



New Year – New You

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Mark 1:1-8

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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 before your face,
who will prepare your way,*

*³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare^[c] the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”*

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

(Pastor prays)

Every year we set goals. Some are physical, some are mental. Some have something to do with our vocations. Your goals this year may be spiritual: you want to develop and grow for the glory of God. Maybe you want to lose some weight, get in shape. Maybe you want to read more and watch TV less. Maybe you want to spend more time with your family. Maybe you just want to work on not being sarcastic or cutting out the foul language or stop drinking. Maybe your goal is to have a better attitude, to be less negative. Maybe you want to save money. Whatever the goals are, we start the year with hopes of

being better. But we are two weeks in and it's already a struggle. I decided that I would eat an apple a day. Well, I started off with a red and delicious apple. It was red, but it was not delicious. Then someone gave me an apple called a Honeycrisp. It was sweet, but it was big. It was suggested to me to dip the apple in peanut butter but all that did was ruin the peanut butter.

In order to keep our goals, we need something outside ourselves. We were not made to be *independent*. We were made to be *dependent* on the one who created us. God Himself. And thanks to God, He has come to us with the person of Jesus Christ and this message is here to give us hope and to set our course.

If you can take it, failure stops today. Here I want you to agree with the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:6 when he says, ⁶ *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*. Has He started a work in you? If so, what needs to happen? What do you need to start? Or what do you need to quit in order to bring it to completion? But whatever it is:

We Need God to Get Us Through the New Year

I think the Gospel of Mark helps us here. As we start the new year, here are four things we need.

We need a good beginning

We have got to have a good start and be headed in the right direction. I read it last week but let's look at it again. *1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

If we take that apart, we find that we need to be...

Clear on the Gospel

Often I'll sit in a church or listen to it on the computer and watch the service and I'll hear a good preacher do something good with the Bible and

never actually explain the Gospel. They may talk about the Gospel and display gospel ministry and lead a gospel-driven church, but in order to have a good beginning we actually have to know what the Gospel is. What is the Gospel of God? The Gospel is that our God is a good and holy creator. He created all of us in His image. If you are not a Christian here today, take some heart you've been created in the image of God. You have dignity because of that the image of God in you. However, that image is poisoned because of our first mother and father. Adam and Eve, the first parents, sinned before God and we have inherited that from the very beginning. So we came into this world as sinners already, separated from God. That's an issue. We are not just separated from God because we are sinners; sin is a capital offense against the almighty judge who is God. God, who is fully just, must punish that crime. The punishment for that crime from Genesis Chapter 3 is death. That is a big problem for every human. But that's not the end of the story, is it?

The Gospel is the story that God not only must punish sin. God loves His creation, to the degree that He sends the second Adam, Jesus. It's important that Jesus is fully man because the first man messed it up for all of us. The second Adam comes and lives perfectly, in perfect fellowship with God like we can't. Jesus lived perfectly, in perfect fellowship with God. But He didn't just live as the second Adam in our place; He also did something radical. It's why we have the cross on the baptistry. It is why we call ourselves Christians. It's not just that He lived so good. The promise of the Gospel is that there is a substitute.

Remember now the penalty of our sin is death; and that's what we deserve, condemnation. We deserve to go to Hell. Thousands of millions of people have gone to Hell without Christ. And yet Jesus took the wrath of God, the punishment that we deserve, and here's the Gospel: He takes the punishment that we deserve on the cross. That's why the cross is so important, it is an instrument of God's wrath against the perfect son of God. And He gives us His lived righteousness so that when you become a Christian, Jesus has taken your sin and given you His perfection so that you are adopted by God the

Father as His child because you are covered and are in Christ. And you might ask, how do you know it worked? We know because Jesus didn't just die on the cross; they buried Jesus, and on the third day, God raised Him from the dead, on a Sunday as a celebration of victory and a promise of the coming resurrection for all of those who die in Christ. We need to begin this year with a clear handle on the Gospel. We need to be...

Serious about sin

Why do I say we need to be serious about sin? Because sometimes I feel the church is slipping. I think the gospel-centered churches, conservative and theologically conservative churches, I think sometimes are slipping in how they view sin. We must never forget the serious nature of sin. The Angel said to Joseph, name that boy Jesus because He will save them from their sins. Jesus came. He was known as the friend of sinners. One of the things that Christians need to do to help us live lives that are honoring to God is to actually take sin very seriously. Our own sin is what I'm talking about, mostly our own personal sin. And when you come to grips with the fact that it took so much grace to save you, you're a lot less harsh on other people because you realize your own sin. We start the year off with a good beginning, clear on the Gospel and serious about sin. We need to be...

Devoted to Lordship

What does verse 1 say? *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus* – the one who came to die in the place of sinners – *Jesus Christ*. That word “Christ” translates into the word “Messiah”. It is the idea of one who is Lord. It's important for us to remember that you don't just take Jesus on as savior. When He saves you, He becomes Lord of your life. We have created this odd category called “nominal Christianity” where you can come to church and be baptized and then decide not to be a part of the life of the church. And the New Testament gives no room for that. I would say again that a **nominal Christian is not a Christian at all**. That is, if Jesus is not your Lord, then He is certainly not your savior. We ought to be devoted to lordship, seeking to live

our lives under the lordship of Jesus. Do we strive to please this King Jesus? Not only that. We need to be...

Committed to Worship

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

What a great picture. He's not just a teacher or a leader. Here is God. Here's the one who deserves our worship. Look, you know the Sundays fell weird this year during the holidays. If you are a preacher, you watch all of this. So Christmas Day was a Sunday and then New Year's Day was a Sunday. It won't happen again till 2033. But unbelievably to me, there were churches that didn't have church on Christmas Day or New Year's Day. It's beyond my comprehension. We travel always on Christmas to go see Connie's mom and dad, but because of the way the Sundays fell, we came back early. I wasn't preaching that Sunday and Dr. Kyler Smith was preaching so I showed up to church. We had one service here at 11 o'clock and one of the things that I thought was, if you didn't make it to church at 11am, you have to make a conscious decision to *not* come to church. Kyler did such a great job expositing the Bible in Psalm 46. It was good for my soul to be there and to listen, to worship and sit. I should do that more often. But I was up for hours thinking about it. Like why do we have church so late? I thought, you have to make a conscious decision to not show up. I'm preaching to the choir because here you are, but let's start with this. Let's start with this conscious decision of having a good beginning, being clear on the Gospel, serious about sin, devoted to lordship and committed to worship. We need a good beginning.

We need a strong foundation

So verse 1 is sort of a preamble. It's kind of like the title. *The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God.* That's sort of the title of the Book of Mark. And then when you drop down to verses 2 and 3, and what you have there is a sort of Bible mash-up when you read it.

Now look at the way Mark introduces it. ²*As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,* but then notice what he does. You look at your Bible and I'll just talk about it. In verse 2 it says, *Behold, I send my messenger before your face.* That comes from Exodus 23:20. And then the second part of verse 2, *who will prepare your way.* That comes from Malachi 3:1. And then in verse 3. *The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord,* that comes from Isaiah 40:3.

Now let's just keep looking at those two verses. There are several things going on here. I just would like to point out a couple of them. One is that this is a reminder. Mark is quoting ancient passages as a reminder that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has always been in the long thoughts of God. This has always been His plan. It starts with the last prophet in the Old Testament, Malachi, and you start going backward from Malachi. You run into Isaiah, and then you get to the history books. You see in the Kings where David is the picture of Christ. You reach over to Joshua and there is Joshua, even his name is the same, as Jesus. From Joshua you ride over to Moses. Moses becomes the picture of leading his people out of Egypt. After Exodus, you go into Genesis chapter 48 and there is Judah. Jesus would be the lion of the tribe of Judah. Keep pressing through Genesis and you see a picture in Genesis 22 and then in Genesis 12 where God calls Abraham. Finally, all the way back to Genesis 3:15 when in the midst of the curse, God says that the seed of the woman would one day crush the head of the serpent. W.A. Criswell would say that there is a scarlet thread that runs through the whole Bible. It's a good reminder that the Gospel of Jesus has always been in the long thoughts of God.

There's something else here in his quotation of these three Old Testament passages that should remind us that this is a high Christology. Christology, it's a study of a high Christology. A low Christology would say Jesus is a man, a great teacher worthy for you to follow. A high Christology would say Jesus is God. And what he's doing here in verse 2 and 3, he quotes passages from the Old Testament in Exodus and what Exodus is talking about is a messenger

coming before God. What Malachi is talking about is a messenger that comes before God. What Isaiah is talking about is a messenger that comes before God. So what Mark is saying, if you take all those passages in their context, what he is saying is that those passages are talking about John the Baptist as the messenger, and Jesus as God come to earth. This passage gives us a high Christology.

This passage speaks to the authority and the sufficiency of scripture. It's something to build your life on when you talk about the authority of the Bible. What I mean by that is the Bible saturates and guides your life. We started our service reading the Bible, saying that we live by this book. The Bible restrains us. The Bible defines who we are. It feeds our souls. In the Bible, we actually hear God speak, pointing us to Jesus. The authority of the Bible, do you live your life under it? The attitude you take each day, is that attitude saturated by and guided by the Bible? Do you complain a lot? Are you a complainer? The Bible tells us the story of God's people complaining in the wilderness and standing under judges. Is your heart grateful for big things and small things? Are you willing to thank God and continue to thank God? Are you quick to forgive people? The Bible tells us that we look at the grace of God, given to us in Jesus. What is your understanding of sexuality, of what it looks like? Because the way things are in our culture, we more and more have to be informed. What does the Bible say about being a man or being a woman? What does that mean being created in the image of God as a woman or being created in the image of God as a man? What about truthfulness, speaking truth or stewardship giving? Are you living your life under the authority of the Bible? But not just the authority. We also speak of the sufficiency of the Bible, that the Bible is sufficient. It is enough to feed our souls and ease our minds and heal our emotions and direct our hearts. It is enough to give purpose to our lives and to inform our faith.

Brothers and sisters, we need a good beginning. That is the Gospel. We need that. But we also need a strong foundation. Would you commit today? I wonder if you would commit today to brick by brick start building your life on

the authority and the sufficiency of the scripture. You know to do that you need a good translation. I would recommend something other than the King James. It's accurate but it's just hard to read. I would recommend the ESV or the NIV or the New American Standard or the CSB.

You need a good plan. What is the plan? Maybe start a Bible reading plan to begin. Maybe you fell off the wagon just in two weeks. Let's get back on. You need to set a time in your life where you are the least likely to be disturbed. Now, if you're got kids, it may be hard to find that time, but we just find some least likely time to be disturbed. You need to ask God to help. You need to build in some accountability; some brothers or sisters that will help you and keep you accountable. Because we need God to get us through the year. We need a good start. And we need a strong foundation.

Let me give you something else to consider. We'll get to the man himself, John the Baptist. Has there ever been another person more countercultural than John the Baptist? In Verse 4, Mark will write, John appeared. It's interesting that he starts the narrative like that because Peter, when he stood up in acts Chapter 10, Peter began his sermon like this, when John appeared. That's why we think that Peter probably informed Mark of this.

Let's look at some of the details. Let's read verses 4-6. *⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.* Let's look at a few details about John and why he was so counterculture. In Verse 4, John appeared. Look what he's doing. He's baptizing in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. And *all*, John Mark tells us *all*. Now that's probably like you and I saying, "yeah, everybody was there." and *all* the country of Judea and *all* Jerusalem were going out to him and we're being baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins.

Now here's the bio. ⁶ *Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.* Let's talk about him. The prevailing word that describes this man named John is the "baptizer." He was baptizing in verse 4. Baptizing would be completely radical and unique. There were other Jewish ritual washings. If you were a Gentile and you want to worship with the Jews, you had to undergo a ritual washing. You would go out close to where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the Qumran society. There are some Essenes out there. They would have a ritual washing. You would walk down into a bath and maybe walk back out to symbolize some sort of purity. That's not what John was doing. John was putting people under water and pulling them back up as a sign of repentance. This was not even Christian baptizing but he was setting the stage. We'll find out more next week when Jesus is baptized. But the Bible says in verse 4 that he was baptizing, and it was a baptism of repentance. See the word "repentance." It's an unpopular word in Christian circles. It should not be because it is the key to salvation. What is repentance? It is an absolute radical repudiating, a turning away from sin. It's saying the same thing about sin that God says and that you hate it. Do you know that the best preparation of the Gospel, the best preparation for Jesus to come is to preach about sin and turning from it.

There's another key element there. It is the word "wilderness." Do you not wonder, why the wilderness? Why is he out in the wilderness? If you've got something to say and you want to preach, go where the crowds are. The wilderness would be 20 miles from Judea and Jerusalem. Now it's all downhill going down there to the desert. But to get back out of there, you've got to walk back up thousands of feet to get back home. What were the people doing out there in the wilderness? The wilderness plays an important role in the storyline of the Bible.

Look, do you think you're in a wilderness? It's not all bad. It was in the wilderness where Moses saw the burning bush and God spoke to him and called him. It was in the wilderness that God took His people out of the slavery of Egypt and guided them in the wilderness. There in the wilderness, He fed them manna and quail. It was in the wilderness where God gave His people

the Ten Commandments, the Law of God. God met His prophets in the wilderness. When the prophet Elijah had gotten to the end of himself, he was ministered to by the ravens in the wilderness. Jesus, the Lord Jesus, went into the wilderness to be tempted and to defeat the demons. Sometimes, God takes us into the wilderness to sanctify his children and discipline his children. What's the effect? Let's read verse 5. *⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.* This is Mark giving us a picture. All the country of Judea and all Jerusalem. They were going out to him. They were being baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. Now this is totally inconvenient and totally worth it. And it's always like that where the Gospel is being preached.

We are reminded and reassured that this John is a prophet. Look at his biography in verse 6. See what the text says. *⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.* This is the John the Baptist diet. Here John the Baptist is completely countercultural. And this what it means to follow the way of Christ.

Look, we live in a world that is accelerating. So here we are, under the authority and sufficiency of the scripture and we've been called to be counterculture. That means we think differently about what the world says about sex. We say something different. What the world says about money, we say something different. What the world says about justice, we see it differently because of the Bible. We think counterculturally to the way the world would define masculinity; the way the world would define Biblical God-honoring femininity. We don't believe the way the world would define and what they would call education. It's going to become increasingly more difficult for Christian families to actually put their children in government-sponsored schools. Just because of how they're guided. It's going to determine how we live in our neighborhoods, how we understand ministry, what we do for recreation, and how we see when life begins or when life ends is going to become more and more radical. There is a growing radical nature

to our Christianity, but it's not because we have changed. It's because we are holding on to the faith once and for all delivered to the Saints. This is what Trevin Wax called "radical orthodoxy, the thrill of orthodoxy." But it's because there is this increasing acceleration and intensity of the downward spiral of our world. And we live in a nation that does not fear God. And to flourish as a Christian, we can't be passive.

We need a good beginning. It's the Gospel. We need a strong foundation. It's the Bible. We need a countercultural approach that is coming outside in the wilderness.

I'll give you one last one and we'll call it a day. Number 4. What do we need? We need a radical focus on Jesus. Look at what he's preaching in verse 7 and 8. There he is out there, in the wilderness preaching, and I want you to see how radically focused on Jesus his message is. ⁷ *And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

He is preaching the status of Jesus, the supremacy of Jesus and the power of Jesus. Let's look at the supremacy first in verse 7. After me comes one who is mightier than I. He said, "You think I have power?" And he did, because the things that he said to the Pharisees, you brood of vipers. He was a hard preacher. He did have power, but notice what he says in verse 7: After me there is one coming who is 10 billion times mightier than I. In fact, in John 3, when people are going to follow Jesus, John the Baptist says, "he must increase and I must decrease." In fact, it's a good personal motto. He must increase. I must decrease. See the supremacy of Jesus. But not just that. Verse 7 shows us the status of Jesus. So what it says here is slave language, by the way. He says of Jesus in verse 7, after me comes one who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. Now stooping down and untying the strap of a sandal is what a slave did and listen to the language. What did John say? I'm not worthy to be that man's slave. This shows John's humility. You need to see Christ as the Savior King and to know that He loves you.

One last one. Look at the power. Look how he describes the power of Jesus. I have baptized you with water. John says, this one coming, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. All I can do, John says, is cleanse you on the outside. There's one coming who has real power. He can transform you. He can cleanse you on the inside. Look now, being baptized with the Holy Spirit, what does that speak of? It speaks of the regenerative power of salvation. What happens when you put your faith in Jesus? What happens when you become a Christian? This is not some reference to an ecstatic post-conversion experience that you would see in the modern charismatic movement. That is not baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit happened at the moment of salvation. What a beautiful metaphor John the Baptist gives us. He says, "I baptize you with water." And if you're baptizing with water, you are completely saturated and soaking wet. Your hair is messed up. You are completely wet. He says, "I baptize you like that." When Christ comes there's a salvation that saturates every part of who you are. It will permeate everything. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is God permeating every part of who you are, so that when Jesus is Lord, He is truly Lord of all. John the Baptist gives us a radical focus on Jesus.

I'll end today with those questions:

Have you made a good beginning in the year? Maybe you had a false start. Today's a good day to start a beginning. Maybe it's that you now understand the Gospel, you want to become a Christian. Or maybe it's you see the authority and sufficiency of the Bible and you want to commit to the Lord today to read God's word and grow as a believer.

Do you have a strong foundation? Have you built that foundation on a right view of Jesus as Lord of all?

Have you made a commitment to be a person of the book?

Are you like the culture? How are you different?

How do you intend to be different?

And is your life radically focused on Jesus?

Look, we need God to get us through this next year. That journey can start today.

(Pastor prays)