Such is the Gospel’s call in our lives.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. How did Jesus’ baptism and the voice from heaven help prepare him for his time in the wilderness and his ministry?**
- 2. What temptations or tests are you currently facing? How is God providing in the midst of this temptation?**
- 3. What does repentance and belief in the gospel mean to you? How do you plan to put this into action during Lent?**