

**The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ**  
**Mark 1:1-8**

Intro:

Beginning a new series on the life of Christ according to Mark. Two weeks we celebrated the key and most significant events of the earthly life of Christ – His death and resurrection, so now we'll go back and see what led to those events.

We will begin with the end in mind as we go through Mark.

If Mark were done as a mini-series on TV the ads might say, "A gripping story of mystery, temptation, wonders, intrigue, prejudice, power, passion, betrayal, and an unlikely conclusion."

If you're not familiar with Mark, I highly recommend that you read along as this series unfolds.

Imagine for a moment that you are not in this comfortable sanctuary but are in first century Rome. We would be meeting on the Lord's Day in the underground catacombs of Rome during the reign of Nero. If we were discovered by the authorities, we could be arrested and possibly be put to death.

Imagine that someone comes into our underground meeting with a copy of the newly written gospel of Mark. Try to put yourself into that context as you hear the opening verses of Mark.

**1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

**2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:**

**"Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You,**

**Who will prepare Your way;**

**3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness,**

**'Make ready the way of the Lord,**

**Make His paths straight.' "**

**4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. 6 John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. 7 And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. 8 I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

V. 1 The beginning of the Gospel i.e. GOOD NEWS

This book is designed to give off the fragrance of good news even when it seems confusing and challenging at times. Our definition of good news doesn't always square with what God considers good news. The Good News of the gospel comes in the context of the bad news of our human condition.

So, as we go through the gospel remember that it is GOOD NEWS.

V.1 is a 'hat-tip' to Peter's confession recorded in Matt 16. When Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?", Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Mark channels Peter as he gives the brief opening, "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

This phrase "son of God" is loaded with OT meaning. Many scholars put Mark in Rome as he wrote this gospel, and he wrote to a Roman audience.

Near the end of the narrative 15:39ff we read

**<sup>39</sup> And when the (Roman) centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died,<sup>a</sup> he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"**

**So we get the title from the Jewish author in 1:1 and a Roman soldier in 15:39**

We hear the term and think of the Trinity, i.e. Jesus the Son in relationship with the Father. But what about the original audience?

Jews would think of Moses in Ex 4:22 saying to Pharaoh. "Thus says Yahweh, Israel is my son, my firstborn.."

The whole people is identified as God's son.

A Roman would think the son of God might be the Emperor or his son.

**The Gospels show us that Jesus is the true Israel. He is the true King who lives righteously to rule his people.**

**He is the son of God and He is God – v. 3 prepare the way of Yahweh, the LORD, the one true God.**

John is preparing the way for the true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

He is THE CHRIST – the anointed one – the Messiah. He was anointed at his baptism v. 10 – next week.

A bit of background...

Early church fathers held that Mark was addressed to the church in Rome or in Italy generally. It was likely written before 64 AD, although it may have been 65 AD before it was circulated.

Believers in Rome came under greater persecution after 64 AD. A fire devastated the city and Nero looked for a culprit and blamed the Christian. They were already viewed with suspicion because they were viewed as 'antireligious'. They only worshipped ONE God, so many considered them antireligious atheists. And they certainly didn't worship the Emperor, so they were considered antisocial.

Nero acted with great cruelty as he had Christians arrested, had them clothed with the skins of animals and then loose wild dogs on them. OR...

Nero would have Christians dipped in tar or pitch and ignite their bodies and used them as flaming torches to light up his private gardens. And of course, most have heard about the entertainment in the Roman Colosseum where Nero would have Christians fed to lions.

These believers in Rome could identify with a man like John who was dressed in camel skins and a Savior like Jesus who was driven into the wilderness (1:12) and was put to death by Rome.

We'll fill in more background as we progress in the series, but for now I'll note that while Mark is second in the NT order of books, it is first in terms of chronology. Biblical scholars would say that Matthew and Luke follow a rough outline of Mark, but they bring in additional material.

**Most orthodox bible scholars say that Mark is reflecting the influence of Peter as his source material. The simplified chronology of Mark reflects Peter's summary of those events in Act 3 and Acts 10.**

Mark is the compressed, fast-moving, quick read of the life of Christ. It's almost like an early church "Gospel tract" that lays out the basic essentials of the person and work of Jesus.

Since Mark doesn't go into as much detail as the other gospel writers, I will bring in some of the other material at times to give a fuller context or picture.

Mark was not designed to be a full biography of Christ, so he doesn't go into as many details as do Matthew, Luke, and John. While the other Gospels have more detail, they are NOT written as biographies per se. The gospels don't tell us a lot of things we'd expect from a real biography. They are not named "The biography of Jesus according to Matthew....Mark....Luke...or John.

They are the "Gospel of Jesus" according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, i.e. their purpose is not so much to give a biographical history but to proclaim GOOD NEWS of a Savior. **The Gospels tell a STORY TO**

## PREACH A MESSAGE.

Other biographies are not regarded as the publication of “good news.” There is no “good news” biography of Thomas Jefferson, Albert Einstein, Booker T. Washington, Helen Keller, Amelia Airhart, etc...

Another important NOTE- Mark is the “go-go” gospel. It is fast paced as evidenced by the frequent use of the word “immediately”. The Greek word is used in 40 times in Mark and only 40 times in the rest of the entire NT. It may be translated “immediately, quickly, straightway, shortly, or anon.”

The idea is that the action is happening quickly. Mark keeps the narrative moving. It’s a page turner.

Mark also has a significant focus on the healing ministry of Jesus and His authority over nature and the supernatural world.

Matthew doesn’t present a healing miracle until chapter 8 – cleansing a leper.

Luke gives the first miracle in chapter 4 – healing a man with an unclean spirit.

John – chapter 2 – the Wedding at Cana

Mark gets right after it and has the same miracle as Luke, but Mark puts it in 1:21.

But before we get to the ministry of Jesus, Mark gives a brief context about John the Baptizer.

And since it is the gospel of Mark, it is brief.

Mark places the beginning of the Gospel in the OT with the prophecy of Isaiah. The fuller OT context is also seen in how Jesus is the one who inaugurates a New Covenant the way Moses led the people into a covenant relationship with God. Exodus records the work of Moses, a covenant mediator, who does miracles that validate his message from God. Jesus calls the people through a ‘new commandment’ (Jn 13:34), and He does signs to validate His teaching as the Messiah.

The gospel of Jesus has an OT CONTEXT because Jesus is the fulfillment of the OT promises regarding the Messiah. It is natural to ground the gospel in the OT because that is the scripture that the believers would be using. Mark begins with some OT references, but he doesn’t use as much OT as we find in Matthew and Luke. This is likely because his primary audience is believers in Rome.

Mark situates the gospel of Jesus in the OT by merging verses from Ex 23, Malachi 3, and Isa 40. He is showing that the Messiah was predicted and would be preceded by a herald who would come and prepare the way for the coming Messiah.

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, ( Ex 23:20; Mal 3)

Who will prepare Your way;

3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, (Isa 40)

‘Make ready the way of the Lord,

Make His paths straight.’ ”

SIDE ROAD: I can’t hear that verse about preparing the way of the Lord without hearing the classic song from GodSpell in my head.

These three passages have some common elements:

- Each speaks of preparing for something: to go into the promised Land, prepare for the Day of the Lord, and a voice to prepare for the coming of God.
- Each is a WARNING that involves blessings for those who obey or curses for those who don’t.

Mark has brought 3 passages together to show how his message is connected to the scripture that the

people had i.e. the OT. The Good News about Jesus continues the saving work of God among the human race.

The Jews, then and now, are waiting for the herald of the Messiah. Even today at a Passover seder, there will be an empty chair for “Elijah” since Malachi 3 speaks of God sending Elijah to restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

When John showed up he got attention and the question was raised, “Are you Elijah who was to come?” He answered “no”. Yet when they asked Jesus who John was, Jesus said he was Elijah who was to come. How do we reconcile that? John said, “I’m not Elijah.” Jesus said, “Yes, you are.”

If we look at the whole picture, that issue is explained. We are told that John came in the spirit and the power of Elijah, and Jesus was saying that the ministry of Elijah was fulfilled in the work of John the Baptist. It was not that Elijah himself came back, so John was speaking the truth: “No, I’m not Elijah.” Jesus said, “No, but you are in the spirit and power of Elijah, and you are the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy.”

The other gospels point out that John is gaining fame, but he hasn’t come to promote himself, but Jesus. John wants the attention to go to the one who comes after him of whom John says, “I’m not worthy to untie the straps of his sandals.”

Untying the straps of someone’s dirty sandals and dirty feet was a very lowly task.

John says, “I’m not even worthy of doing that, so don’t get excited about me. Look to the One who is coming.”

He does come to baptize because he knows that something big is coming and that the people of Israel are not ready.

In Matthew we are given a very descriptive picture of the ministry of John.

4 Now John himself had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 10 The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Matthew 3

John came to Prepare the way of the Lord and he did so with zeal. He didn’t pull his punches because Jesus wouldn’t pull his punches when he shows up.

Mark writes in such a way as to put Jesus and His supernatural reality in your face. He wants you to deal with him.

Whether you are new to the whole Jesus, God, church scene or you have been immersed in them for years, Mark begs this question, “Have you dealt with Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God?”

Here’s how you know...

If you read the Gospel and think, “Jesus was pretty cool. He was an interesting teacher. He was a bold

social rebel who was authentic and true to Himself, and I want to FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE”, then you have NOT dealt with the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of God.

You’ve only dealt with Jesus as a man who gave you an example to follow, and there is NO Good News for you. If you seriously embrace Jesus as an example, He will crush you.

If you read or have read the gospel and think “Jesus was pretty cool. He was an interesting teacher. He was a bold social rebel who was authentic and true to Himself, and I CAN’T be like Him. I NEED A SAVIOR, not an example”, then there IS good news for you.

The Good News comes when you see YOUR NEED as you deal with the real Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God.

THE TABLE BEFORE us signifies the reality of our need for a Savior.

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