

# A Voice in the Wilderness (2)

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Mark / John the Baptist; Preaching; Baptism; Repentance; Forgiveness; Sin / Mark 1:2–4

What role should preaching have in the church? What can we learn from John the Baptist, Jesus, the Apostles and the prophets? Join Pastor Steve as he continues his look at Mark 1:4.

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## INTRODUCTION

- We are looking again at Mark's gospel
- Let me invite you to take your Bible and turn to Mark chapter 1
- Last week we looked at verses 2-4 but wasn't able to finish
- So we will look today where we left off at verse 4 but let me read verses 1-4 so that you have them in your hearing
- [Mark 1:1-4](#), "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way; The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.' " John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."
- Martin Lloyd-Jones said, "The most urgent need in the Christian church is true preaching"
- He's right!
- Preaching today is weak
- The pulpit is weak
- We have weak men in weak pulpits preaching weak messages to weak members
- And that is an abomination!
- There are many churches that have completely revamped their ministries in an attempt to appeal to unbelievers
- These churches are telling us if you want to be successful, you must concentrate your energies in an agreeable, inoffensive environment
- You must give unbelievers freedom, tolerance, and anonymity
- You must always be positive and benevolent
- If you must have a sermon, keep it brief and amusing

- Don't be preachy and authoritative
- Above all, keep everyone entertained
- Churches following this pattern will see numerical growth, we're assured; those that ignore it are doomed to decline
- So the new norm for a church service is "music, skits, rock 'n' roll oldies, disco tunes, heavy metal, rap, dancing, comedy, clowns, mime artists, and stage magic" (MacArthur, Not Ashamed of the Gospel)
- What is now missing is preaching
- It has now been replaced by men and women preachers preaching cute, amusing, brief talks geared at entertaining the masses
- This is the user-friendly church
- Listen to some of the things people are saying about the user friendly church:
- One said, "There is no fire and brimstone here. No Bible-thumping. Just practical, witty messages."
- Another said, "Services at [this church] have an informal feeling. You won't hear people threatened with hell or referred to as sinners. The goal is to make them feel welcome, not drive them away."
- Another one said, "As with all clergymen [this pastor's] answer is God—but he slips Him in at the end, and even then doesn't get heavy. No ranting, no raving. No fire, no brimstone. He doesn't even use the H-word. Call it Light Gospel. It has the same salvation as the Old Time Religion, but with a third less guilt."
- Here's another one: "The sermons are relevant, upbeat, and best of all, short. You won't hear a lot of preaching about sin and damnation and hell fire. Preaching here doesn't sound like *preaching*. It is sophisticated, urbane, and friendly talk. It breaks all the stereotypes."
- So the new rules are "be clever, informal, positive, brief, and friendly. Never loosen your necktie. Never let them see you sweat. And never, never use the H-word" (MacArthur)
- John MacArthur says, "The weakness of the pulpit today does not stem from frantic cranks who harangue about hell; it is the result of men who compromise and who fear to speak God's Word powerfully, with conviction. The church is certainly not suffering from an overabundance of forthright preachers; rather, it seems glutted with men-pleasers (cf [Gal. 1:10](#))."
- God has called preachers to preach the word ([2 Tim.4:2](#)) not entertain the goats
- Charles Spurgeon reminds us that "Preaching is not child's play: it is not a thing to be done without labor and anxiety; it is solemn work"

- Paul said it this way to Timothy in [1 Timothy 5:17](#), “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”
- The words “work hard” (kopiao) means to “toil and labor” (Logos) “to work to the point of fatigue or exhaustion” (MacArthur)
- And this was done faithfully week after week (pres.act.part.)
- It’s obvious that some elders work harder than others
- John Piper says, “The hard work begins in preparation, long before the moment of delivery. Preachers often bear the burden weeks before a particular message, a weight that gets greater the week of, and is especially heavy the night before and morning of”
- “A pastor who doesn’t sweat and strain at his study and teaching is not fulfilling his calling. And diligent word-work is hard work, when done well” (Piper)
- Paul told the Thessalonians in [1 Thessalonians 5:12-13](#), “12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.”
- Christ calls pastors to labor in their feeding of the flock through sound teaching (Mathis)
- David Mathis said, “Part of what makes pastoring hard work is that we teach with a tether. We don’t just sit down with a blank piece of paper, or show up to address an attentive church, and speak off the top of our heads. Unashamed workers “rightly handle the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Week after week, day after day, the words we breathe out to feed the church are not our own thoughts on the matter.

Christians have a Book. And good pastors are happily tethered to this Book — which is the most powerful, proven, life-changing Book in the history of the world. Good pastors are unavoidably Book-men.

Being men of the Book demands headwork and sustained mental effort. We study. Many of us learn and reference the original languages of Hebrew and Greek. Before making applications, we first wrestle with what the text means and does not mean. And being men of the Book requires heart-work. Before turning to tell others what the Book says, we first put ourselves under its teaching, for repentance and faith” (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-plague-of-lazy-pastors>)

- That is so true!
- Before the message is given it has already been internalized in the heart of the preacher
- How true also of John the Baptist
- John was a man of conviction
- He was not a weak preacher with a weak message

- He was “A Voice in the Wilderness”
- John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins
- He was a prophet and the forerunner of Christ

· He was also the fulfillment of...

## The Prophecy of Isaiah (vv.2-3)

- More than 700 years after Isaiah’s prophecy, the voice of one calling in the wilderness appears
- This is John the baptizer
- Notice verses 2-3: “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.’””
- Mark takes this from two OT passages
- The first two lines are from [Malachi 3:1](#).
- The last two are from [Isaiah 40:3](#).
- He merges both together to say that before the Messiah would come, God would send a herald, and that herald’s responsibility would be to prepare the way for the coming Messiah (Sproul)
- And that herald was John the Baptist or literally John the baptizer

· Let’s meet...

## The Forerunner of Christ (vv.4-8)

· Verse 4 begins with...

### His Revealing (v.4a)

Mark says, “John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness”

- According to [Luke 1:80](#) this is where he also grew up
- He spent the duration of his ministry along the Jordan River, about twenty miles south of the sea of Galilee ([Jn.3:23](#))
- For Mark to say to his audience that John “appeared in the wilderness,” was to constantly remind them of the exodus from Egypt and entrance into the Promised Land (MacArthur)
- Mark also says what he did in the wilderness:
- He was “preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”

Let's notice...

## His Preaching (v.4b)

- This is what he was called to do
- This is what all preachers are called to do
- In the words of Paul to Timothy, “Preach the word” ([2 Tim.4:1](#))
- The word “Preaching” is the Greek word kerysso
- It occurs over 60 times in the NT
- It means “to proclaim as a herald” (Mounce)
- As already noted, this is what Mark is saying with identifying John the Baptist with Jesus
- He was sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus the Messiah
- Last week I deviated for a moment to talk about preaching
- I began with a definition from Martin Lloyd Jones
- He asked, “What is preaching?” And answered, “Logic on fire! Eloquent reason!... Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire...” (*Preaching and Preachers*, 97)
- This certainly described John the Baptist
- Preaching has always been the means God uses to proclaim His Word
- That was true of John the Baptist ([Mk.1:4,7](#)) and others and is true today!
- There are many reasons why we preach and teach God’s Word:
- Preaching is the response of the preacher to the call of God
- It is being obedient to the heavenly calling not just to go but what to say
- God tells the preacher what to preach
- Paul told Timothy in [2 Timothy 4:1-2](#), “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”
- The word “Preach” is an imperative
- Timothy was commanded to preach “the word”
- Preaching the word is preaching “the entire written word of God, His complete revealed truth as contained in the Bible” (MacArthur)
- God’s Word would be the same as Paul’s teaching in [2 Timothy 2:2](#).

- It is called “sound doctrine” in [2 Tim. 1:13](#).
- It is called the “glorious gospel of the blessed God” in [1 Timothy 1:11](#).
- It is called the “faith and truth” in [1 Timothy 2:7](#).
- It is called the “Scriptures” in [1 Timothy 4:13](#).
- This is “the whole counsel of God” that Paul told the elders at Ephesus he preached ([Acts 20:27](#))
- There were other names given for the word:
  - The angel called it “the whole message of this life” in [Acts 5:20](#).
  - Paul referred to it in [Acts 13:26](#), as “the message of this salvation”
  - In [Romans 10:8](#) he calls it “the word of faith we are preaching”
  - Peter calls it “the utterances of God” in [1 Peter 4:11](#).
  - Paul also calls it “the word of life” in [Philippians 2:16](#).

• Now there are 4 things preaching does:

## Preaching prevents ignorance

- “Doctrine matters”
- When we teach doctrine we are laying the foundation for proper behavior and we are preventing ignorance of what God has written
- When Paul went to Ephesus, [Acts 18:11](#) says that “he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”
- He later told the Elders of the Ephesian church in [Acts 20:27](#), “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (NKJV).
- Elders are required to be “skilled in teaching” according to [1 Timothy 3:2](#)
- How is that to occur?
- By the systematic preaching and teaching of God’s Word
- [Titus 1:9](#) says he is to be “holding fast the faithful word *as he has been taught*, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”
- Martin Lloyd Jones again said, “The preacher is not in the pulpit merely to give knowledge and information to people. He is to inspire them, he is to enthuse them, he is to enliven them and send them out glorifying in the Spirit” (*The Puritans*, 376–77).

• Notice the second thing preaching does...

## Preaching promotes maturity

- God has left “evangelists and pastor-teachers” in the church for the purpose of maturing the saints for the work of the ministry
- [Ephesians 4:11-15](#), “11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ”
- We preach and teach God’s Word because it is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” ([2 Tim.3:16-17](#))

• Preaching prevents ignorance and promotes maturity. Preaching also...

## Preaching prevents false doctrine

- When we systematically teach what God’s Word means we are preventing it from being perverted by false teachers
- Paul’s noted his greatest fear to the elders of the church at Ephesus in [Acts 20:28-32](#), “28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”
- Why was Titus to make sure that the elders at Crete were duly qualified?
- [Titus 1:9-14](#) answers when it says that the elder is to be “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. 10 For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, 11 whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. 12 One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." 13 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.”
- Thomas Watson said, “It was by the ear, by our first parents listening to the serpent, that we lost paradise; and it is by the ear, by hearing of the Word, that we get to heaven. ‘Hear, and your souls shall live.’ ([Isaiah 5:3](#))”

· Last...

## Preaching is commanded of all preachers

- Peter said in [Acts 10:42](#), “And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead” (NKJV)
- Again Paul commanded Timothy in [2 Timothy 4:2](#) to “preach the word”
- [Titus 2:15](#) adds, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”
- Since Scripture says so much about this, we are not to forsake it, especially when the culture is rejecting it
- The world does not want to hear preaching
- It appears the church is willing to accommodate them
- But churches must return to the Bible as the Word of the living God
- They must preach it with divine authority
- They must follow the example of John the Baptist, the prophets, Jesus, the disciples and the early church
- And in following their example, they must preach “repentance for the forgiveness of sin” (v.4)
- Why?
- Because If you never repent, you will never be forgiven of your sin and you are in danger of God’s judgment
- You might be asking, “What is repentance?”
- Paul defines repentance in [1 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#), “9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”
- This, according to [2 Timothy 2:25](#), is something God grants to “those who are in opposition” to the word of God which is true of every unbeliever
- [Acts 11:18](#), says “repentance leads to life”
- Without it there is no life and no forgiveness
- Peter said this after he was asked “what shall we do” in [Acts 2:37](#).
- They said this as a result of Peter’s preaching of the word of God
- They had murdered their Messiah and Peter charged them with His death
- Verse 37 says they were “pierced to the heart”



- But Peter didn't leave them like this
- He continued by saying to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"
- The word for "repent" (metanoia) means "a change of mind" (LTW) that leads to a "change of direction" (EDNT), a "change of heart" (CFEDNT)
- In the words of [Romans 12:9](#), It is to "...Abhor what is evil [and] cling to what is good."
- It is a "turning around from our evil ways in order to look to Jesus" (Tozer)
- Charles Spurgeon preached on repentance week after week, and somebody came to him and said, "When are you going to quit preaching on repentance, pastor?" Spurgeon replied, "When you repent."
- Tozer said, "A man who truly comes to God in repentance and contrition of heart does not work up a defense on the basis that he has not broken every law and every commandment.... Remember, an outlaw is not a man who has broken all the laws of his country—he may actually have ignored and flouted and violated only a few. The bandit Jesse James may have broken only a couple of laws—those that say "You shall not kill" and "You shall not steal." But he was a notorious outlaw with a price on his head, even though there were thousands of other laws on the books which he had not violated. Friend, when I come before my God as an outlaw, returning home as the prodigal, returning from the pig pen, I will not be dickering and bargaining with God about the sins that I did not commit. I will not even be conscious of those—for the fact that I have broken any of God's laws or committed any sins will so overwhelm me that I will go before God as though I were the worst sinner in all the wide world" (*The Tozer Topical Reader*. WingSpread, 1998, pp. 144–45).

## **CONCLUSION**

- The question this morning is have you repented?
- Repentance is not just one time but is a way of life
- Have you come to the place where you hate your sin?
- Have you turned to Christ for forgiveness?
- I urge you to repent and come to Christ now seeking His forgiveness for transgressing His word
- For those of you that are unbelieving, we hear challenges like that thinking everything is alright
- But it's never alright until you repent and believe the gospel by embracing Christ as the only means of salvation and the only way to be forgiven of your sins
- Examine your heart now as we pray
- Let's pray