

Prayer

Save us, O Lord, from being consumed by our own concerns and interests. Direct our hearts towards others, so that we may offer genuine concern for all those who need our love, our help, our care, our fellowship and our friendship. May we find fulfilment by doing this, for You are the greatest friend we can ever have; AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: 'Anointing'

Pray that God will come afresh and anoint you for worship and for service. The Lord has a purpose and a call for each of us, so seek the confirmation of God's Spirit on your life.

On-going prayers

- Ask the Lord to help us agree about how to look after our world
- Give thanks to God for those you know who show God's love
- Pray for local migrant workers

Meditation

If you face events that seem mysterious,
Do not fear; hand them over to the Lord
And let Him guide the way you handle them.

If you face problems that are your fault,
Repent; hand them all to the Lord your God
And let Him bless you with His forgiveness.

If you face a callous attack of the enemy,
Stand firm, to resist this affront to the Lord
And let Him do what you cannot, and defeat him.

If you face the nagging pains of doubt,
Believe; hand these dire feelings to the Lord
And let Him feed your soul; receive His peace.

If you face questions that never fade,
Stop dwelling on these problems; think on Him
And let the Lord your Saviour reign in you again.

Bible Study - Mark 1:9-15

⁹ At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the river Jordan by John. ¹⁰ As soon as He came up from the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit coming down on Him like a dove. ¹¹ A voice came from the heavens; 'You are my Son, the One whom I love; with You I am very pleased.'

¹² The Spirit immediately took him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and He remained in the desert for forty days being put to the test by Satan. He was with wild animals, and angels took care of His needs.

¹⁴ Now, when John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee preaching the good news of God. ¹⁵ He said, 'The time has now come and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe in the good news!'

Review

These remarkable verses complete the introduction of Mark's Gospel, which, as we say yesterday, began with a brief reference to the story of John the Baptist. Our passage today describes three incidents; Jesus' Baptism (1:9-11), His testing in the wilderness (1:12-13), and the beginning of His preaching (1:14,15). Each of these gives us essential information about Jesus, but we are immediately struck by the speed with which Mark sweeps into his story; the 'heavens are torn apart' (1:10), the Spirit 'immediately' takes Him into the wilderness (1:12). Each of these events is described more fully in the Gospel of Matthew or Luke, but here in Mark, they are brief summaries that serve to prepare us for the dramatic first events of Jesus' actual ministry.

Mark does not give us an extensive description of John's meeting with Jesus, such as we find in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 3:13-17) for example. He merely tells us some of the story of Jesus' baptism, but focuses on describing the power and authority of God in appearing from the heavens and coming in the form of the Holy Spirit on Jesus 'like a dove' (1:10). The words spoken by God (1:11) are typical of many great passages of Scripture in which God gives His approval to His servants (for example, see Psalm 2:7 or Isaiah 42:1f.). Nevertheless, Mark reports more of what God says about Jesus than either Matthew or Luke; 'You are my Son, the One whom I love; with whom I am very pleased.' There are some subtleties to these words (as we find out in the main study), but the whole sentence tells us very clearly that Jesus was God's own dearly loved Son, the Messiah.

Next, we are surprised to read that the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness have been reduced to two brief verses (1:12,13)! The other Gospels tell us the details of Jesus' temptations, and explain that they were a significant part of the beginning of His ministry because of Jesus' ability to defeat Satan and all forms of temptation. However, Mark does not describe any victory; all he says is that Jesus was 'put to the test by Satan' and adds some comments about animals and angels (1:12,13)! It is possible that Mark was simply telling us that Jesus' ministry would always be a battle with Satan and the forces of evil. The battle had begun, but it would only be won conclusively when Jesus faced death on the Cross and rose again in victory. Jesus' temptations are indeed an important part of each of the three Gospels in which they are recorded (Matthew, Mark and Luke), but each Gospel writer uses the story in a different way to say something important about Jesus.

The last part of our passage describes Jesus' preaching. It also tells us that Jesus only began preaching after 'John was arrested' (1:14). The pace of Mark's Gospel is very quick, but Mark felt it is important to tell us that Jesus waited for John's ministry to be completed before His began. In some Gospels there is a hint of competition between the disciples of John and Jesus (see Matthew 11, for example), but as far as Mark was concerned, this was unimportant. John had prepared the way for the Gospel and the news of God's Kingdom, so when his job was finished Jesus continued by preaching repentance, just as John had done. However, Jesus went further and preached what could only be announced by the Messiah Himself, that God's Kingdom was 'at hand' (or, more literally, 'touchable'). God's work of salvation had begun!

It is all too easy to prefer reading about Jesus' baptism, temptations and His initial preaching from the Gospels of Matthew or Luke, because what is said is more appealing to us than the brief reports of Mark's Gospel. However, Mark uses these incidents to deliver three sharply focussed points which form an essential introduction to his whole Gospel. Jesus was God's loved Son and anointed Messiah, His life was a battle against evil, and

He preached repentance, belief in God, and the coming of God's Kingdom. We will not understand Mark's Gospel without grasping these essential starting points.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How is baptism practised in your church, and how does it reflect the work of the Holy Spirit?
2. Are you aware of the spiritual battles of God's people, or does the idea sound strange? If so, what does Jesus' 'temptations' mean to you?
3. Is the Kingdom of God any nearer now that it was in Jesus' day? How can we preach the presence of God's Kingdom today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

throughout his Gospel, Mark has an admirable way of reducing things to the bare minimum in order to tell his story. Given that our brains can only hold a small number of things active in our minds at one time, his approach has much to commend it! I have studied all of the Gospels at some time in my life, and I find Mark fascinating, because it is possible to read one of the stories and think you have understood it, but then find that it says more than you have appreciated. Mark is a Gospel that, in my opinion, is underrated by too many.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *The art of summary is very important. Do your best to try to summarise your own faith; what has led you to believe, how you express your faith and what you expect the Lord to do in the future. You may remember this more accurately if you can summarise this!*
- *Pray for those who seek to find out who Jesus is, and struggle to find out more about Him and what He stood for. Pray for any member of your wider family who seeks faith but has not yet found it.*

Final Prayer

Lord, I turn my eyes towards You, I look for Your help, I seek Your advice, and I long for Your presence within every moment of my life. Remove the unseen barriers, O Lord, and break into my consciousness with Your liberating power, to both challenge me and inspire me. Thank You, O Lord my God: AMEN