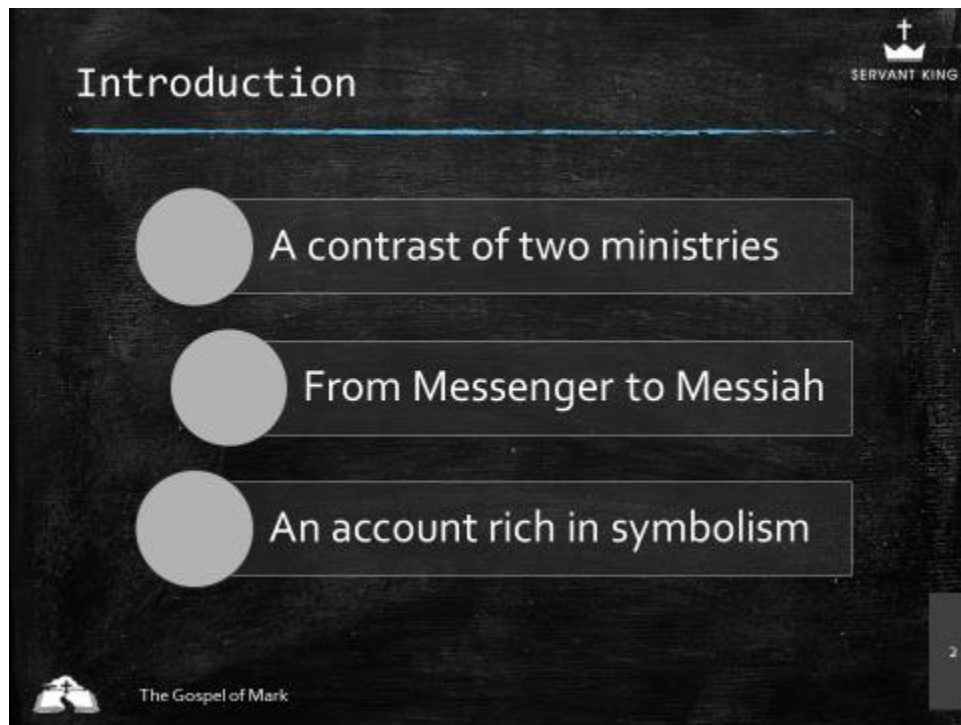


This morning we continue the series we began last week on the Gospel of Mark. Last week Pastor Dan started us out at the very beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God. He introduced us to a messenger who proclaimed a message of baptism and repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The good news being that in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, we see the divine work of God sending John the Baptist to proclaim and prepare the way for the long awaited Messiah.

Last week, we also saw the connection of the prophesied ministry of John the Baptist with that of the ministry of one who is far greater. John the Baptist's message was solely focused on the coming of one who was greater. Not only was Jesus greater, but his message was one of anticipation of the One who is coming. While John baptized with water, the coming One would baptize with the Spirit. Both of these contrasts speak to the greater sense that John's message and baptism were external and limited while Jesus' message and baptism was internal, permanent, and far greater. And what John proclaimed to the world of good news of the coming of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God now deserves our careful attention.

Establishing the authenticity and authority of Jesus' ministry is an important part of communicating the inverted kingdom lead by a servant king. Jesus was not the kind of Messiah the Jews were expecting. And the Gentile Christians, who are the intended audience of Mark's gospel, would have been surprised by a king who came to serve and not to conquer. Mark's gospel shows us a Leader who is abandoned by nearly everyone. It pictures a Savior whose identity and ministry will be mistaken by many. It puts forward a King who will suffer and die at

the hands of his enemies. Thus we can understand why this book begins with the affirmation of a prophet in the wilderness who proclaims the coming of the true Messiah.



This leads us to our passage this morning. As we read and hear this text, we are to see the intersection of John the Baptist's ministry with the introduction and inauguration of the Jesus' ministry. Here we have a contrast of the two ministries as seen in John the Baptist's own words, showing that he was not the Messiah and was not fit to even be a servant of Jesus. We are to see the greater nature of Jesus' ministry. We are to see John the Baptist as the messenger who came to prepare the way for the Messiah. In the intersection of these two ministries we have the confirmation that Jesus' arrival on the scene is not a random occurrence, but rather it is a part of God's sovereign plan of redemption.

Therefore, at God's appointed time and place, we move from the Messenger in the wilderness, to the Messiah in the wilderness. First, in the sense that Jesus comes out to John in the wilderness to be baptized. And second, in the sense that after His baptism in the Jordan He is led further into the wilderness to be tempted. In these few verses, Mark plays out a drama that brings together both heaven and earth. A drama that initiated and confirmed the ministry of Jesus Christ and sent out shock waves that forever changed the world.

Mark's beginning may seem rather abrupt with introduction of John the Baptist and then Jesus in these two brief accounts. But while brief, these accounts are rich in symbolism as we hear the story of the good news of the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ. The common symbol in these two first two passages is the thematic use of the wilderness. The ministry of John the Baptist takes place in the wilderness where he calls people to repentance. For the early Christians, the wilderness would have been a direct reminder of the Jews and their wandering in the wilderness after they came out of Egypt. Kent Hughes, commenting on the ministry of John the Baptist says,

“The people’s coming out to John in the wilderness was a subtle acknowledgement of Israel’s history of disobedience and rebellion, and a desire to begin anew.” This morning, may God grant us eyes to see our own disobedience and rebellion and fuel in us a desire to abandon all and follow Jesus our Lord and Savior.



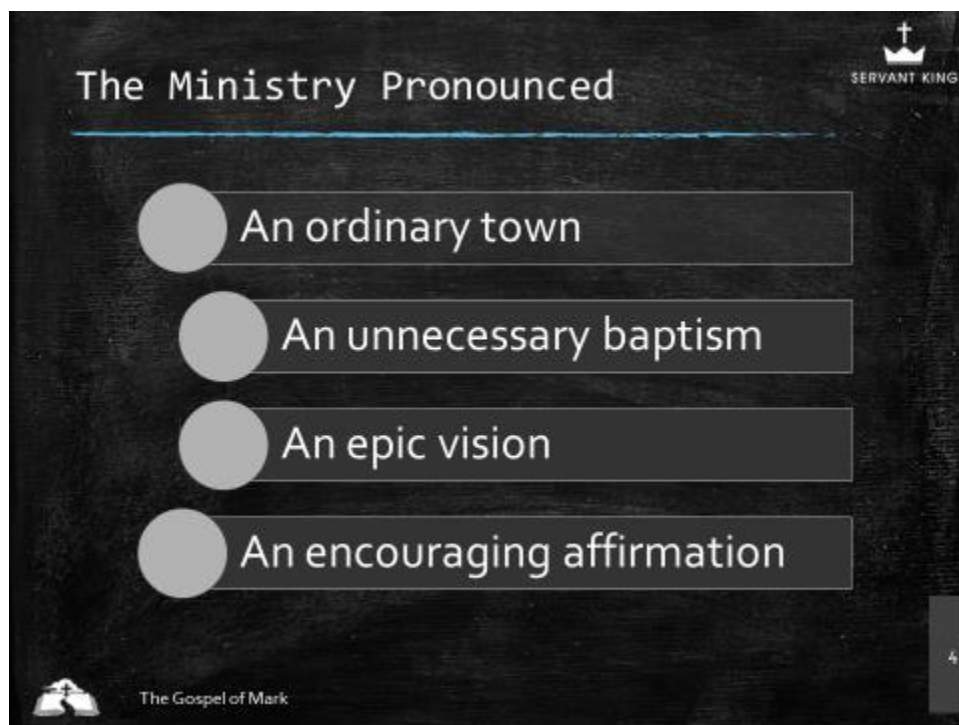
Please turn in your Bibles to Mark 1. This morning we will be looking at verses 9 through 20. Please follow along as I read God’s word to us this morning.

*“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 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. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.”*

In verses 9 through 20 we are given three different scenes in which Jesus is introduced to us. In the first three verses, Jesus’ **ministry is pronounced** in a scene along the Jordan river which encompasses the divine trinity. Here we have the official pronouncement and approval of Jesus, God’s beloved Son by the Father through the Spirit. Next, verses 12 and 13 take Jesus deeper

into the barren wilderness where He is tested and His **ministry is proved**. For 40 days Jesus is tempted by Satan. While we do not have all the details, this is no less than a spiritual clash of two kingdoms; evil and darkness against righteousness and light.

Finally, in the last seven verses, we are taken to a scene alongside the Sea of Galilee where Jesus' **ministry is proclaimed**. Such was the power of His message that four ordinary men were moved to leave all they had and follow this extraordinary man. Their radical response to the man and ministry would have surprised the early Christian readers of this Gospel. Who was this Jesus that arrived with such divine fanfare? What sort of power was His to command and do battle with Satan while accompanied by angels? What compelled ordinary men to drop what they were doing at the proclamation of His ministry? Our answers will be clear as we unpack our passage this morning.



Look again at verses 9 through 11. *“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*”

While Mark’s account of Jesus’ baptism in these three verses is very brief, there is a lot going on here. He writes that Jesus came out of Nazareth in Galilee to be baptized by John in the Jordan river. This is the inauguration and pronouncement of Jesus’ ministry and mission. But to our modern understanding there is something here that we might easily miss. **How odd for a King to come from an unimportant town in an unknown place**; an irony that would probably not have been lost on the Roman Christians. Yet this is a common theme throughout scripture. How often God uses the ordinary and unlikely to fulfill His purposes. Who would have thought that a lowly carpenter’s son from an unknown town would be a King; would soon die, but would then come

back to life? And it is a theme that Mark uses to connect Jesus to John the Baptist. For who would have thought such an unlikely and strange man in the wilderness would proclaim the coming of the promised King?

We read that Jesus came out to the Jordan to be baptized. One question that might come to mind is why would Jesus go to be baptized? **Certainly He did not need to repent or be forgiven of sin; this was an unnecessary baptism.** So what's going on here? First, it may have been a sign of Jesus' dedication to doing His Father's will. Jesus is making a public demonstration of His commitment to serving and obeying the will of the Father. And second, there is a sense in which we see Jesus' baptism as identifying with sinners. Jesus not only shares in the experiences of those He came to save; but he stands in our place.

Surely, Mark's readers are meant to see the irony in Jesus' baptism. Here is the righteous King, who though he does not need to repent, humbles himself to receive a baptism from one not worthy to untie His sandals. His ministry humbly begins in baptismal waters, a servant standing in our place. And it foreshadows His ministry's end upon the cross, where the One who did not need to be punished died in the place of sinners. As a perfect and righteous man, Jesus did not have to die on the cross. Yet, his death was necessary to bring victory over the power of sin and death and lead His people into a new kingdom.

Our scene ends with **an epic vision** through which Mark removes any shadow of doubt that Jesus' baptism was far different from the others John had performed. He records this incredible, yet unexpected pronouncement from God the Father of the divine nature of this man from Nazareth and the divine nature of His mission. As Jesus comes up out of the water, He immediately has a supernatural vision. And as Jesus sees the heavens being torn open the Spirit of God as a dove coming down upon Him. Finally, God speaks with a loud voice from above proclaiming that Jesus is His Son and that He is pleased and takes pleasure in Him.

Mark's account of Jesus' ministry begins with a picture of the heavens being torn open. And at the end of His account, we will see the temple curtain being torn open at His crucifixion, as God turns away from His Son. These extraordinary parallel circumstances are no coincidence. By God's design they bookend Jesus' ministry and demonstrate that He was, and is in no way, an ordinary King.

We must also consider that for Jesus, humanly speaking, this was **a powerful and encouraging affirmation** of His mission, ministry, and nature. Such an exalted vision and revelation would have confirmed His divine nature and strengthened Him against his temptations in the wilderness. The imagery here is majestic, powerful, and gathers together the divine Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to inaugurate the coming Kingdom at a single point in time. We see God the Father looking down with love upon His Son. And we see the Holy Spirit descending like a dove upon Him, suggesting a diving blessing and equipping for the ministry and mission He is now beginning.





Let's move on to the next scene in verses 12 and 13. *"The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 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."*

We start to get a sense of intensity and pace in the way Mark writes. Just as Jesus "immediately" had a vision, the Spirit "immediately" takes him deeper into the wilderness. Again, while Mark's account here is shorter than the other gospels, there is much for us to observe in this text. Mark continues into our next scene by showing Jesus responding to the Spirit driving Him further into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. The brevity and tone of Mark's account serves to emphasize a sense of urgency to the start of Jesus' ministry as He demonstrates obedience to His Father and the Spirit's leading as well as experiencing the hardships and weaknesses of men. There is no time to bask in the glory of the previous scene. As quickly as the ministry begins, it must begin to move out.

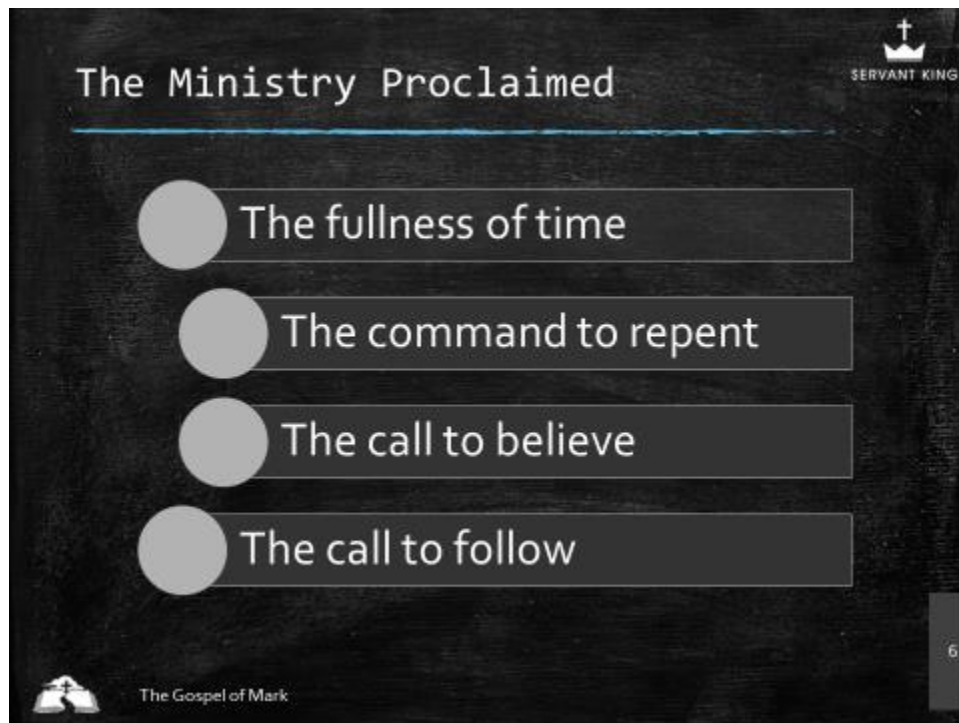
Just as Mark points out the wilderness in this account, the forty days of temptation is also very symbolic. It is clearly meant to refer to the forty years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness before moving into the Promised Land. I believe that Mark intends for his readers to sense the theme of God's sovereign hand being involved throughout the course of history. The journey into the wilderness is not an accident or shortcut back to Galilee. The Spirit propels Jesus into a harsh wilderness that is filled with trials and testing.

It is interesting to note that the wilderness, the place of Israel's testing, was also the place of Jesus' testing. Mark's record of Jesus' obedience to the Father's here at the beginning of His ministry is important. It not only proves Jesus righteousness, it also foreshadows His obedience at the end of His ministry at the cross. As we will see throughout this series, one of Mark's themes is to demonstrate the power of Jesus the King with victories over Satan, His enemy.

In verse 13, Mark emphasizes **the shared experience** of Christ with those He came to save. The inaugurated King experiences hunger, thirst, loneliness, weakness, and fatigue. He experiences the temptations of Satan. Although Mark does not provide the details to the extent of Matthew and Luke, he does uniquely record the danger of wild animals as Jesus experiences the dangers and fears of this world.

Mark also mentions the ministering angels which speaks to God's care for his Son as He followed in obedience. The presence of Satan and the angels here reminds us that the forty days in the wilderness were not just a physical battle with his flesh and temptations. This verse contains the first sense of **the spiritual battle** going on between the kingdom of God and kingdom of darkness as a battle raged between Christ the King and Satan during this time.

But if the wilderness is a place of testing, it is also a place of deliverance. Jesus emerges victorious and His ministry is proven through the crucible of the wilderness. He has done what the Israelites and we could not do. His victory brings hope that we too will be delivered from the struggles and suffering of this world. Here again is a powerful reminder of the Gospel. God has provided a Savior who understands our wilderness. He has experienced our temptations. And He now represents His people before the Father as One who walked in our shoes and intercedes for us as Redeemer and King.



Let's move on to our final scene in verses 14 and 20. *"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately*

*they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him."*

Mark begins the third scene noting the beginning of Jesus' ministry starting after John the Baptist is put in prison. As His forerunner's ministry begins to close, Jesus goes to Galilee and begins His public ministry. Jesus begins to proclaim the message of His ministry. Here again, Mark conveys the sense of God's sovereign hand at work, perfectly ordering the events of Jesus' ministry **in the fullness of time**. In the words, when we hear that "the time is fulfilled", we are to get a sense that we all need to synchronize our watches by this event. From here on out, with the proclamation of this message, nothing will ever be the same.

The second part of Jesus' message define the content of His ministry. Literally, Jesus is saying that the reign or rule of God is at hand. Jesus proclaims the idea that His death on the cross will bring about a completing and final work. He brings a new kingdom and rule that shall be forever more. Jesus' message ends with **the command to "repent"** and believe the good news." Similar to the call of John the Baptist, Jesus calls men to turn away from sin and turn to a right relationship with God.

The implication to Mark's readers and to us is a turning of bending our will to the will of God in obedience and submission. In addition, Jesus makes **a call to believe** the good news. The implication here is that belief or faith involves action and commitment. It is more than an intellectual assent to the fact that Jesus came and died on the cross. It is a commitment, whatever the cost, to a sustained faith in the perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus, who is our only means of salvation.

Our scene closes as Jesus walks long the Sea of Galilee. Here Mark depicts the powerful magnetism of Jesus' ministry and message. First, Jesus sees Simon (later know as Peter) and Andrew **and calls them to follow Him**. Similarly, he calls upon James and John to follow him as well. Four men who earned their living catching fish. Certainly an ironic first action for a King. He does not search for warriors or wise counselors. Instead he searches for, and calls out, very ordinary men.

Mark notes that they immediately followed Jesus. While we do not know everything that was said or whether these men had heard of Jesus before, we do know that something about Jesus and His message compelled them to drop everything and follow him. No longer would they be catching fish. They were to become fishers of men. They probably did not know all that lay in store for them that day. But something in them had changed and when Christ called, they heard and obeyed. They abandoned all for a new life and a new mission drawn by the authority and message that Jesus proclaimed.





In closing I would like to reflect on two things that flow out of this passage. The first of these is to see how Mark presents redemption's scarlet thread as he introduces the ministry of Jesus. Mark uses themes of water, wilderness, and kingdom to connect his readers with the captivity and deliverance of Israel. Each of the three scenes we have looked at in Mark's introduction to Jesus ministry connect with each of these themes.

First, Mark causes us to look back. Out of captivity in Egypt, God delivers Israel through the waters of the Red Sea. After walking through the parted waters, Israel enters the wilderness where they are tested. Their failures are a reminder that man cannot save himself. But after 40 years of struggling in the wilderness, God brings deliverance and Israel is allowed to cross into the Promised Land. Mark intentionally and firmly connects the promises of the good news of the coming Messiah with passages in Old Testament scriptures showing God's faithfulness to His promises. If God fulfilled His promises to Israel, would he not do the same in fulfilling the promises of a coming King?

But we can also look forward from Mark's account. Out of the captivity of sin God has delivered us and we proclaim our new life in the waters of baptism. Out of this new life we enter into this world as strangers in a wilderness where we encounter trials and temptations. What we cannot do on our own, Christ has done for us. And our hope in Christ is that the spiritual kingdom that Mark is writing about was completed at the cross. And we who have been delivered from sin have been transferred to an eternal kingdom where we will one day dwell in the presence and glory of our King.



This morning, I would you to consider a few applications of Mark's introduction to the ministry and mission of Jesus. What does it mean to us today? First, Mark reminds us that **God uses the unlikely to bring Him glory**. God takes the average and ordinary to bring glory to His name. It's not about our position, power, or possessions that give us any status with God. Nothing we can do or be will gain us favor with God. God does not need us to fulfill His purposes.

Second, Mark reminds us that **Jesus stands in the place of sinners**. Believers should be encouraged that just as Jesus' identified with us in His baptism, through His death on the cross and resurrection, we now find our identity in Him. What we could not do, he did in our place. What he accomplished in His death and resurrection is applied to us. This is the mission and ministry of the servant King. He came not establish and rule a physical Kingdom. But gave his life to serve and save His people and establish a spiritual Kingdom that will have no end.

Finally, Mark reminds us that **those who hear Christ's message to repent and believe must follow Him**. Those who have faith and believe will trust Christ and submit themselves to Him as Lord and Savior. For those who are saved, we often forget our initial love for Christ. We begin to take His precious gift to us for granted. And when we lose our passion and desire for His Kingdom, we become dry and barren like the wilderness Jesus was tempted in. May we ever walk and live with Christ as our heart's greatest desire and satisfaction.

Perhaps this morning there are some who have never trusted Christ for salvation and given their life to him. Let me encourage you to talk to someone this morning and ask them to introduce you to Jesus. This morning, may you look to the examples of the first disciples who heard the message to repent and believe the Gospel and immediately followed Christ. Believe me when I tell you that you will never find true satisfaction and lasting joy without Christ.

[closing prayer]

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