

CHRIST BEGINS HIS MINISTRY

Mark 1

Mark's purpose was not to give an account of the genealogy of Christ, of His conception and birth, of what befell Him in His infancy, or of any actions and sayings of His from then until His appearances in Israel; but to give an account of His ministry and miracles, sufferings and death. These things are introduced with the preaching and baptism of John the Forerunner. He first pointed out Christ, Who is the author and substance, as well as the great preacher of the Gospel; the sum of which is, that He is Jesus, the Saviour and Redeemer of lost sinners; the Christ, the Messiah, that was to come; the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet Who has declared the whole mind and will of God; the great High Priest, Who has offered Himself a sacrifice for His people, made peace, procured pardon, brought in everlasting righteousness, and obtained eternal redemption, and now lives to make intercession for them; and the King of saints, Who reigns over them, protects and defends them, and is no other than the Son of God; equal with His Father; of the same nature with Him, possessed of the same perfections, and enjoying the same glory.

I. His Forerunner. Mark 1:3-8.

John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing in the wilderness. He required repentance before baptism, and administered baptism upon profession of repentance, and as an open testimony of it. John preached that men should repent of their sins, and believe in Christ, who was to come; and upon their repentance and faith, he baptized. As many as were brought to a sense of their sins and made a confession of them, these he baptized in the river Jordan.

John was a preacher of Jesus Christ; of the dignity of His person, the excellency of His office, and the nature and importance of His work. The expression, "the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose," indicates the great veneration he had for Christ, and the deep sense he had of his own unworthiness.

II. His Preparation. Mark 1:9-13.

1. His baptism. Mark 1:9-11.

Large crowds were flocking to hear John the Baptist and to be baptized by him. Quietly and deliberately Jesus came from His home in Nazareth to John and was baptized by him in the Jordan River, thus identifying Himself with sinful humanity. As Jesus was coming out of the baptismal waters, the heavens were rent asunder and the Spirit came upon Him in a dove-like form, symbolizing peacefulness, meekness, gentleness, tenderness and love, those qualities which were to characterize the ministry of our Lord. Thus, on the eve of His ministry, Christ received special enduement. When He was baptized Christ received the audible and visible approval of God the Father Who said, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Thus the Father testified that Jesus was the object of His love and the One in whom He took a great delight.

2. His temptation. Mark 1:12-13.

From the waters of baptism our Lord was led immediately into the fires of temptation. After Christ had listened to the testimony as to His divine sonship, the Spirit impelled Him with great energy to go into a more remote, desolate and forlorn part of the wilderness and there to contend with Satan. At the behest of the Spirit, Christ went to the place which had been chosen for the testing. Evidently it was a place of desolation and extreme solitude, for Mark wrote, "He was with the wild beasts." In that region, which was uninhabited by men, our Lord neither feared wild animals, nor was He injured by them. Nevertheless, it was a place of horror.

In that horrible solitude, without the sympathy of friendship or any possibility of human assistance, Jesus was subjected to forty days of wearing assaults from Satan. With subtle craftiness and tremendous appeal, the adversary tried to get Jesus to waver in His allegiance to the heavenly Father. Upon Him the tempter exercised all his devices in vain. Satan was foiled at every point and Christ won a complete victory. During His loneliness and temptations Christ received and enjoyed the beneficent ministry of the holy angels.

III. His Preaching. Mark 1:14-15.

Preaching was the first work of Christ's ministry. As He came into Galilee, the theme of His preaching was the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. These tidings did not consist of outward ceremonies and observances, but rather of forgiveness, salvation, peace, righteousness and joy.

Christ called upon the people to repent not only of their sins and vicious course of life, but also of their wrong opinions concerning a temporal kingdom of the Messiah. He admonished them to relinquish their erroneous beliefs concerning justification by works and salvation through the observance of ceremonies. He urged them to accept the gospel plan which proclaims pardon, salvation, peace, righteousness, joy and eternal life as gifts from Christ. His message centered around two great doctrines, namely, repentance and faith. Repentance involves consciousness of sin, sorrow for sin and separation from sin by the grace of God and with His help. Faith involves assent to the gospel truths, acceptance of Christ as Saviour and acknowledgment of Him as Lord.

IV. His Partners. Mark 1:16-20.

These verses give us a brief account of Christ's call of four men to work with and assist Him during His personal ministry on the earth, and then to carry on His work after He should leave them.

Having won a complete victory over Satan, who had assailed Him with all the seductive temptations of the physical senses, of worldly ambition, and of the lowering of spiritual standards, and having begun His public ministry, our Lord was ready to call some helpers to work with Him in behalf of others. As He walked by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two pairs of brothers, one pair of whom was fishing and the other was mending nets. To them He said, "Come ye after Me." This call was not to salvation, for they had already believed on Jesus, but to service. He challenged them to leave their places, the business in which they were engaged, the loved ones with whom they were associated, and the interests with which they were surrounded in order that they might follow Him and work with Him. This call held tremendous issues, for they were to be with Him, to learn from Him and to obey Him.

Let us never forget the character of the men whom Christ called to assist Him in His work. They were not learned men from the rabbinical school, but they were busy and humble young men from the common walks of life. They belonged to the ranks of the employed. It is well to remember that the world's greatest soul-winners have been men of humble origin, and often of meager training.

Christ called these industrious and cooperative young men to leave their secular work as fishers of fish and to follow Him as fishers of men. It was not a novel task they were invited to undertake, but a diversion of their labors to a higher service. They were called to the same kind of work, but in another sea. He simply transferred the special qualifications of these men from the natural to the spiritual sphere. They were to use all the skill they had acquired in learning to fish, but in a far higher and nobler sphere. Fishermen they were, and fishers of men they were to become. However, before they could become what He wanted them to be, it was necessary for them to follow Him. Growth in ability, efficiency and effectiveness is guaranteed to all who will follow Christ.

Without hesitating or attempting to excuse themselves, those men gave up their gainful employment, severed home ties, put their trust in Him who called them to assist Him, and went with Him, believing that He was able and willing to supply all their needs. Their fitness for discipleship was evidenced by their prompt and complete obedience to Christ's call. Because of their obedience to Him, Christ trained them, encouraged them, led them, blessed them and used them in a great way.

Christ's call to follow Him is extended to all Christians, regardless of age, race, talent, position or temperament. Linked to His call is His glorious promise: "I will make you to become fishers of men." If a believer follows Christ, he will be a fisher of men. If he is not a fisher of men, he cannot be following Christ. Here is indeed a most practical test of the character of our Christian lives.