

## Title: “Dessert before the Meal”

Chris Ryan

Mark 1:4-11

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**Lesson:** *Christ’s baptism and movement to the cross makes available the efficacy of our own baptism. His baptism is a visible presentation of our own. We are challenged to go forward in our own path in faith and knowledge that we are adopted sons and daughters of God.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Just ask 5-year-old Emma and she’ll tell you: Thursdays are her most favorite days for dinner. Mondays are good, too because it’s pasta night, oh and Friday is always pizza night, but Thursday.... Thursday is crazy night. You never know what will be served. Sometimes it’s breakfast.... for dinner! Sometimes it a picnic in the living room. You just never know. But her favorite one is, by far, when she gets to eat dessert *before* she eats her dinner. She still can’t comprehend how that can actually work, how she can even be *allowed* to eat dessert first without getting in trouble, but she can and that’s why it’s her favorite.

Here in the “adult world” we rarely get to eat dessert before dinner. The end comes, well, at the end. You must first go to school before you can receive a diploma; you must first earn your money before you receive it; you must first travel before you reach your destination, and the list goes on. The end is always the end. But not in today’s passage. Like so many examples we find in the Bible, God doesn’t act in expected ways. He doesn’t conform to our way of thinking. Instead, he turns that all on its head - every assumption, every expectation, every norm that we try to apply to him.

- Israel believed God would come as a warrior and rescue them from earthly captivity - God came as a servant and rescued them from eternal damnation.
- The Romans and Jews believed that the crucifixion of Christ was the end of the story - it was only the beginning.

And in our world today, how often do we think this same way? That salvation is earned after a lifetime of obedience to God? That the prize is waiting for us if and when we successfully finish the race? In the spirit of this message, I offer you dessert before the meal: Your salvation has already been secured. You have already been saved. It is not something that comes at the end of your path and it doesn’t depend on you doing anything to earn it.

That’s the dessert. That’s the good news of the gospel. Switching metaphors we can talk about this in the context of a race. Like Emma, we find that God has placed us in the destination; we didn’t have to travel the path first. He just set us down across the finish line - we didn’t even have to break the ribbon! Christ did all of that - he ran the race, he traveled the path to the cross, he crossed the finish line, and he placed us in the winner’s circle with him.

But how? How did this all *actually* happen? We have to back up a few thousand years to the banks of the Jordon River. It was there that

<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."

The path prepared; the race about to begin. It was not any race, but *the* race. And it would start in an unexpected way: the baptism of Jesus.

<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."

God was speaking *about* Jesus but he wasn't really speaking *to* him as much as he was speaking to *us*. Jesus knew who he was; he needed no validation from God. He didn't need to be baptized, he didn't need to see the Holy Spirit descend upon him, and he didn't need to hear these words from God, his Father. It was done for the benefit of those who witnessed the event. It was done for *our* benefit. God's message to us was clear that day: "Take note! God has come to Earth and is about to travel to the cross to win our freedom from sin and death. He is about to do what we cannot and then transfer that victory over to us!" What he said, and what everyone saw all contributed to God's message to us. The voice, the dove, everything....

And Christ's baptism serves as the source of baptismal power for our own. In our baptism the heavens that were closed to us are torn open. They are not carefully parted, gently set aside. Scripture is clear: they are torn open. You have watched small children open Christmas presents; and I visualize it the same way. They tear them open as if nothing were more important, that time itself were an enemy. Every second that passes is another second spent separated from their precious gift. It is with this zeal that God tears open the heavens. It was as if he can't wait any longer to send his mercy down to us, to send the Holy Spirit down to us. And the holy spirit doesn't descend into us softly, like a dove, like it did with Jesus. With the same zeal that tore open the heavens, he sends the holy spirit into us like lightning. What happened at the Jordan provides for us heaven's view of our own baptism. It is what the angels see; what we cannot. It is what they hear; what we cannot.

You see, when Christ was baptized the heavens were tore open, the Spirit was sent, and God spoke "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

And in our own baptism the heavens are torn open, the Spirit is sent, and God speaks: "You are my beloved child; *because of Christ*, I am well pleased."

We have been given the dessert. We have been set down across the finish line and we were never asked to run the race! With God's spoken word he adopts us into his family. But he doesn't leave us in the winner's circle. He sends us out on our own journey with faith and assurance that the heavens are open to us, that he is accessible to us, and that the Holy Spirit is alive in us. He sends us out into the world with assurance that we do not travel alone. Christ leads us, protects us, encourages us, and sustains us.

We journey into the world with our own cross, a cross that God himself fashioned just for us. The journey is difficult, painful, impossible to complete on our own. We are challenged about our beliefs about who God is. We are questioned about where he is in a world like ours. But we continue on. We don't back down, don't back away, don't look for a smoother path than where Christ leads us. We don't hide difficult teachings of him. We don't ignore his commands when they don't serve us. We don't love everyone except our enemies. We do what God did for us:

We tear open the clouds of heaven in our actions towards other people. We show others that God is dying - strike that - *has died* to reconnect to them. We speak God's word to them: "You are my beloved child; *because of Christ*, I am well pleased." Like the baptism of Jesus was to us, our *daily baptism*, our *daily response to God*, our *daily walk on our journey with Christ*, should be visual representation of their baptism. It should drive them to the same river where they can experience what we already have!

Here I am, Lord. Use me!

Please pray with me.

I, the Lord of wind and flame  
I will tend the poor and lame  
I will set a feast for them  
My hand will save  
Finest bread I will provide  
'Till their hearts be satisfied  
I will give my life to them  
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord  
Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard You calling in the night  
I will go, Lord  
If You lead me  
I will hold Your people in my heart