

Mark: A Servant on a Mission
A Whole New World

Introduction: Today we begin new series that will be our focus for much of this year

The Gospel of Mark

- One of the four books we call “Gospels”
- One of the three we call “synoptic Gospel” (Syn=together + optic=seeing=seeing together)
- Author is John Mark (he is a cousin of Barnabas and went on a missionary trip with Paul but came home early)
- Likely the first of the four Gospels to be written (mid-50’s AD)
- Written from Rome during time of Nero’s persecution
- Mark’s primary source was Peter (this really is the Gospel according to Peter)

It helps then to know a little about Peter...

- Original name was “Simon” (son of Jonah from Bethsaida)
- Brother of Andrew and fishing partners with James and John the sons of Zebedee
- Married and his wife’s mother was healed of a high fever in Mark 1:30
- Called by Jesus to be a “fisher of men” and left his nets and all he had to follow Jesus
- One of the inner circle of three (James and John), quick to speak, promised not to deny (3x)
- Restored by Jesus after the resurrection (John 21)
- Used at Pentecost to preach when 3,000 saved
- Martyred (65-69 AD) crucified upside down saying—“I am not worthy to die like Jesus.”

With Peter as his source, Mark writes His Gospel

Today we will explore the prologue to the Gospel of Mark (separate introduction to the Gospel)

- Mark has no birth narrative (like Matthew and Luke); he goes straight to the ministry of Jesus
- Begins with John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness (people from Judea and Jerusalem going OUT to meet him to be baptized)
- John announces that one that is greater than him will be coming

“John announced: “Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!” Mark 1:7-8 NLT

- Jesus went to see John and was baptized (Spirit/Dove—heavens opened/Father’s voice)

- Same Spirit leads Him into the wilderness deeper to be tempted

Approaching the Text (Let's do so with new and fresh eyes)

- For some this is old, heard it over and over—can there be anything new?
- Others, you know little or nothing about it—we want to see this for the first time with you
- What is the story Mark is communicating to those believers in Rome being persecuted by a wicked Nero?
- Fire destroyed $\frac{3}{4}$ of Rome in AD 64 and Nero was accused so he blamed it on Christians and began persecuting them (dressed in animal skins and torn apart by dogs and some burned to death to provide light for his nighttime garden parties)

What is the Message of Mark's Gospel (that comes from Peter) that begins to be communicated here in the prologue?

I. Mark wants his readers to be aware of their NEW HOPE.

Mark 1:4a—“John came baptizing in the wilderness...”

- A. The emergence of John the Baptist in the wilderness was the most important event in the history of Israel in more than 400 years.
 1. Hundreds of years before God had promised a prophet like Moses who would come—“a faithful prophet” and his coming would signal the last days

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’ “And the LORD said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.” Deuteronomy 18:15-19 NKJV

Maccabees was a Jewish author living in the 2nd century BC (100 years before Christ)

Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. 42 He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, 43 and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. 44 They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. 45 And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, 46 and stored the stones in a convenient place

on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. (1 Maccabees 4:41-46)

“The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise.” (1 Maccabees 14:41)

2. Malachi was the last prophet for Israel (420 BC)
3. The people waited but no prophet emerged

B. There was only a remnant of Jews still expecting “the prophet” and then the Messiah, the Savior

1. Simeon and Anna in Luke 2
2. After the temple rebuilt in early 500’s BC there was still an expectation of the elders that something great would come

“But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers’ houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.” Ezra 3:12-13 NKJV

3. Over the years that hope diminished—only a remnant left
4. By the time John came on the scene the hope was all but gone

C. “John came baptizing in the wilderness...”

1. He had a message of Christ’s coming (the Messiah)
2. “There comes one after me...”
3. No matter how long you have waited...THERE IS HOPE!

D. Mark is telling Peter’s story

1. He followed Jesus one day
2. He left his nets and all he had to follow
3. What he found in Jesus was more than he could have ever imagined

Take the Hand of God (Ravi Zacharis tells story)

In 1952, King George VI of England addressed the British commonwealth on New Year's Eve at a moment in history when the whole world stood on the brink of uncertainty. Despondency and uncertainty filled the air. The king's own body was racked by cancer. Before that year was over, his life ended. Unaware of his own physical maladies, he uttered these memorable words:

"I said to the man at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I might walk safely into the unknown.' And he said to me, 'Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God. It shall be to you safer than the light and better than the known.' "

The Message of Mark—There is NEW HOPE (safer than the light and better than the known)

II. Mark wants his readers to know about their NEW BEGINNING.

Mark 1:4—“John came baptizing in the wilderness, and preaching a baptism of repentance ad remission of sins.”

A. Meaning of John’s baptism (some conjecture)

1. Initiation rite for Jewish proselytism
2. Initiation rite for Qumran community
3. No proof of either
4. This was unique to John as a prophet for Israel-Baptism

B. John was a prophet of the wilderness

1. His clothing
2. His diet
3. His ministry of preparing the way for the coming Christ was performed in the wilderness—calling them to repentance and forgiveness of sins (Christ had not died yet)
 - a. Repentance—me-tä'-noi-ä=change of mind or a turning back
 - b. Repentance literally is a turning back to the previous state

C. The wilderness was where the people of God first became a people—called sons

1. Moses before Pharaoh when God sent him to Egypt

“Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.” Exodus 4:22-23 NKJV

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son.” Hosea 11:1 NKJV

2. John is calling Israel back to the wilderness to be His Son again—to renew that relationship

- a. They had abandoned that
- b. No longer his sons
- c. God wanted to give them a new beginning
- d. Must return to the wilderness—in all humility lay aside their pride and return

3. Peter knew what it was like to lose that sense of Sonship

- a. Matthew 16—You are Peter and on the rock
- b. Great denial at the cross
- c. But a new beginning-sonship restored

D. As you read the Gospel of Mark—you learn He came to give you a new beginning.

When Jesus heard this, he told them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.” (Mark 2:17)

III. Mark wants his readers to know about their NEW OPPORTUNITY.

“It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Mark 1:9-11 NKJV

A. Jesus comes to the wilderness to Himself be baptized

1. We talk about his substitution or representation at the cross
2. We talk about his “vicarious” death (acting on behalf of another)
3. Even here Jesus is coming back to the wilderness on behalf of the people of Israel to vicariously stand in for them and make them God’s Son again!

4. In the wilderness is where their Sonship will be established
 - a. In 1:5—all the people came to be baptized
 - b. In 1:9—one single representative is introduced and it is the only one from Galilee
 - c. Jesus (like Moses in the wilderness) does not set himself apart from the sin of the people—He identifies with them
- B. As He comes up from the water—it is answered by a coming down from above
1. Spirit descends
 2. Heavens rent
 3. Father speaks

Isaiah had prophesied

“Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence—” Isaiah 64:1 NKJV

C. Pattern was set in the first Exodus in the wilderness

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.” Exodus 19:10-11 NKJV

1. A new opportunity to know God
 2. A new opportunity to experience God
- D. Mark announces in this prologue
1. Jesus has identified with us
 2. He has gone out to the wilderness to renew Sonship
 3. He has consecrated Himself
 4. Heaven has come down

This is a new opportunity for us! We don't have to just get by! Heavens are opened and God can use us now!

(ILL)

Pastor Mike Breaux tells the following story of when his daughter Jodie answered God's call to go into missions work:

During her junior year of high school, Jodie struggled to find a faith of her own. She wanted to know in her heart that all of what she'd been taught to believe was true and that Jesus Christ was real. Honestly, she was headed down a dark road. But God pursued her down that road. She eventually found a faith of her own, and when she graduated from high school, she said, "I don't think God wants me to go to college right now. I want to take a year to go to Haiti, and I want to serve people in a medical mission down there." I said, "Are you sure you want to do this? Jodie, it's 3,000 miles away from home. It's AIDS-infested and the poorest country in the western hemisphere. And do you know it's controlled by the voodoo religion?"

"I know all that," she said. "But I feel like God wants me to go and help those people." I said, "Okay. If that's what you want to do, we'll make it happen." One of the hardest days of my life was putting my little girl on an airplane and watching it lift off, not knowing whether I'd ever communicate with her again.

One night I got an e-mail from Jodie. She wrote: "Dad, tonight has been the most remarkable night of my life. I got called out to this hut to deliver a baby. Dad, I've only delivered one, and that was with somebody. I'd never done this by myself, but I was the only one around. They called me, and I get to this hut, and there's this naked, screaming lady on the dirt floor. I got a flashlight, and I'm thinking, Here I am, 18-years-old, and I'm in a hut in a third-world country with a naked, screaming, pregnant lady. I have a flashlight, and I don't know what I'm doing—but I'm here. To make matters worse, this lady from the voodoo religion walked into the hut, dressed in her red and blue voodoo garb, and began to chant some voodoo incantation in Creole. She put some kind of oil on the lady's head, and when she started to walk away from me and the woman, she stopped at the woman's belly, put some other kind of saave there, and walked the opposite direction—all while chanting this Creole spell. I didn't know what to do. She stood at

the head of this woman and stared a hole through me. When I was getting ready to deliver this baby, I just looked back at her, and I started singing. I knew she didn't understand English, but I just started singing: 'Our God is an awesome God, he reigns from heaven above, with wisdom, power, and love, our God is an awesome God.'" Jodie said that the voodoo lady became completely unglued. She grabbed all of her stuff and ran out of the hut. Jodie wrote, "That night I knew that that baby was going to be born with the blessing of God and not the curse of Satan."

As I read Jodie's e-mail, my fatherly side thought, You get on a plane tomorrow! What are you doing in a hut with a voodoo woman in the first place? But then my heart beat so fast for her as her brother in Christ. I thought, Way to go, Jodie! Way to make a difference with your life! Way to stop floating around accidental-like! Way to put your life in the hands of the destiny-maker! Way to make a splash! Who knows who that little baby she delivered that night is going to grow up to touch and who that person is going to touch—all because of one courageous girl who said, "Okay, God, I want to put my life in your hands; I want to make a difference."

In Mark 8:35 Jesus said: If you insist on saving your life—[if you insist on the comfort of playing it safe]—you're going to lose your opportunity for life! Only those who give away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it really means to really, really live.

Mark wants his readers to know about their new opportunity!

IV. Mark wants his readers to know about their NEW CHALLENGE.

"Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him." Mark 1:12-13 NKJV

A. The Spirit that descended upon Him at His baptism now drives him more deeply into the wilderness to penetrate the darkness

1. The wilderness and its wild beasts
2. No seed or growth no water or refreshing
3. Things as chaos (like in the creation before the Spirit broods—then God speaks and order comes)

B. Jesus will bring order

1. To fisherman looking for a purpose-order will come
2. To a man in the synagogue with a demonic spirit-order will come
3. To Peter's mother-in-law suffering with fever—order will come
4. To a outcast leper-order will come
5. To a paralytic and his hopeless friends-order will come

C. This was the new challenge for Jesus

1. Battle with Satan
2. Advance the kingdom

Mark wanted his readers to know that the NEW CHALLENGE was before them

- New hope
- New beginning
- New opportunity
- New Challenge

This is the message of Mark's prologue—John—One crying the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord!

Conclusion: Let's return to the opening statement of Mark

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Mark 1:1 NKJV

- The beginning of the Gospel
- The whole set of events from John's coming to the outset of Jesus' ministry is the beginning of the Gospel
- Gospel or "Evangel" was not first a Christian term
- Among the Romans it meant –"joyful tidings" (or good news)
- On the Emperor's birthday or attainment to new kingdoms or power a festival would be called to celebrate this achievement
- Gospel or Evangel was "an historical event which introduced a new situation for the world."
- Mark's Gospel was going to announce that with the coming of Jesus as an event, a radically different new state of affairs had begun—It was a Whole New World!

Gerhard Friedrich- "Caesar and Christ, the emperor on the throne and the despised rabbi on the cross, confront one another. Both are "evangel" (good news) to men. They have much in common. But they belong to different worlds.

Jesus has brought us a whole new world! A Different Paradigm!

British pastor, Matthew Hosier, writes about a missionary friend who moved to a Muslim majority nation:

When we first moved to the Middle East we heard that on festival days everyone dresses in their best clothes and goes to visit their relatives and neighbors to celebrate. So, for our first Eid festival we carefully cleaned our apartment, dressed up in our best clothes, got some sweets and chocolates which are traditional to hand out to visitors and waited in our house. But no-one came to visit. Another missionary explained what we did wrong: "On festival days, the small visit the big, and the big give out presents." For example, everyone in a family visits their eldest brother, or their parents, or grandparents. When they arrive they would kiss the hand of the older person to show respect and honor. The host would then care for their guests by feeding them, serving them, and giving them gifts like good quality chocolate, money, or other presents. As newly arrived foreigners without social standing or relatives, naturally no-one came to visit us. We are considered "small" by the culture, so we are the ones who need to do the visiting.

This incident made me ponder the awesomeness of the incarnation. In every other religion, humans (the small) try to visit God by their own strength and good works. But as much as we try to dress up nicely, we cannot be clean enough to enter his house without polluting and disrespecting it.

In the incarnation God decided to play the role both of the "small" and of the "big." He humbled himself totally to become "small" so that he could visit us in our squalid house. But also as the "big" he played the role of host and gave gifts—atonement, the Holy Spirit, and clean clothes—which means that as believers we are now appropriately dressed and thus free to enter his house without disrespecting it.

- This is the Gospel—the Good News
- Jesus has become small to enter our house to make us His
- THIS is a whole new world