

Message #2

Mark 1:1-8

When we open the book of Mark, there are three things that catch our eye:

- 1) Mark does not give any data pertaining to the birth of Jesus Christ like Matthew and Luke.
- 2) Mark opens with a statement that this will tell the story of how the Gospel of Christ began.
- 3) Mark opens with the first eight verses being dominated by a man named John.

The opening statement of the book gives us somewhat of an explanation for it—**this book is about the beginning of the Gospel.**

Mark Strauss, who has written a good commentary on the Greek text of Mark, says that this opening statement either gives us the title to the whole work or it introduces the first section of the Gospel (*Mark*, p. 59).

The word “gospel” means good news. In the first century this Greek word was used in the context of a good “celebratory announcement.” It was used in secular Greek to announce some battle victory or the announcement of a new king.

Now Mark opens his Gospel by announcing not only good news or great news, but amazing grace news. He starts off by saying this Gospel is for the purpose of presenting the good news and the great grace news of Jesus Christ.

Now the genitive construction “of Jesus Christ” may mean this is the good news about Jesus Christ (objective genitive) or this is the good news whose source is Jesus Christ (subjective genitive). Both are true. But probably the focus here is that Mark is presenting the good news about Jesus Christ.

Now he identifies Jesus Christ by using three Divine Titles:

- 1) **This is good news about Jesus—a name that means He is the God/Savior.**
- 2) **This is good news about Christ—a name that means He is the Divine/Messiah.**
- 3) **This is good news about the Son of God—a name that means Jesus is Royal Deity.**

In fact, the centurion who stood next to the cross of Jesus Christ finally admitted this very fact—**Mark 15:39—“truly this man was the Son of God.”**

Now of course the specific good news that Mark will present is that this Royal, Divine, Son of God, God/Savior, Messianic Person, came to this earth as a man “to give His life a ransom for many.” He came to offer Jewish and Gentile sinners salvation from their sins. That is not only good news, it is incredible news. That is the best news that any could ever hear. Now as Mark opens this good news story, he starts off by making this point:

THE GOSPEL CENTERED ON JESUS CHRIST BEGAN WITH A FULFILLMENT OF BIBLICALLY WRITTEN PROPHECY CONCERNING ONE WHO WOULD BE THE FORERUNNER OF JESUS CHRIST AND WOULD OFFICIALLY INTRODUCE HIM TO ISRAEL.

This is a significant point of the book. The Gospel starts off with a heavy focus on Israel and then it eventually branches out to the rest of the world. In fact, **most of the book of Mark presents the story of the Gospel to Israel and only the last verses expand to “all creation.”** If we assume that Mark is writing for a Gentile, Roman world, we may observe that Mark wants this world to realize this good news salvific Gospel centered on this Divine Person has its roots in Israel. We owe a great debt to Israel and Mark never wanted the Roman world or the Gentile world to forget this fact. Now there are two main opening points that Mark communicates:

OPENING POINT #1 – The beginning of the Gospel centered on Jesus Christ is a fulfillment of written prophecy. **1:2-3**

Mark opens by communicating the fact that truth pertaining to Jesus Christ is found in the written prophetic Scriptures, specifically in Exodus 23:20; Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1. **So the beginning of the “good news” of Jesus Christ is not new news, but is an amazing fulfillment of Biblical prophecy which was written.**

This is a critical point. Israel should have known this and seen this because this was written down. Prophetic statements that are written enable us to examine the prediction long before its fulfillment. So if Isaiah or Malachi makes a written statement of something he is predicting, we are able to go back to those documents to compare the specific prediction to its fulfillment.

A few weeks ago we had our dedication service. Prior to that service we announced that Dan Duncan, of Believer’s Chapel, would be here. We announced that in written form in our bulletin, our prayer sheets, and our internet site and on the radio. On the day of the service, I stood up and formally introduced him to you, the congregation. Dan’s appearance here on June 28 was specifically predicted and when you came that Sunday, you expected him to be here.

That is the way it should have been for Jesus Christ and Israel. It was predicted that a specific person would come to introduce Him, specifically to the Jewish world. When John surfaced, the people should have expected Christ’s arrival; but for the most part they rejected it even though it was predicted in writing.

Now Mark loosely quotes Moses, Isaiah and Malachi as a written proof text for the fact that before the appearance of the Savior, a specific messenger would be sent by God who would prepare the way for His Son’s coming.

Now there are six realities that Mark had in his mind about this fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy:

Reality #1 - God would send His chosen messenger before He would send His Son. **1:2a**

One would come on the scene totally sent by God to introduce the Son to the world.

Reality #2 - This chosen messenger would prepare the way for His Son. **1:2b**

That word “prepare” means to get everything ready for Christ’s appearance (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 238). John’s ministry was a predicted preparatory ministry designed to introduce the people of Israel to their Savior and Messiah. His preparation was a repentance message and some special sin/forgiveness baptism.

Reality #3 - This chosen messenger would prepare the way by the use of his voice. **1:3a**

John would prepare the people by his verbal preaching. John basically used his voice to communicate truth to Israel about her need for a Savior.

Reality #4 - This chosen messenger would cry out in the wilderness. **1:3b**

John was this Elijah-type Grizzly Adams character who came on the scene out of the wilderness crying out with a message about Jesus Christ.

There are different words for “cry out” in Greek. Kaleo means to call or invite someone to something; krazo means to cry out harshly or inarticulately as animals cry; kraugazo means to cry out intensely; but the one Mark uses here is boao, which means to cry out with great emotion. **John’s introduction of Jesus Christ to the world was a very emotional introduction.**

He literally did come out of the wilderness and he started proclaiming his message in the wilderness to a wilderness world. The world is still a wilderness and we need to cry out to people that they need to believe in Jesus Christ.

Reality #5 - This chosen messenger would cry out to make ready for the way of the Lord. **1:3c**

Now how did John actually help to “make ready” the way of the Lord? He called the nation Israel to “repent” to change their mind about their sin and lack of righteousness.

Reality #6 - This chosen messenger would cry out make His paths straight. **1:3d**

He would use his “voice” to make ready the way of the Lord by crying out to the people that they needed to make His path straight.

William Hendriksen said what this meant is that the people needed to prepare their hearts so that Jesus Christ would have straight access into their hearts and lives. They must be willing to make straight that which is crooked in their own lives and minds.

They must see themselves as crooked sinners who needed to be made straight by Jesus Christ. The path to the Lord will never be a crooked path of deception; it will be a straight path of truth.

OPENING POINT #2 – The beginning of the Gospel was when John the Baptist fulfilled this Prophecy. **1:4-8**

There are several specific facts Mark wants the readers to know about the beginning of the Gospel as it connected to John the Baptist:

Fact #1 - John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness. **1:4a**

This is no coincidence. This is what was predicted. Israel has a long history of a connection with God in the wilderness. Water and wilderness are two applicable items pertaining to Israel. God had parted a sea and had literally led Israel into the wilderness and now He was calling Israel into a right relationship with Him by calling her into the wilderness again.

Fact #2 - John the Baptist came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **1:4b**

John came proclaiming something that had never been proclaimed in Israel in its history and never would again be proclaimed after this moment in history. Now notice carefully what John is preaching—something must be done about your sin. This is not some health, wealth and ear tickling message. This is a message for people to face their sin and admit it.

For those of you that have taken our baptism class, you know that there are 14 different types of baptisms found in the New Testament. The baptism that we practice in this church is New Testament Grace Age believer's baptism that pictures Spirit baptism.

This baptism here is not that. This particular baptism was a baptism in which people from the nation Israel went out to the Jordan River to be baptized by John, and in doing so they were admitting that they had changed their mind (repentance) about the fact that they did not have the righteousness necessary to get into the Kingdom. They were admitting they were sinners who needed a Savior, who could grant them forgiveness and cleansing from their sin.

Fact #3 - Many Jewish people were responding to John and were being baptized by John. **1:5**

Many from Judea and a great number from Jerusalem were going out to the Jordan and wilderness area to be baptized by John, admitting they were sinners and needed to be saved from their sins. Israel once again would need to go to the wilderness to do business with God.

There apparently was a momentum being built in this area and droves and droves of people responded. One commentator said hundreds and even thousands of people responded to this. One guesstimate given was about 300,000 people.

Now you couldn't just hop in a car and drive to where John was. To actually get to where John was, the people had to travel about 20 miles down in elevation from Jerusalem to the Jordan. It was some rough country and to get to the Jordan one had to cross the Judean desert. So, large numbers were coming from some long distances.

No one can ever be saved by water baptism. This is not what John's baptism was designed to do. This baptism was designed to get Jews to admit they were sinners who needed a Savior.

Fact #4 - John wore odd clothing and ate odd food. **1:6**

It is intriguing that Mark does not tell us what John looked like, but he does tell us what he wore and what he ate. He was an unusual man and he certainly was not wearing your typical white shirt and tie as a minister for God.

John was certainly not dressed in fine religious clothing. He was not out to make some fashion statement for ministerial clothing. A camel's hair robe was typically worn by one who was very poor monetarily and his belt was not some fancy belt; it was simply some strand of leather tied around his waist.

His food was certainly not that of the finest restaurants. He would catch and eat locusts and then for desert scoop out some wild honey from a beehive.

This was a very similar look to that of Elijah (II Kings 1:8), who also called Israel to national repentance.

So just by the clothing and the food we certainly see that John is not fitting in with the social and cultural norm of the religious culture. He did not have the finery of clothing and food of the religious first class.

This was the point. John's clothing and food was in sharp contrast and was a protest against the self-righteous religious leaders who strutted around in all of their finery, pretending they were right with God.

People who are actually called by God and understand grace typically don't fit in with the mainstream of religion.

Fact #5 - John was preaching. **1:7-8**

Mark spends much more time developing what John was preaching rather than how John was baptizing. Now the message that he proclaimed contained some critical parts to it:

(Part #1) - John preached Jesus would come after him. **1:7a**

In other words, his job was to be forerunner of Jesus Christ.

(Part #2) - John preached Jesus would be mightier than he was. **1:7b**

The Greek may be understood in saying Jesus is the Mighty One, the Powerful One. John says I am not the Mighty One, Jesus, the One Coming is. John preached that Jesus Christ was the mighty God Savior Messiah.

(Part #3) - John preached that he would be unworthy to stoop down and untie his sandal. **1:7c**

John was interested in one thing—him decreasing and Christ increasing (John 3:30).

John was no self-promoter. He was a humble, honest man who saw himself as a sinner who needed a Savior. Most preachers dream of having multitudes of people respond to you. But John knew he was not the source of any of this; God was the source.

(Part #4) - John preached that his water baptism was inferior to Christ's Spirit baptism. **1:8**

John had the right and authority to baptize in water, but the One who would come could baptize in the Holy Spirit.

These people needed much more than physical cleansing, they needed spiritual cleansing. John had done something external, but what they needed was something internal. What is needed to be saved is the Holy Spirit in our life.

This is a critical part of the Gospel. What truly makes us right with God is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that occurs the moment we believe on Jesus Christ.

Now there were a group of students discussing this opening of Mark one time, and they were saying what does this text say to you:

- 1) One said we need to go to the Jordan to be baptized.
- 2) Another said we need to go to the wilderness and get away from people.
- 3) Another said we need to rebel against mainstream religion.

None of this is right. John's point is Jesus Christ is the Savior and the good news is you may believe on Him and be saved from all your sins.