

Proof #3: Two Incontrovertible Witnesses Certify Jesus
Mark 1:9-11

We have accommodated this thing we are calling a crisis with great diligence and concern, but there comes a point where we have to begin the journey back to normal. You are hearing of protesters and governors and leaders all talking about reopening the economy and the return to some measure of normalcy. The return to normal is a process called renormalization. Renormalization can be a long, arduous process, but it is a fairly easy process to get started.

If you think of life as a pyramid, normal is the pyramid resting on its wide base. It takes a lot of effort to move a pyramid from resting on its base to standing on the point at its apex. Basically, it takes a powerful force to turn that pyramid upside down. That is what a crisis does, it moves the pyramid of life from its stable base to wobbling precariously on its pointy apex. Crisis is a destabilizing effect on a normally stable system. Crisis creates instability.

But think now about that pyramid. Gravity, the nature of things, pulls on the destabilized pyramid to fall back to rest, back to its normal, natural position. It is, by the nature of things, going to return to some state of normal. The question is, will it fall on its base or on one of its sides.

Crisis is hard, and final outcomes are not always easy to determine, but imagine if you want that pyramid to fall back on its base, how easy it would be to simply give it a tap in the right direction. It is easier to influence the direction of renormalization than it was to lift the pyramid into crisis in the first place. All you have to do is tap it hard enough in the right direction and the natural process will mostly take over from there.

It is time, at this point in our ongoing crisis that we give a hard, rightly aimed spiritual tap to the upended pyramid of our lives. It is time to influence the beginning and the course of our renormalization. It is time to do what we can to begin to return to normal.

My effort at influencing our return to normal is to return to the Gospel of Mark and our series entitled, *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*. You may remember in the early part of last week's resurrection Sunday message I mentioned there comes a time in the midst of crisis when, like Martha mourning the loss of Lazarus, she left the grieving visitors behind and went to find Jesus.

The best way back to normal, in the midst of any crisis, is to find Jesus! And so, to begin our return to normal we are going to take our eyes off the crisis for a moment and turn our eyes on Jesus.

This was the context and the immediate purpose for which the gospel of Mark was written in the first place, to turn the attention of the Christians in Rome from the crisis surrounding them to the Christ who embraced them. My desire for us today, and I believe the will of God and the mercy of Christ to us today, is to call our attention to the One who is true when our perception of the world is false, to the One who is powerful when we are powerless, to the One who is right when we are wrong, to the One who holds us and all the world in His hands, when our hands have emptied of all they held.

Let us turn our eyes upon Jesus, who will finish in us the work He began. Let us turn our eyes on Jesus, whose own eyes roam throughout the whole earth to show Himself mighty on behalf of those who fear Him. Let us turn the eyes of faith, the eyes of our heart, the eye of the mind upon Christ who is Light to the eyes, a Lamp to our feet, a Lifter of the Head, the Lover of our soul, the Sender of the Spirit, and the Savior of our heart.

Let us turn from uncertainty to Him who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Let us turn from our concern to the Him who makes known the beginning from the end. Let us turn from our own ideas of our future to the sovereign King of the universe who sits upon the throne of heaven and has the earth as his footstool.

Mark uses the opening scenes of his gospel to provide proof of a single fact upon which the entire Christian faith rests, Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And Jesus Christ the Son of God is worthy of your unshakeable love and devotion. The whole purpose of this whole gospel is to inspire each of us to acknowledge Jesus as the God's chosen Savior, the Son of God, and to love and take pleasure in Him.

In what we have labeled the first chapter of Mark's gospel he offers nine proofs that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. The first proof is that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament prophetic vision. The second proof is that Jesus delivers the promised Holy Spirit. The third proof is the one we are taking up today as we begin our return to normal: that Jesus receives the certification of three incontrovertible witnesses proves He is the Christ, the Son of God.

We have spoken about witnesses and testimonies and certifications before. During the COVID crisis we have looked for medical testing the means for determining whether a specific set of symptoms is influenza or COVID-19. We have counted on the evidence provided not only by a patient, but by a doctor, and a lab, and the guidelines of a government agency. We have settled for any one simple assertion. We choose to establish a certification on the basis of multiple credible witnesses.

This practice reflects the biblical principle of credible witnesses. **Deuteronomy 19:15 (ESV)** "*A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.*" The Bible calls for corroborating certification! And God always lives up to His own requirements.

Here in Mark, in the account of Jesus' baptism, we find three incontrovertible witnesses certifying Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Mark 1:9-11 (ESV) ⁹ *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* ¹⁰ *And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.* ¹¹ *And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*

Who are the three witnesses? The first witness is Jesus Himself. Jesus comes to be baptized by

John in the Jordan River. Bear in mind that John's baptism is a baptism of repentance. It is a public acknowledgment of personal and national sin. It is a confession of a wrong heart and the wrong attitudes and actions that come from being separated from the revealed will of God. And Jesus comes this day to participate in this baptism.

Mark gives no explanation to the inherent question. Why does the innocent, sinless Son of God, come to engage in a rite specifically related to repentance for sin? Mark doesn't tell us, but Matthew gives us a clue. When John asks Jesus the same question, why are you here, Jesus responds, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Here is Jesus, a previously unknown man from an obscure village in Galilee, looking for all the world like the most unlikely candidate to be the Christ, coming to John to be baptized and when John questions Him, Jesus simply says, "Leave it alone, John. Trust me. This is the right thing to do." What's going on here?

Let me take you back to the resurrection for a second and remind you that, had Jesus at any time in any way, in attitude or action, failed to follow the Father's will in anything, that tomb would still be occupied. Had Jesus misled anyone, had He lied about anything, had He deceived anyone, His sin would have earned Him the death penalty, just like it does the rest of us. He would have deserved death on the cross and the Father would not have raised Him from the dead. He would have left Him where He was getting what He deserved.

But, God raised Jesus from the dead because Jesus was faithful in all He said and did and was. And, not only was Jesus personally faithful to the Father's will for Him, he was the faithful representative of the whole human race.

Jesus' faithfulness to His mission to be the substitutionary, atoning sacrifice for the whole world begins to be seen at His baptism. Here the One who had no sin undergoes a baptism of repentance from sin, because all forgiveness of sin and deliverance from the consequence of sin begins, for human beings, with repentance. Jesus reveals in His actions here that those who experience the blessings of God's saving grace are those who in faith do what God declares to be right and good.

Why is it important that Jesus "fulfill all righteousness"? Because, while Jesus' death on the cross removes the guilt of sin from those who put their faith in Him, it is Jesus' life of obedience that counts as our living righteousness. It is Jesus' life of faithful obedience, as our representative, that counts as our righteousness in the eyes of God, when we put our faith in Christ. R.C. Sproul puts it like this, "Just as my sin is transferred to Jesus on the cross when I put my faith in Him, His righteousness is transferred to my account in the sight of God. So, when I stand before God on the judgment day, God is going to see Jesus and His righteousness, which will be my cover."

As the substitute for all those chosen and called by God to salvation through faith in Jesus, Jesus in His baptism acknowledges the human need for and divine requirement of repentance as an act of faithful obedience to the revealed will of God. The fact of Jesus' faithfulness to His

representative mission testifies to His identity as the Christ, the Son of God, a testimony that is finally affirmed by His resurrection from the dead.

The second witness in this scene to the identity of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, is the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sees descending on Himself like a dove. May I just say here that nowhere in Scripture is there an occasion when God gives or pours out His Spirit on anyone or anything that is not fully His. It is in the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus, in his human nature, will teach and live and preach and heal and feed and walk on water and raise the dead. All that Jesus the man does while He lives He does in the power of the Holy Spirit, the presence and power of the Spirit testifying to His identity as the Christ, the Son of God.

No mere man could do the things Jesus does. Only God can do these things and it is God the Holy Spirit who works the works in and through Jesus, who is the Christ, the Son of God. The presence of the Spirit certifies the identity of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

The third witness is the Father Himself. As Jesus comes up from being immersed He sees the heavens torn open, just like the curtain in the temple is ripped from top to bottom when He dies on the cross, the heavens are ripped apart, the Spirit descends, and the Father speaks. If ever there were a moment in the history of ever that all creation should hold its breath in anticipatory silence, this is that moment. When the Father speaks, Jesus will either be rejected as a false Messiah or affirmed as God's uniquely chosen and empowered Christ. The identity of Jesus, as well as His mission in the world, rises or falls on what God the Father says next.

"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." God lays claim to Jesus as His Son, the One Who shares God's identity and God's attributes. It is a powerful affirmation that carries two powerful implications.

First, when the Father declares Jesus to be His own beloved Son, God warns the world to look on Jesus and remember whose Son this is. Jesus is both the natural son of God and the chosen Son of God. He is affirmed to belong to God by birth and by choice. And don't you forget it!

The second implication is wonderfully personal for each of us. While affirming the identity of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, the Father is setting the stage for understanding our adoption. By nature, sin separates every human being from God. We are not the sons or daughters of God by nature and by birth. But, listen to these words of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:

Galatians 4:4-7 (ESV) ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

God sent His Son so that we might receive the adoptions as sons. God the Father, at Jesus' baptism, spoke His choice of Jesus the man as His Son. God the Son was always the Son, but Jesus the man, in his human nature, is the Son of God's choosing. God's declaration of Jesus'

sonship foreshadows the declaration of affirmation God makes over anyone who puts their faith in Jesus: “You are my son. You are my daughter. You are the child of my choosing. You belong to me, and I love you!”

God the Son, God the Spirit, God the Father each an incontrovertible witness, certify by their testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. What makes their testimony incontrovertible, undeniable, irrefutable, unimpeachable? It is because God meets His own criteria. In giving the Law to Moses, God declares what must happen to a false witness.

Deuteronomy 19:18-21 (ESV) ¹⁸ *The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, ¹⁹ then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. ²⁰ And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. ²¹ Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*

To bear false witness is an evil subject to extreme judgment. For God to lie and misrepresent Jesus in any way is to deny His very nature as God and that would cause Him to cease to be God.

The certification of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, rests on the incontrovertible evidence of the Person and Nature of God Himself.

Now, as we close, I want to answer an important question, one that I hope you are already asking. The question is this, what does God’s affirmation that Jesus is in fact the Christ, the Son of God, mean personally for any of us? Is this simply a theological, doctrinal assertion, or does the fact of Jesus’ identity have an application in our lives?

Let me give you three implications the divinely confirmed identity of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God has for your life. First, there really is no other avenue to peace with God than Jesus. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” No one comes into relationship with God except through faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God, faith in His life, faith in His teaching, faith in His death, faith in His resurrection, faith in His person and purpose. No one comes to God except through Christ, and we must accept Jesus’ declaration as the singular means to peace with God because Jesus is the divinely affirmed Christ, the Son of God, whom we know has not lied or misrepresented God because God raised Him from the dead.

If you want true peace with God you must put your faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Second, there really is no other avenue to inclusion with Christ than total surrender in faith and practice. I want to caution you here, based on the affirmed identity of Jesus to avoid a trap many seem to have fallen in to. Jesus called not just for belief that He exists, but total faith in Him and surrender to Him. Listen to His words,

Luke 14:26-27 (ESV) ²⁶ *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even*

his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Jesus, affirmed by God as the Christ, the Son of God, sets as criteria for discipleship, total surrender of the heart and affections to Him in both faith AND practice.

Finally, there really is no other avenue to Christlikeness than faithfulness. Jesus came, and he made disciples. When Jesus returned to heaven, he sent His disciples to make disciples. The servant is not above the Master, nor the student above the Teacher, nor the sheep above the Shepherd. If we would be like Jesus, then be and do what Jesus was and did.

Moreover, Jesus gave as a commandment to His disciples, that our lives should be faithfully characterized as His was. Jesus, the divinely declared and affirmed Christ, the Son of God, said, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." There really is no other avenue to Christlikeness, the goal of faith, than faithfulness.

God has promised a means for each of us to be restored to Him through His Son, Jesus. He makes a way for us to be included in Christ through faith. He offers an opportunity to be like Jesus by putting faith into obedience as faithfulness.

Where are you in your relationship to Jesus, the affirmed Christ, the Son of God? Do you have forgiveness of sin and new life through faith in Christ? You have only to believe in Him, trust Him, put your faith in Him to follow Him.

Are you trusting Christ as your Savior but you're wondering what's next? Study who Jesus is and what Jesus taught us to do, and do it. God's plan for your life in Christ is laid out for you in His word. God leads us by His Spirit through His word, so knowing and doing the word is the path to spiritual maturity in Christ.

Have you put your faith in Jesus and are pursuing a life of faithfulness. Paul says, "Do so more and more." Peter says,

2 Peter 1:5-8 (ESV) ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.