



Deep Community

Notes from our first study on Mk. 1.1-13 (11.08.09)

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Recurrence:

- Observation: Baptism is a recurring theme throughout Mk. 1.1-13
 - What might the significance of baptism before John the Baptizer have been?
 - Where does baptism find its origins?
 - Is there a difference between baptism by water and by Spirit? If so, why and what is the significance?
 - Is there a symbolic meaning of baptism?
 - Why did Jesus get baptized for the forgiveness of sins if He was sinless?
- Observation: Forgiveness and confession of sin are a recurrent theme throughout Mk. 1.1-13
 - What if any significance might be found in the fact that these two terms are recurring?
 - Is there a connection between these two things with baptism?
- Observation: The narrative has a ruggedness about it
 - What are we to make of the abruptness of the story starting (e.g. no genealogy), the “voice crying aloud,” the “tearing of the heavens,” the rugged dress and eating habits of John the Baptizer, the Spirit “driving out” Jesus to the wilderness, the repetition of the wilderness, etc.?
 - A sub-question: Does anyone else find it odd that Jesus is in the wilderness with John to be baptized but Mark says that the Spirit drove him out to the wilderness for 40 days? In other words, was He driven out to the place He already was? Driven out further? Is this a different place?
 - Is there any meaning to be had in the fact that the wilderness was a place of preparation for ushering in the Messiah?

Comparison:

- Jesus is compared to a dove
 - What is the significance of this?
 - Are there echoes of the creation narrative here? Dove, Spirit hovering over water, etc.?
- Jesus is called “The Messiah” and “The Son of God” about whom the “Good News” (euangelion) is told
 - Could the “Son of God” label and the “Good News” mantra, which were often attributed to the ruler of Rome, be religio-political subversions? Does Mark start his story off with political overtones? Further, can themes of a “new” Exodus be found here, which might also be politically subversive?

Contrast:

- Jesus and John the Baptizer (stronger and weaker)
 - What if any meaning might this contrast have?
 - Spirit versus water baptism is of what significance? (See above)
 - Jesus with Caesar?
 - John the Forerunner with Caesar's forerunners?
 - The revelation from Scripture, God & John concerning Jesus' identity as the Son of God versus Caesar who simply called himself this...is there any significance?

Climax:

- The baptism of Jesus
 - What is climactic about this?
- The sending of Jesus into the desert with Satan and the beasts
 - What climactic elements are found here?
- The affirmation of Jesus' identity by the Spirit and voice from above
 - What is climactic about Jesus' identity being asserted? Did Jesus need to have this as self-affirmation? Or did others need to know this (e.g. the reader)? Could others see/hear/experience what was going on or was it just Jesus?

Question Pursued as a Group: What was the significance of baptism prior to John the Baptizer?

Commentary:

- Hurtado:
 - This was a new practice
 - Some remnant of this practice may be found at Qumran, however
 - May be rooted in the Jewish practice of ritual baths / cleansings
 - John baptized people ONLY ONCE
- Healy:
 - Baptizo is a Greek word peculiar to Christianity at this point in time
 - Baptism stressed inner-purification (of the heart)
- France:
 - Baptism symbolized eschatological restoration
- Martin:
 - John's baptism was a new / innovative practice
 - John's baptism may be rooted in Judaic ritual cleansing
- Stein:
 - Jesus was sinless and did not undergo a "sinner's" baptism
 - The inclusion of this story was too risky to include in the Gospel narrative for it not to be true
- Hooker:
 - May have had semblance to Qumran practices
 - May be rooted in Nahman's cleansing
 - May be most concerned with a shared, communal experience

Initial Thoughts for Implication & Application:

- Was the baptismal scene meant to act as a re-emergence of the Spirit after a religious dry spell of hundreds of years? If so, what might this suggest about how we react to religious dry spells in our contexts?
- Does the baptismal scene evoke a sense that people were longing for God? Does Jesus fulfill longing and if so, how might it speak to the longings that people have today?
- If baptism was viewed more as a communal event and less as an individualized event, how might this affect our understandings and theologies of baptism today?
- A predominant thought in Jewish theology was that if Israel could just be sinless for one day, they would usher in the return of the Messiah, does the baptismal scene play into this theology? Even more so, does going to the wilderness to prepare for the Messiah's return come into play here? What about Qumran, who separated themselves to try to be sinless and to usher in the Messiah, might they factor into the equation to some degree? If any of this is the case, what might it suggest about how we think about the return of the Messiah in relation to baptism?