

1. **Introduction:** Today we begin a verse-by-verse study of the Gospel According to Mark.
2. **Mark 1:1:** *“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”*
  - ◆ Ancient writings often began with a description of the purpose of the book (like Luke and Acts) or, like Mark, with an opening line declaring its primary subject.
  - ◆ Like Genesis, Hosea, and John’s Gospel, the first word of Mark is simply “beginning,” a new beginning in the work of Jesus Christ.
  - ◆ In the first “beginning,” God created the universe, but sin brought disaster to Adam and Eve and their progeny and to the heavens and earth. But now, with the appearance of the Son of God, there is a new beginning, a new era of creation in which the damage done by sin will be corrected.
  - ◆ In Mark’s understanding, the gospel is very different from a set of truths. It is a Person. The kingdom of God is inaugurated by the bodily presence of Jesus of Nazareth. It is “in Christ” that recreation occurs.
  - ◆ In v. 1 Mark declares the essential content of the good news (gospel) is the person of Jesus, who is the Christ (Messiah) and Son of God.
3. **Mark 1:2-4:** *“As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way,’<sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”<sup>4</sup> John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”*
  - ◆ Mark wrote for Roman Gentiles and did not use many OT quotations since they were often unfamiliar to them.
  - ◆ The Isaiah quote connects future events to God’s eternal plan, identifies John as preparing the way for Messiah.
  - ◆ John is divinely ordained to be the messenger sent ahead of Messiah. His effect was dramatic.
4. **Mark 1:5:** *“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.”*
  - ◆ John’s baptism (1:4) was proclaimed as a divine gift and opportunity for forgiveness of sins if one repented.
  - ◆ “Repentance” means to change one’s mind or alter one’s understanding, signifying a rational decision and willful act as opposed to emotive feeling.
5. **Mark 1:6-8:** *“Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*

- ◆ Jesus is not an afterthought of God. He did not come to fix an earlier plan of salvation that failed to work. Jesus is the visible manifestation of God.
- ◆ Reduced to one word, John's message was repentance. Jesus, the incarnate Son, was to continue the work God began in Israel, fulfilling the law and prophets (Mt 5: 17).
- ◆ The gospel, in the person of Jesus Christ, will complete the restoration God began after Adam and Eve sinned.
- ◆ Although offensive to some modern tastes, eating locusts met Jewish dietary regulations (Lev 11: 22) and provided a high source of protein and minerals.
- ◆ John's rustic dress and diet set him apart from the refined temple cult in Jerusalem and further identify him with the desert region.
- ◆ John's dress associates him with Elijah, and his fearless criticism of Herod Antipas (6:18) is like an echo of Elijah's confrontations with King Ahab (1 Kgs 18: 18).
- ◆ In these ways Mark associates John, the Baptizer, with Elijah, the prophet who renewed God's covenant with Israel on Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs 18: 30-45).
- ◆ Thus, the crowds coming to John are attracted to a figure who signifies the fulfillment of Israel's destiny.
- ◆ Mt 3: 7-10 and Lk 3: 7-9 focus on John's message of reform, but Mark focuses on John's preaching of the "one more powerful" to come.
- ◆ Losing sandals and washing feet were the duties of slaves. John considered himself unworthy to untie the sandals of the Coming One.
- ◆ This metaphor speaks of John's humility before the Messiah (John 3: 30).
- ◆ John knew his baptism was symbolic of a permanent and powerful reality to come: ***"I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."***
- ◆ This is an extraordinary comment, because in the OT, giving the Spirit is exclusively an act of God.
- ◆ Mark's introduction of Jesus is brief and incomplete compared to the other Gospels, but it is sufficiently complete to be clear that, through the ages, God has been preparing for a new beginning in Jesus Christ.

6. **Mark 1:9-11**: ***"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>1</sup>And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."***

- ◆ Jesus' baptism is the inaugural event of His public life and ministry. Mark's description of it tells not what Jesus does but what God does to him.
- ◆ Baptism was a defining, indispensable fact of Jesus' life. When it became necessary to choose someone to replace Judas, the main qualification was that it be a man who had walked with Jesus since his baptism.

- ◆ When Jesus came up from the water, three things happened that the Jews recognized as signifying the inauguration of God's eschatological kingdom.
- ◆ (1.) the heavens opened above Him, (2.) the Spirit descended into Him, and (3.) the heavenly voice spoke to Him.
- ◆ These 3 events together signify that Jesus is the "mightier one" (1:7) promised in the OT, the One who inaugurates God's eschatological kingdom.
- ◆ The first sign was highly significant. It was believed OT prophecy ceased because Holy Spirit no longer spoke directly to God's people.
- ◆ Thus, tearing open of the heavens at Jesus' baptism signified a long-awaited return of God's Spirit.
- ◆ That began a period of grace in which God revealed Himself in Jesus in an unparalleled manner.
- ◆ The word used for "tearing open the heavens" is used again at the time the Temple curtain is "torn in two, from top to bottom" as Jesus died and the centurion said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"
- ◆ Both these "tearing" events are supernatural and reveal Jesus as the Son of God.
- ◆ Confession that Jesus is the Son of God comes not from human knowledge but from divine revelation and empowerment (1 Cor 12:3).
- ◆ The second sign at Jesus' baptism was the descent of the Spirit filling Jesus and equipping Him for ministry. Mark speaks of the dove as a simile ("like a dove").
- ◆ The third eschatological sign is the declaration from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."
- ◆ Only here and in Matthew 17:5 and John 12:28 do we find direct discourse between the Father and Jesus. Each time, the Father refers to Jesus as "My Son."
- ◆ As in the case of the ministry of Isaiah's mysterious Servant, Jesus' ministry will be fraught with opposition and seeming defeat.
- ◆ But as seen in Isaiah 49:6, God says, "*I will also make you (Jesus) a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.*"
- ◆ At Jesus' baptism, the heavenly voice declares and confirms Jesus' identity as God's Son, who is anointed and equipped with God's Spirit to express His status as Son in terms of servanthood—indeed, suffering servanthood.
- ◆ Jesus' baptism signals both the confirmation of His Sonship and the beginning of His servanthood.

7. **What is Next:** Begin with Mark 1:12.