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## WHEN JESUS CAME

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I recently told you the story of what happened when Jesus came into my home when I was a child. My father became a Christian, and everything in my family changed—even the way my father voted in the next election! A few years later, while I was mired in rebellion, I also accepted Jesus as my Savior, and then I experienced a great change in my own life. Radical, life-changing things happen when Jesus comes!

In our passage today, we will find an instance of those two words, “Jesus came.” Let’s examine what happened when Jesus came to John the Baptist in Mark 1:9:

*<sup>9</sup> And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.*

Mark, as we have discussed before, focuses on actions, not words; and therefore we get a fuller account of this event in Matthew, Luke and John. For now, allow me to summarize what happened, though. Jesus came to be baptized, and John said to Him, “You know, I really am not qualified to baptize You; in fact, You should be baptizing me!” And Jesus said to Him, “This is the way it needs to be.”

I used to wonder why, in fact, Jesus did need to be baptized. I mean, I never doubted that it was the right thing for Him to do; but I just couldn’t figure out why Jesus even needed to be baptized. Have you ever wondered that? Jesus didn’t do anything wrong, and He certainly didn’t need to repent. I think the reason is that this is more for us than for Him. He is identifying with us at the outset of His public ministry, which will end with His death on the cross. Why did He die? He died to pay the penalty for our sins. So I think, as Dr. Harry Ironside has pointed out, that this is sort of like Jesus putting His own name on the debts that we owe, showing that He is going to be the one to pay the debts for us. It was an act of identification—Jesus identifying with us.

It was not only an act of identification, but one of recognition. We have already pointed out that Mark has shown that the gospel began with the witness of the prophets, and the witness of John the Baptist; but there is another witness! Let’s look at verses 10 and 11 now:

*<sup>10</sup> And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him:*

*<sup>11</sup> And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

Now this is remarkable: the Holy Spirit comes down and descends on Jesus like a dove, and God the Father speaks from the opened heavens. Wouldn’t you like to have been there for that? God the Father and God the Holy Spirit also bear witness to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. Incidentally, this is one of the instances in Scripture which shows all three member of the Holy Trinity at once.

We have, then, witnesses of the highest possible order to the deity of Jesus Christ. The Jehovah’s

Witnesses do gymnastics with this because they don't believe in the Trinity or in the deity of Christ; but both are unequivocally on display here.

But what does this all mean? I want you to notice that the Spirit descends *upon* Jesus. That is no accident. Remember, Jesus is identifying with us by being baptized. When we have confessed our sins and repented, God applies His forgiveness to us and instills the Holy Spirit within us. We have the Holy Spirit within us from the very moment of salvation, convicting us of sin. But the anointing of the Spirit is something different. It is the Spirit's power coming upon us. It is a partnership with the Spirit, in which we have the Spirit's power and boldness. Put another way, we always have the Spirit within us, but we do not always have the Spirit upon us. We can, but we often do not because we are not in complete fellowship with God. When we allow sin to creep into our lives, we will still have the Holy Spirit within us, whispering to us, convicting us, and pointing us back to fellowship; but we will not have His power. So here, the Spirit descends upon Jesus at the beginning of His public ministry so that He can do what must be done in partnership with the Spirit.

Why a dove? We understand that the Holy Spirit gives power; but we don't associate power with doves. Let me tell you a story that will illustrate power in a way that's outside of our normal thinking about power.

In October of 1918, a battalion of nearly five hundred men under the command of Major Charles Whittlesey advanced on German positions in the Argonne Forest in France. Though his battalion achieved its objectives that day, the battalions on his flanks did not; and he and his men were soon cut off from supplies, trapped in a depression in the hills. They were stuck, and in great peril.

To make matters worse, the American artillery used their best available coordinates to shell the Germans around the lost battalion—but the coordinates were wrong, and the shells were falling on Major Whittlesey's men. He needed to get a message to the American headquarters immediately. His only option was a carrier pigeon, and there was just one of those left: a lively little pigeon named Cheri Ami.

Major Whittlesey put down a short message which was placed in a canister on Cheri Ami's leg. Cheri Ami was launched into the air, but as he flew, the Americans watched in horror as the little bird was shot at over and over by the Germans—and they all knew he was their last hope. Cheri Ami began falling, tumbling; then, miraculously, he climbed and gained altitude until he was beyond the German guns. But poor Cheri Ami had twenty-five miles to fly!

A short while after that, the Army Signal Corps heard the buzzer that indicated a bird had returned. The soldier who checked the pigeon coop found Cheri Ami, lying on his back in a pool of blood, with a hole in his chest the size of a quarter. His breastbone was broken. His left leg was shot almost completely off, but attached to that little stump was the canister with the precious message.

The artillery barrage was stopped; the men of the lost battalion were rescued three days later; and little Cheri Ami was saved. The French awarded little Cheri Ami one of their most distinguished honors, the *Croix de Guerre*, and General Pershing awarded him a Silver Star.

Now, let me ask you, when sports teams pick a bird as a mascot, what kind of bird do they pick? They'll pick some kind of raptor, such as a hawk, but never a pigeon or a dove! We don't associate pigeons or doves with power; but Mon Cheri demonstrates a different kind of power—the power of being beaten down, destroyed, and yet persevering and overcoming. That is the very kind of power that Jesus

demonstrates. That is the very kind of power conferred by the Holy Spirit—the power to be beaten down, destroyed, and yet persevere and overcome. It’s not the power of striking out or of striking back, but of rising up, of continuing in the face of impossible odds, that the Holy Spirit confers.

I might add as a side note that it is this very power to which we owe this particular church’s existence. The power of striking out or striking back could never have saved this little church; no, it was the power of perseverance, granted by the Holy Spirit, to which we owe our existence.

I’m going to fast-forward a bit and read what the Lord Himself says about this experience. I’m going to read Luke 4:19–20. In this passage, Jesus is reading from the Old Testament and applying what He reads to Himself:

*<sup>18</sup> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,*

*<sup>19</sup> To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*

That, my friends, is the power of the anointing of the Spirit! “The greatest force in the world today, without a doubt, is love. And yet it is the kind of power that does not threaten or break apart or destroy; it gathers and heals. It is rejected, turned aside, and beaten down; yet it rises again and again. So the dove is an apt symbol of the new life our Lord came to teach.”<sup>1</sup>

The Lord’s baptism by John is, as we mentioned, His way of identifying with us. The gospel message for us begins with John’s teaching of repentance and forgiveness, and the Lord’s ministry began with His identification with that message. It is Jesus’ way, at the beginning of His ministry, of signing His own name to our debt, stating His intention to pay our debts in full in three and half years’ time.

In the same manner, baptism is for us an identification with Christ. It shows that we have accept the beginning of the gospel—repentance and forgiveness—and that we understand that Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection are payment in full for our debt of sin.

In His baptism, He identified with us; in our baptism, we identify with Him. God the Father Himself shouted His approval from Heaven, and the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus with power for the work He was being called to do.

Now, the next few verses contain another instance of those words, “Jesus came.” He came into Galilee, preaching the gospel; but before we get there, Mark gives us a very brief description of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. The wilderness experience is, of itself, deserving of a full sermon, and I think it will be best to get into that later. For now, though, I want you to see two pictures that have been drawn for us.

First, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, which is pictured in the Old Testament with the forty years of wandering in the wilderness; but instead of failing like the children of Israel did, He passed His tests. You might also remember that at the end of forty years, Joshua led the children of Israel to victory in the Promised Land; but did you know that in Hebrew, Jesus is the exact same name as Joshua?

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Steadman, “Jesus Came.” 29 September 1974. Available at <http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/mark/jesus-came>.

Second, there is a picture of the stark, barren wilderness, where Jesus passed the test of love and obedience to God, which is a contrast to the lush, beautiful garden where Adam failed his test. In failing, Adam lost his dominion and brought a curse; but in succeeding, Christ claimed dominion and brought a means of destroying that curse. What a blessing!

We've tipped our hat to the next sermon, but what can we take home today? Friends, if nothing else, we need to remember what happened in our own lives when Jesus came. Jesus brings hope, peace, joy, and victory where once there was shame, anguish, and brokenness. This is the beginning of the gospel. This is what our world needs! This world does not need a lecture about morality as much as it needs a model of Christ's love, a demonstration of Christ's power in repentance and forgiveness. He can bring the healing and hope in ways that our self-righteousness never can.

The world may never hear God shout from heaven about you, "This is my beloved son"; "This is my beloved daughter," yet the world ought to be able to tell that you are God's child. Identify with Christ, just as He has identified with you, with your sorrow, with your brokenness. Christian, I urge you to bear the name of Christ this week, and see what God will do!