



## The Gospel of Mark Where the Good News Begins

Mark 1:1-11

David Sunday      October 7, 2018

I get excited whenever we turn to one of the four Gospels, because this is where we come face to face with Jesus. It's one thing to know the doctrines of Christianity. It's another thing to know Christ, behold His beauty and see Him as He is. The four Gospels are here to show us Christ. So turn with me to the Gospel of Mark.

Church tradition tells us that Mark was a close follower of the Apostle Peter. Peter told Mark all about what Jesus did so that Mark could write this Gospel. Most scholars believe this was the first of the four Gospels to be written. It's the shortest, it's the sharpest, and it's meant to grab us, making us face the truth about Jesus, the Kingdom of God, ourselves and repentance.

We're launching into a new series of messages that ultimately will take us all the way through this wonderful Gospel. I had the privilege of reading the whole Gospel in its entirety this week and was moved deeply by Jesus in this Gospel. I'm looking forward to preaching these words. So let's listen with joyous expectancy as we read Mark 1:1-11:

<sup>1</sup> *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

<sup>2</sup> *As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, <sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"*

<sup>4</sup> *John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

<sup>9</sup> *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*

This is God's Word. Let's bow before Him in prayer.

Our great God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thank You for inviting us into the eternal love that You have enjoyed within the Godhead from all eternity. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for coming and becoming one of us so that we might enter into Your love. We thank You, Lord Jesus, that You walked in this beautiful world that You created and that we have ruined through our sin. Thank You that You came to restore all that was broken, all that was damaged, all that had been undone through our rebellion.

We praise You, Jesus, for giving us words like this in the Gospel that reveal You to our hearts. I thank You, Lord Jesus, for the privilege of speaking of You this morning. Lord, there is no one more worthy than You. There's no one of whom I would rather preach than You, Jesus. You are lovely in all Your ways, and I pray that I would speak of You in a way that honors You in the power of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

I want to ask you a few very simple questions. In fact you might feel these are too simple. You might be tempted to tune out and think, "Oh, I know all about this." But I beg you, don't do that now, because these questions are the most decisive questions you could ever answer. Your answer will shape the way you live every part of your life and will set the trajectory for where you will spend eternity.

The questions I want to ask you are these: Who is Jesus? Do you know Him? How well do you know Him?

The man who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace" put the question like this:

"What think you of Christ?" is the test  
To try both your state and your scheme  
You cannot be right in the rest  
Unless you think rightly of Him  
As Jesus appears in your view  
As He is beloved or not  
So God is disposed to you  
And mercy or wrath are your lot

[*"What Think Ye of Christ?"* by John Newton]

What think you of Christ? There's no more important question than that. Mark begins his Gospel by giving us the richest of introductions to Jesus. He lets us hear four different voices

testifying to Who Jesus is. First, the voice of Mark, then the voice of the prophets, the voice of John the Baptist, followed by the voice of God Himself.

### **Mark tells us Who Jesus is (Mark 1:1)**

Let's start in verse one with the voice of Mark. Mark tells us here Who Jesus is. The first thing Mark wants us to see is that the coming of Jesus marks a new beginning, *arche* in Greek. It's the first word of Mark's Gospel: beginning. Just like at the beginning of Genesis, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...*" Or the beginning of the Gospel of John, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" Mark's Gospel begins with this word "beginning."

Mark is not just telling us, "This is the first thing I want to tell you." No, he's telling us, "This is where the good news begins." One commentator describes the power of that word "beginning" like this: "For Mark, the introduction of Jesus is no less momentous than the creation of the world, for in Jesus a new creation is at hand. A new creation has dawned in Jesus."

Now, if you were a God-fearing person in the first century, living under the tyrannical rule of Rome breathing down your neck, you might feel like you're doing the best you can just to survive day by day. You've heard stories about how God moved mightily in the past, how He parted the Red Sea after bringing plagues on Egypt, how He gave His law at Mt. Sinai, as well as miracles and wonders that He had done in the past. But now that's all ancient history for you.

It's been a long time since anyone has heard the voice of God—400 years since a prophet has spoken. It's been a long time since anyone has seen a miracle. That's what it felt like for many a believer in the first century and I think that's what it feels like for many of us in the 21st century. We believe in God, but we don't expect to see Him do a whole lot in our lifetime. We believe in the future promises, but we're not experiencing a whole lot in the present. So we settle in. We do our best to just keep our heads above water, just trying to survive the daily grind. We're no longer looking for the God of Isaiah Who does awesome things that we do not expect, Who comes down and the mountains quake at His presence, Who acts for those who wait for Him. We're not thinking that this God is going to act in our lives today. Well, Mark is telling us, "If you're feeling that God is far off and removed from your daily life, take a fresh look at Who Jesus is."

Do you realize that when Jesus came into the world God was starting a new creation? Jason Meyer says, "A new day and a new hope has come bursting on the scene with great blazing glory that pierces the darkness." Friends, when Jesus comes, the gospel comes. The gospel is not just a

set of propositions or ideas—the gospel is about a Person. Good news begins with Jesus. Without Jesus, there is no good news. Without Jesus, we are all doomed. Jesus Himself is the good news.

At the introduction to his English New Testament, William Tyndale described the gospel as “good, merry, glad and joyful tidings that makes a person’s heart glad and makes him sing and dance and leap for joy.” At the age of 42, William Tyndale gave his life for the gospel. Friends, we would not be willing to give our lives for something that does not make our hearts glad, something that doesn’t make us sing or dance or leap for joy. The gospel is that kind of news. It’s joyous news.

So I want you to imagine that as you were coming in to church this morning I happened to meet you at the door. We had a few minutes to talk, so I asked you gently, with care, “Do you feel the need for a renewing, refreshing work of God in your life today? Are you enjoying Jesus today? Are you rejoicing in the new creation that He’s begun in you? Or do you sense the need for God to do something fresh in you, something to rekindle the joy of your salvation, something that will revive your faith, hope and love?”

Let’s say I asked you that and your answer was, “Yes, I do feel the need for something new, for God to revive me, for God to rekindle my joy.” If that was your answer, this is the next question I would ask you: “Have you asked God to do that for you? Have you asked Him to rekindle your joy in Jesus?”

Sometimes when my joy is waning, I look around at my circumstances and think, “If only that would change, then I’d really have joy.” Or sometimes I even look at people in my life and think, “They’re the reason I don’t have joy. If they would change, then I’d have joy.” I don’t always turn to God and ask Him to renew me, to refresh me, to return me to my first love, to capture my heart afresh with the glory of Jesus.

Mark is telling us, “In Jesus, God is beginning something new and it’s good news. It’s joyous news.” This Gospel of Mark is here to produce fresh joy in Jesus. It’s here to help us shape our lives by the life of Jesus, so that His life in us holds increasing sway over us and we become more and more like Him.

Mark is drawing us into Jesus here in this first verse and he wants us to know three things about Him: His name, His title and His identity. His name is Jesus, which is a Greek name for Joshua, which means “God is Savior.” In the first century, Jesus was a really common name. It might disappoint you a little bit to learn that Jesus is not the only one who had this name. But what it tells us is that He was a common man, one of us, a carpenter in Nazareth, living in a specific place and time. People saw Him with their eyes, heard Him with their ears, touched Him with their hands and ate with Him in their homes. He was a real man, like one of us.

His name was common, but Jesus was no ordinary man. Many people have recognized how extraordinary the man from Nazareth was. Even a guy like Albert Einstein, in all his brilliance, when he was writing his reflections on spirituality, said, “As a child, I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I’m a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene.” I love that—the luminous figure of the Nazarene who enthralled him. “No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. How different, for instance, is the impression which we receive from an account of legendary heroes of antiquity. They all lack the authentic vitality of Jesus.” That was Einstein’s impression of this Man. But sadly, you can see the luminous figure of Jesus the Nazarene, you can acknowledge His authentic vitality—and still fail to realize Who He really is. Einstein himself never did confess the rest of what Mark tells us in verse one about Who Jesus is.

His name is Jesus, but He has a title which is Christ. Christ is not Jesus’ last name—it’s His calling, His role, His vocation. The title “Christ” tells us that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Anointed Prophet Who brings us God’s final word. He is the Anointed Priest Whose sacrifice on the cross puts an end to all other sacrifices. He is the Anointed King Whose reign will never end, Who delivers His people from all their enemies. He is the long-awaited Messiah.

Later on in Mark 8, Jesus will ask His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter will say, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” That’s the third thing Mark wants us to see about Jesus: His identity. He is the Son of God. Do you see that in verse one? The Son of God takes us beyond the title Messiah. This is a claim to outright divinity. Jesus is God. One commentator says this: “Jesus’ identity as the Son of God is the chief artery of His gospel.”

This is the primary thing Mark wants us to see about Jesus. In Mark 1:11, God Himself is going to call Jesus His Son. In Mark 3, demons are going to call Jesus the Son of God. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus Himself is aware of the fact that He is the Son of God. At the very end of the Gospel, in Mark 15:39, we read, “*And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’*”

So Mark wants us to understand that God is beginning a new work here. God is bringing us joy in Jesus—a real man—Who is the Christ—God’s Messiah; Who is the Son of God—God Himself.

### **The prophets tell us Who Jesus is (Mark 1:2-3)**

Mark also wants us to know that this God is beginning a whole new work with Jesus coming into the world. This new work is connected to everything God has been doing in the Old Testament. You’re never going to understand Who Jesus is unless you understand that He’s

completing what God began in Israel in the Old Testament. It's impossible to unhitch the gospel from the Old Testament. If you unhitch the gospel from the Old Testament, you will fail to grasp Who Jesus is. So Mark moves from his own testimony to the prophets' testimony in verses two and three. The prophets tell us Who Jesus is.

Mark quotes from both Malachi and Isaiah here, but he puts the emphasis on Isaiah, the prophet. Do you see that in verse two? He takes us to Isaiah 40, where Isaiah is speaking to God's people who are going into exile. He's telling them that when they're in exile, they're going to hear a voice crying in the wilderness who will prepare the way of the Lord. Who will send this messenger? Verse two: *"I send my messenger..."* God says. Before whom will He send Him? *"Before your face..."*—before the people who are hearing these words. Who is this One Who is coming? He is the Messiah. And what do the prophets call the Messiah? Look at verse three: *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord."*

Do you see what Isaiah calls Him? Not just Messiah, but Lord. Isaiah is telling us that the coming of Jesus into this world is no less than the coming of the Lord God Almighty Himself. Jesus' way is the Lord's way. Jesus' work is God's work. Jesus is Lord. Notice how three times in these two verses we see the word "way" or "path" being repeated. Mark is emphasizing here that the gospel of Jesus is a way. It's a path. It's a new way of living. When you trust in Jesus, He transforms your life practically and experientially. He changes the way you think, the way you behave and the way you love.

So the gospel is not just about receiving forgiveness of sins. The gospel is also about experiencing a new beginning, so that you can live with a new Master, with a new purpose and a new heart. So you can walk on a new path that will ultimately lead all the way to the cross. That's what the prophets are telling us in verses two and three.

### **John the Baptist tells us Who Jesus is (Mark 1:4-8)**

Now let's listen to the testimony of the messenger, the forerunner, that the prophet said would come—John the Baptist. We hear him in verses four through eight. He tells us Who Jesus is. Where do we find him? Out in the wilderness, at the Jordan River—the boundary of the Promised Land. In the Bible, the wilderness is a place of struggle. It's a place of repentance from sin. But it's also a place of new beginnings. For Israel, the wilderness was the place where God brought them out of slavery in Egypt and He initiated a new covenant relationship with His people—a relationship of love.

God spoke later in the history of Israel through His prophets and said that He would again do that kind of work for His people in the wilderness. Listen to what Hosea the prophet says. He says after the people are in exile, God's going to do something among His people. Hosea describes God's voice as the voice of the Lover wooing His people to Himself. God says this in Hosea 2:14-15: *"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her... And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt."*

That's what's happening here with John the Baptist. God is calling His people back into the wilderness. He is alluring them to Himself so that He can renew a right relationship of love with His people. How does this relationship of love begin? How does this new exodus, this new redemption from slavery to sin begin? It begins with repentance, with turning away from your sin and from everything that keeps you from loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, embracing God with all your heart.

John the Baptist is saying to the people who are coming to him from all over Judea and Jerusalem, "You need a bath. You stink. You need cleansing from your sin." If you're listening to John the Baptist and if you're seeing in Jesus what John saw in Jesus, you will repent and return to God. You will change the way you think and your attitude. You'll commit yourself totally to serving Him and relying on His strength. That's what's happening in Mark 1:5. People are coming from all over the place. They're being baptized by John in the River Jordan and they're confessing their sins.

Then look at verse six, where Mark tells us what John the Baptist ate and what he wore. What did John the Baptist wear? *"He was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist."* It was scratchy and rugged. What did he eat? Locusts—they're great for protein—and wild honey to wash the locusts down. That was his diet. If you were an Israelite and you saw John the Baptist clothed like this, out in the wilderness, you would think immediately of the prophet Elijah. We read in 2 Kings 1 that he was a prophet who wore a garment of hair with a belt of leather about his waist. And you would think of Malachi, who said 400 years earlier in Malachi 4:5, *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes."*

Mark is telling us here that John the Baptist was that coming Elijah. Mark wants us to focus here on how John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus and he did so in two ways. He had two main activities out in the wilderness. He preached and he baptized. Look at verse seven. "And he preached..." That's the first thing John the Baptist did. He didn't start a discussion group. He didn't make gentle suggestions. He was a herald. After a king won a victory in battle, a herald

would go out into the territory the king had conquered, announcing, “The king is coming.” Everyone would be called to surrender, to submit to the rule of that coming king.

That’s what preaching is. Preaching is heralding. It’s not entertaining. It’s not supposed to be a man’s powerful oratory that impresses you. Preaching the gospel of the Kingdom is a summons. It’s a command from an ambassador of the King. That’s what I am to you today. I am an ambassador of King Jesus, announcing that the King has come. He has made war against sin and Satan. He has made war against everything that stands in rebellion to His good and gracious rule.

Jesus is a good King. He is a mighty King, but He is also a King Who will tolerate no rivals. You want to get yourself in line with King Jesus. If your life is going in the opposite direction, if your life is rebelling against His rule, it’s time to repent and believe the gospel. That’s the message we’re seeing today. Listen, friends. You don’t make Jesus Lord of your life. Jesus is Lord of all. You don’t make Him Lord—He is Lord. Jesus doesn’t ask permission to rule over our lives—He has all authority in heaven and on earth. So repentance is the only sane response to the authority of King Jesus.

I love how John describes the esteem and the adoration and the honor that he holds in his heart toward King Jesus in verse seven: “*After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.*” If you were a Jewish person and you had a servant who was also a Jew, you were not allowed to ask your Jewish servant to untie the straps of your sandals. That would be too menial of a task even for a servant to perform. You’d have to get a Gentile to do that for you—and that would be a low, low thing. What John the Baptist is saying is that Jesus is so great, so mighty, so wonderful, that even the lowliest task in service to Him we’re not worthy to perform. That’s the esteem John has for Jesus. “I’m not worthy to do the lowliest of tasks for You, dear Jesus.”

So he preached—and he also baptized. I want you to notice in verse eight the difference between John’s baptism and Jesus’ baptism. The difference can be seen in what they used to do their baptisms. John the Baptist baptizes with water, bringing an external cleansing. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit, Who brings inward washing, cleansing, renewal day by day from the inside out. He washes us and renews us by His Holy Spirit.

So friends, when you repent and believe in Jesus, He comes and establishes His Kingdom inside you. He doesn’t just wash you with water—He immerses you in His Holy Spirit, with His Spirit filling you in the innermost part of your being. So baptism with the Holy Spirit is not a second experience that you are supposed to look for in addition to your conversion. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is a description of what Jesus does for every believer when we are converted.

Baptism with the Spirit is a gift of grace that God intends to be transformative over every part of our lives. Because we've been baptized in the Spirit, we should experience Jesus' luminous vitality in our lives day by day. The Holy Spirit becomes the air we breathe, like we sing: "It's Your breath in our lungs." He becomes the very air we breathe. He becomes the fire in our hearts. Jesus says, "Whoever believes in Me, whoever comes to Me and drinks..."—that's what it means to believe in Jesus. It's drinking of His rich resources. "We're thirsty for You, Jesus. We need You Jesus." If we come to Him and drink, Jesus says, "Out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-39). He's speaking of His Holy Spirit there, ever replenishing, ever fresh, ever vital.

This means is there is no reason for any of us to stay dry or stagnant or joyless in the Christian life. If we're lacking in joy, it's not because of our circumstances. It's not because of our surroundings. It's not because of someone else. It's because we're not coming to Jesus and drinking deeply of Him. We're quenching the flow of His Holy Spirit in our lives. We're doing what Jeremiah 2:12-13 says. We're forsaking the fountain of living waters and hewing for ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Jesus gives His Holy Spirit. Friends, that's something only God can do. So John the Baptist is telling us again, "Jesus is God."

### **God Himself tells us Who Jesus is (Mark 1:9-11)**

And this brings us to the last testimony—the climactic testimony in verses 9-11. God Himself tells us Who Jesus is. Verse nine: "*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth...*"—just a small, podunk town in Galilee. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Yes, Someone good has come. And He "*was baptized by John in the Jordan.*" This should startle us. Why does Jesus need to enter into the waters of baptism? It was a baptism of repentance for sin. Jesus didn't have any sins He needed to repent of. So why did He enter into this baptism?

What Jesus is showing us here, friends, is that He's identifying with us. As low as our sin has taken us, Jesus is willing to go even deeper. Whatever it takes to lift us out of the depths of our depravity up to the heights of His heaven, Jesus is saying, "I'll go there. I'll do that. I will identify with My people fully."

Now, when we are baptized, we say we are identifying with Jesus. When we go down under the water, we're saying we identify with Him in His death for us, becoming dead to sin through our faith in Him. And when we come up out of the water, we're saying, "Jesus, I identify with You in Your resurrection. You have given me new life, a new beginning. I'm going to follow You."

But before we can identify with Jesus, Jesus first had to identify with us. When He was baptized, He was saying, “Dear ones, I am committed. I will bear your sins and sorrows. I will make them My very own. I will bear that burden to Calvary, where I will suffer and die alone.” His baptism is His commitment: “I will not turn back from whatever it takes to deliver My people from their sins.”

So it’s wonderful that Jesus enters into these waters of baptism. When He does, and when He comes up out of that water, Mark tells us He experiences three things that signify that God’s eternal end-time Kingdom has come and been inaugurated on earth. What are these three signs? Number one, the heavens were torn open. Do you see that in verse ten? “*And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open.*” It’s what Isaiah longed for when he prayed in Isaiah 64:1, “*Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down.*”

Matthew and Luke both tell us the heavens were opened. Mark says Jesus saw the heavens being torn open. That’s significant. When something is torn, it will never be the same again. A permanent tear has taken place. You’ve heard the phrase, “All hell is breaking loose.” Here in the words of one writer, something more wondrous is happening: all heaven is breaking loose. There is only one other time in the Gospel of Mark when this word ‘torn’ is used. It’s used at the crucifixion of Jesus. When Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed His last breath, we read in Mark 15:38, “*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*”

So with the coming of Jesus, this invisible veil that separates heaven from earth has been torn open. No longer is heaven a place that’s far away from us and inaccessible to us. Heaven has come down. A new and living way has been opened up and we can draw near to God because of this.

The second sign is the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove. Just like at the creation when the Spirit of God hovered—or the Hebrew word is fluttered—over the chaotic waters in Genesis 1. That same Spirit now is descending on Jesus. The Greek wording is even stronger. It says the Spirit was descending “into” Jesus. So Jesus is the One Who will be completely filled, equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, the Father speaks to His Son. Look at verse 11: “*And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’*” Only here and at the Transfiguration do we hear the divine voice speaking to Jesus. And both times God acknowledges Jesus as His Son. The Father tells His Son, “I love You and I am pleased with You.”

Friends, we’re getting a glimpse here of the beauty and wonder of Trinitarian love—the love that exists between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This scene defies explanation. I want you to see how Tim Keller attempts to describe what we’re seeing here:

If you find somebody you adore, someone for whom you would do anything, and you discover that this person feels the same way about you, does that feel good? It's sublime! That's what God has been enjoying for all eternity. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are pouring love and joy and adoration into the other, each one serving the other. They are infinitely seeking one another's glory and so God is infinitely happy. If this is ultimate reality, if this is what the God Who made the universe is like, then this truth bristles and explodes with life-shaping, glorious implications for us. If this world was made by a triune God, relationships of love are what life is really all about.

If this world was made by God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit, Who for all eternity have enjoyed a communion of perfect love, then relationships of love are what life is really all about. Friends, God didn't create us because He needed the companionship. God the Father, Son and Spirit have had that perfect joy, love and communion from all eternity. But God created us so that we could enter into that love, so that we could enter into that joy, so that He could share His divine joy and love with us. He's inviting us in to that glorious, joyous love that has forever existed within the Trinity.

How do you enter into that joy? Well, you repent and believe that Jesus is Who Mark says He is. He's the beginning of a new creation, the Bearer of good news of great joy. He's the Savior, the anointed King and the Son of God. You repent and believe that Jesus is Who the prophets said He is. He is the Lord Who makes a way in the wilderness for His people to experience deliverance from their enemies and new life and freedom in His presence. That's how you enter into His joy.

You repent and believe that Jesus is Who John the Baptist said He is. He's the One Who forgives all the sins of those who repent and believe. He's the One Who is so mighty we're not worthy to untie His sandals. He's the One Who baptizes us with His Holy Spirit so that we are cleansed from deep within so that out of our innermost beings will flow rivers of living water. You enter into that joy by repenting and believing that Jesus is Who His Father proclaimed Him to be: the Son of His love from all eternity with Whom He is perfectly pleased.

And here's the wonder of it all. If you repent and believe in Jesus, God will say to you today what He said to Jesus at His baptism. That's the good news of great joy. When we receive Jesus the Christ as our Savior and King, the Father sees us, not as we are in ourselves, but as we are united to His beloved Son. He loves us just as He loves His Son. He is pleased with us, just as He is pleased with His Son.

That means the world to people who haven't really known the love of a father. That means the world to people who have seen more of their father's anger and rejection than their father's

embrace and words of love. There are a lot of people in the world like this today. I read about a famous movie maker who had a huge legal dispute and a fallout with his long-time mentor and guide. The younger man couldn't handle criticism, so he ended up rejecting his mentor who had helped him so much. When it was all over, a close friend of the man summed up the real problem this way: "It was all about an ungenerous father and a son looking for affirmation and love."

There are so many souls in the world like that today. But if you are united to Jesus, this is where the good news begins. You don't have to approach God as you would a stranger. "I'm sorry. May I have a moment of your time, a little of your attention?" No. You can come to God the way a child runs into the arms of her father who delights in her. If you trust in Jesus, there's a place at the table for you. You don't have to stay back at a distance. You don't have to hide in the shadows of your sin and shame. You don't have to be afraid to draw near. You've been forgiven and you've been cleansed. You've been baptized with the Holy Spirit. You've been welcomed home to the Father's embrace. There's a place at the table for you.

As you come, trusting in Jesus, the Son of God's love, believe that the Father says to you what He said to His Son. Think about this as you come to the Communion Table. Could you put your name in this blank and believe that the Father in heaven is actually saying to you who are united to His Son, "\_\_\_\_\_, you are My dear, dear child. I love you. I'm delighted with you." That's true for those who are in Christ. "Maria, Susan, you are My dear, dear child. I love you. I'm delighted with you." That's what Jesus has opened up for us—that new kind of relationship with His Father. He becomes our Father and we enter into His love.

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