

I Am Here To Worship (video)

I am here to surrender to the King of Kings
I am here to offer every breath I breathe
I am here to sing, to lift up his Name,
To give him glory, to give him praise
I am here to bow down, to kneel at his throne
To give all I am to him alone
I am here to worship

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Confession

When our worship has been more about us than about you,
Lord have mercy.

When our songs have ignored the pain of your broken body on earth,
Christ have mercy.

When our services have been more of an escape for us than good news to the poor,
Lord have mercy.

When we praise you with our lips but deny you with our finances,
Christ have mercy.

When our instruments are louder than our cries for justice,
Lord have mercy.

When we fail to learn from the sacrificial worship of brothers and sisters around the world,
Christ have mercy.

**May God forgive us our sins,
cleanse us with the blood of Christ,
and fill us with his Holy Spirit,
to lead *lives* of worship
that bring his resurrection power
to our broken world,
and inspire *acts* of worship
which reflect his heart for justice,
mercy and humility.**

**In the name of Christ we pray,
Amen.**

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Wordless video

‘Grace’

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[Mark 1:4-11](#)

My ordination service was memorable for all the wrong reasons. For one thing, I never experienced the spiritual exhilaration that others report, only a sense that at last I was no longer under suspicion from the church authorities.

For another, my sister and brother-in-law weren't there. They had been invited, they had booked into an hôtel, and they had ordered a buffet there afterwards for a family celebration. But there was no sign of them.

You have to understand that this was in a time when few people had mobile phones. So my father went outside to look for them. When they didn't arrive for the service, we decided afterwards to find a phone box. Then we discovered that they had been to a wedding the day before, and my sister had suffered a fish bone getting stuck in her throat at the wedding breakfast. They had tried to get a message to me, but it hadn't got through.

I have often viewed the baptism of Jesus as his ordination service. Here is the public confirmation and commissioning of the ministry to which he had been called since before the beginning of human history.

And like our ordination services, the place of the Holy Spirit is significant here. At an ordination, we often sing the ancient hymn 'Veni Sancte Spiritus' ('Come, Holy Spirit') and we lay hands on the ordinands, praying that the Holy Spirit will equip them for their calling.

So in this talk, I want to reflect on what the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus tells us about the public ministry he is about to begin.

¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

These words are loaded with scriptural resonances from elsewhere, and when we realise that their significance for the ministry of Jesus will become apparent.

Firstly, Jesus 'saw heaven being torn open' (verse 10).

When heaven is opened in the Scriptures, it usually means God is about to reveal his glory and his will. Ezekiel's inaugural vision that makes him a prophet begins when 'the heavens were opened and [he] saw visions of God'¹. Stephen the martyr, on trial for his life and facing stoning, saw 'heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'² The revelation Simon Peter receives to mix with Gentiles and ultimately proclaim the Gospel to them begins in a trance when he sees 'heaven opened'³. There are at least eight examples in the Book of Revelation itself⁴. And so on.

Therefore in this incident the Father is telling Jesus that something important is about to be communicated.

We may think that such spiritual experiences are rare, unusual, or even non-existent for us. However, there are occasional times when we are conscious that the presence of God is close or even virtually tangible. It does not feel like the sky has a ceiling and our prayers bounce back down to us without reaching heaven. We have those times when we know the lines of communication are clear.

If we do, then this passage tells us to pay attention. God may be opening heaven to say something important to us, or to do something important with us.

I wonder whether we stand to attention at such times?

Secondly, Jesus saw 'the Spirit descending on him' (verse 10). This has echoes of the creation story in Genesis 1, where 'the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters'⁵ before the six days of creation begin.

So here too God is about to begin a work of creation. Except creation already exists! With Jesus he begins the work of the new creation. Through Jesus all things will be made new.

This shows us that Jesus is way bigger and more important than the ways in which we often treat him. For all our confessions of him as Son of God and Saviour, there are too many times when we treat Jesus as if he were someone

who helps us to improve our lives, or who mentors us in good ways of living. We treat life with Jesus as some kind of deluxe addition to life.

But that is not why Jesus came, it is not why he ministered, and he will not have it. Jesus came that we might say goodbye to all that is old, decaying, and twisted due to sin and instead to welcome in a world where not only are we individually made new in our lives, but that all creation will be made new. Even our bodies will be made new at the Resurrection.

Following Jesus is not like buying a new car, where we look at the specifications and say, I'll add on some extra features, like a parking camera to help my reversing, and a heated driver's seat to keep me comfortable.

No: the ministry of Jesus is one where our old life is put in the grave and we are raised to a completely new life. It is one where we look forward to the old world going and living in the new heavens and new earth.

To welcome Jesus into our lives, then, requires that we are willing to sing the words to the old chorus 'Spirit of the living God': 'Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me.' When we allow him to do that in our lives, he will make us new and make his world new.

Thirdly, Jesus saw 'the Spirit descending on him *like a dove*' (verse 10, italics mine).

That the Spirit descends *like a dove* takes our last thought further. The most obvious biblical precedent here is of Noah using a dove to find out whether the flood waters had receded⁶.

This is an indication, then, that as Jesus comes to make his new creation, he does so as One who rolls back the damage of the past, and who shows that the judgment of God no longer pertains to all who own the name of Christ. Yes, 'Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me' can be challenging, disconcerting, and disturbing, but Jesus also comes as the gentle One who restores where we have been broken by the actions of others and who tells us that no longer have to live under our past, because through him God has offered us forgiveness.

If you are already broken, let Jesus put you back together in a new and beautiful way. Maybe you think that the brokenness will still show. Maybe in this life it will, but don't let that daunt you. After all, the risen Jesus showed his scars to the disciples.

Think if you will about the Japanese art of kintsugi. This is the practice of putting broken pottery pieces back together with gold. Even the flaws and imperfections are beautified, to make a more attractive piece of art. See that as a picture of what Jesus wants to do in your life. Why not invite him to do his work of restoration in you?

Fourthly and finally, verse 11:

And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love;
with you I am well pleased.'

The first thing that has always struck me here is that the Father proclaims his delight in his Son before he has even begun his ministry. It is a powerful statement of unconditional love.

But if we want to dig into the biblical background here, then the obvious stopping-off point is the so-called Servant Songs in the Book of Isaiah, especially the first of those songs⁷. It begins with the words,

'Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.' (Verse 1)

The main difference is that whereas in Isaiah the designation 'servant' is used, here in Mark it's 'Son'. We draw the conclusion that God's own Son came as the Servant of the Lord. The Son of God is the Servant.

Later in Mark Jesus will tell his disciples that servanthood rather than status is what matters in the kingdom of God, and that even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many⁸.

But it's established right here at the beginning of the Gospel that Jesus will carry out his ministry of salvation in the form of a servant. The Son of God will bring in the new creation and all heal the broken not in the way that many assume an Almighty God will do, with force and irresistible energy, but by treading the path of servanthood.

And so he comes to serve – not in the sense that he waits on our every indulgence but that he provides our every need and he knows that the only cure for the wounds of the world lies at the Cross.

When we receive that, he then enlists us to serve him by serving others that they may see through us the nature of God's transforming love. That is what Jesus is ordained to do. This is what all his followers, reverends or otherwise, are all ordained to do as well.

Prayers

'Lord's Prayer Pause And Pray'

The words accompanying the Lord's Prayer are not available, presumably for copyright reasons.

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Blessing

The peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God
and of his Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
And the blessing of God,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you now and always.

Amen.

¹ Ezekiel 1:1

² Acts 7:56

³ Acts 10:11

⁴ Revelation 4:1; 5:3; 8:1; 10:8; 11:19; 13:6; 15:5; 19:11.

⁵ Genesis 1:2

⁶ Genesis 8:8-12

⁷ Isaiah 42:1-7

⁸ Mark 10:35-45