



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

# Turning Points

## Mark 1:9–15

<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 opening 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."*

<sup>12</sup> *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.* <sup>13</sup> *And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.*

<sup>14</sup> *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,* <sup>15</sup> *and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

In today's Gospel we see several turning points. The first is a turning point in the life of Jesus, detailing His temptation in the wilderness and the beginning of His public ministry. Prior to this time Jesus was very much a private figure. But from this point on, *every little thing* about His life would be lived in the public eye. "The Son of Man came to serve," Jesus would later say. And in that service of preaching, teaching, and healing, Jesus was delivering lost humanity from the power of the devil, until finally, it involved the giving of His life as a ransom for many. That is the service, the ministry, the very public ministry, that we see Him enter upon in our Gospel today.

This was no easy road for Jesus. Yes, He was the Son of His *dear Father* – truly Immanuel, God with us – but He was also true man, born of a human mother. And because of His humanity, He suffered all the weaknesses of human flesh, except sin. So, right off the bat – immediately following His baptism – He embarked on forty days in the wilderness. "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness," Mark tells us. Why? Because it was necessary, divinely necessary; Jesus was compelled by the Spirit of God – not against His will, but in perfect unity and agreement – to undergo this time of testing.

For how long? Forty days. Can you imagine spending six weeks alone out in the middle of nowhere. What do you think your chances would be for *survival*? And Jesus wasn't alone, was He? No. Wild animals were there, threatening His safety. And Satan was there, tempting and tormenting Him. Believe you me, this was no walk in the park for Jesus.



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***Sermon for Lent 1***

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The next thing we read is that "after John was arrested," Jesus traveled the countryside proclaiming the gospel of God. Did you catch that? After John was arrested and imprisoned, Jesus started preaching the same kind of a message that got John arrested and imprisoned. Jesus never played it safe. He didn't weigh His words so as not to offend anyone. He almost seems to go out of His way to criticize the rich and powerful, calling them out for their offenses. His was the way of the cross from the very beginning of His public ministry. His was a path of suffering, of hardship – ultimately leading to His own arrest and death.

Why did He choose this path? Did He just get a kick out of poking the bear? Was He just a rabble-rouser, like the Pharisees accused Him of being? *Looking around* at the lay of the land, you and I wouldn't have taken that path. In truth, we couldn't take it. Who of us has the wisdom, the insight, the strength, and the compassion to take such a path? No. Someone else had to take that path for us – someone stronger, someone wiser, someone with a greater sense of purpose and dogged determination. Jesus went that way for the rest of us – for you. For you, Jesus was tempted, prevailing where you and I would surely have failed – and still do. For you, He preached and kept on preaching, even when so many didn't want to listen, and that includes you and me. For you, He risked death, and suffered death, that so by His death He would bring life to the world. Jesus went the way of the cross for the sinners of His day, and for the sinners of today, like you and me.

And this is where it began, with His temptation and early preaching ministry. For that reason, we can say that this was a turning point in the life of Jesus, for it was the beginning of His public ministry.

Secondly, the coming of Christ marks a turning point in history. We see that reflected in the words He chooses. "The time is fulfilled," He says. "The kingdom of God is at hand." This is a turning point in the history of the world. Everything *beyond and before* was leading up to this moment. All of human history, reached its fulfillment in the coming of Christ.

This even extends backward to the very beginning. Think of Adam and Eve in the garden, when they succumbed to the devil's temptation. As a result, sin entered into the world, and the curse came along with it. Because of sin, gardens became deserts. Because of sin, the animals, which had been brought to Adam to be named, became wild beasts. Because of sin – Adam's sin, our sin – death fell on the human race.

But God told Adam and Eve, *something's coming*. Indeed some *One* was coming: Jesus – the new man, the second Adam, the one who would get it right. This time it happened in a desert, not a garden. This time, Jesus overcame Satan's temptation. This time, Jesus was with the wild animals, but they did not harm Him. Yes, the time had come, the time was fulfilled. God's promise was fulfilled, the promise He made to Adam and Eve, that the woman's seed would strike the head of the serpent. Here He was, the Offspring of the woman, and He came to do just that.



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Here was our Champion, come to save us. Like David going out to face Goliath, our Champion came, strutting out onto the field of battle, to defeat the enemy for us. "No strength of ours can match his might. We would be lost, rejected. But now a champion comes to fight, whom God Himself elected." In His temptation and the beginning of His public ministry, the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior, appeared on the scene. And this marked a turning point in human history.

It was a turning point in salvation history, in the history of God's people. Think of the people of Israel, wandering in the wilderness for forty years, all the while grumbling and complaining. They had failed the test, miserably. But Jesus passed the test, perfectly. He was in the wilderness forty days, but He remained faithful, He endured. Jesus was Israel reduced to one. The faithful remnant of God's people came down to this one true Israelite. Salvation history came to its focal point in Christ. The time had come, the time was fulfilled. It was a turning point in history.

One day, of course, it will all come to an end; it'll reach its goal at a time of God's choosing, and this same Christ will return in glory, and His kingdom will have no end.

That, by the way, is the kingdom of God that Christ announces in our text. "The kingdom of God is at hand," He says. In fact, it is Jesus Himself who ushers in the kingdom of God. Jesus embodies the kingdom in His very person. Where the king is, ruling by His grace and power, there is the kingdom. Jesus brings it among us. He's present among us, just as He promised. Remember what He said: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The king is here, beloved, and so is His kingdom. He brings us into His kingdom of grace even now, and He will bring us into His kingdom of glory at the end of time. Yes, the time has come, the time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is near, right at hand. The time is now. The place is here. Jesus is speaking to you today. Listen to His voice.

So, a turning point in the life of Jesus, a turning point in history, and now, the third turning point in our text is that, because Jesus is here speaking to you today, this day marks a turning point in your life, in your personal history. Jesus says it: "Repent and believe in the gospel." Do you hear Him? He's speaking to you right now! Yes, you! Yes, now! Every time, every day, that the Word of God comes near to you – *that* is a turning point. It's a call to turn around in your life. "Today," the Bible says, "today, if you hear his voice, harden not your heart – as long as it's called Today." "Today is the day of salvation; now is the time of God's favor."

"Repent and believe in the gospel." "Repent and believe the good news." This is what Jesus is saying to you today. This is a call to turn around in your life. That's what it means to repent: to turn around. Turn around from walking in the wrong direction. Turn around, and come to the light. Turn to Jesus and follow Him in faith. Believe the good news! God has something good for you! Forgiveness for all your sins. New life, new purpose, and new direction. And there's plenty more good in store for you! Life in place of death. Eternal life with God. This is good news, beloved, this is the gospel!



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The good news is that Jesus Christ won all this for you by His death on the cross. He faced down the devil, overcame temptation, walked the way of obedience and the way of the cross, and paid the ransom for your sins, the redemption for all of your misdeeds. Paid in full. No more for you to worry about. The fight is over; Jesus won. Oh, what good news this is! Believe it; it's for you!

Today we've seen a number of turning points. A turning point in the life of Jesus: His temptation and the beginning of His public ministry. A turning point in the history of the world: "The time has come, the kingdom of God is at hand." A turning point in your own life, in your history: Jesus is speaking to you today, "Repent and believe in the gospel." Turning points all around. Mark it well! The point is this: Jesus Christ is your Champion and no one else. He's the one who beat the devil, preached the good news, and went the way of the cross, for you! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen