

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

Preparing For Jesus

January 8th, 2017

Mark 1:1-8

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 1:1; that’s on page 836 in your pew Bibles. We are starting something new this morning. We are going to spend the better part of 2017 working our way through the Gospel of Mark. Now, in a sense this is NEW but in another sense this is the logical continuation of the series that we just came out of. We spent 4 weeks doing a series called “After Darkness Light” in order to make the point that Jesus came as light into a particular darkness – we did that to set up Christmas, but in a sense it serves as the set up for this series too. As I’ve said many times before you can’t understand Jesus unless you have read the Old Testament story. Jesus is the answer to a particular set of questions – Jesus is the fulfilment to a particular set of promises. You have to read those promises and you have to study those problems in order to recognize and receive Jesus as the Saviour sent from God.

Now, before we jump into the text let me provide a little bit of background to the book itself and we probably need to start with why it is called “The Gospel Of Mark”. Mark or John Mark as he is sometimes called shows up in the New Testament as an assistant to the Apostles – he was an early travelling companion and baggage lackey for the Apostle Paul and then he appears to have been assigned or claimed by the Apostle Peter and he was Peter’s interpreter and scribe throughout the latter part of his career and that’s how his name ended up on this Gospel. The author of the Gospel is never named in its pages, but it was known from the earliest days of the church to have come from

the Apostle Peter by way of his assistant Mark. So for example Papias in AD 130 says about this Gospel:

Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord.¹

So the church has always understood this Gospel as basically Peter's Gospel written down and probably translated into professional Greek by John Mark. It was written around the year AD 65 during the persecution of Christians in Rome by Nero and it has, as a result, a bit of a sense of urgency about it. It is brief, it is blunt, it gets right to the point and it is exactly what you would expect from the Apostle Peter.

Alright, that's enough introduction, we will fill in the rest as we go.

The text for this morning is actually a lit bit unusual. Mark's Gospel is all about Jesus – as you might have guessed, but our text this morning – Mark 1:1-8 – is one of the few passages in Mark's Gospel where Jesus doesn't do or say anything. Our passage is actually about John the Baptist – all of the Gospels in some way or another begin with the person and work of John the Baptist. So he is obviously a significant character and each of the Gospels make it clear that while John is NOT THE MESSIAH his job is to prepare the way. So we will read this story about John in order to understand how it is that people are prepared to meet the Lord. We'll begin reading at verse 1 and we will read all the way through to verse 8. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

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 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." (Mark 1:1-8 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

¹James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 3.

I mentioned that Mark is the shortest of the Gospels and that is characterized by bluntness and brevity. That is certainly the case in terms of Mark's portrayal of John the Baptist. The other Gospels say a lot more about this incredibly significant character. Matthew, for example, tells us that John had some pretty intense run-ins with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. In Matthew 3 for example he tells us:

when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matthew 3:7-10 ESV)

Woah! John was a firebrand! He was not entirely house trained! He called these Bible teachers – however misguided – a brood of vipers! And he was not optimistic about the future of the Jewish state. He said the "axe is lying at the root of the tree! God is going to cut this thing down and you best get out of the way" – John was a fire breathing Old Testament prophet – but Mark doesn't tell us much about that.

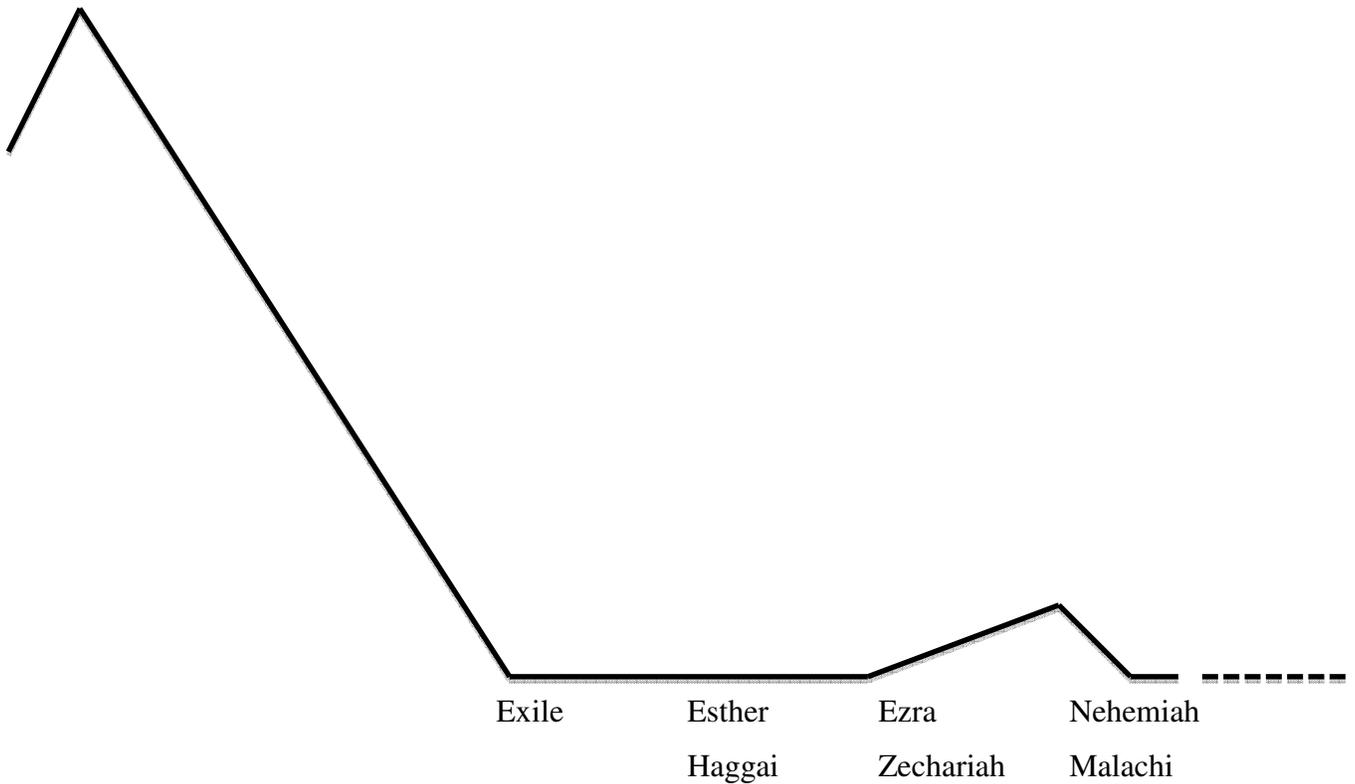
In Luke's Gospel we get the whole story of John's miraculous birth. We get the angel coming to John's parents who are old and wrinkly and past the point of having children and God promises that they too will have a miraculous birth – not a Virgin Birth – but a miraculous birth and we learn in Luke's Gospel that John will do stuff that was prophesied by Malachi in the last book of the Old Testament. Do you remember that? The angel said some incredible things about John! He said:

he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." (Luke 1:15-17 ESV)

He is going to be a SPIRIT FILLED BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN from the WOMB! That's pretty cool. So the next time someone asks you at what age a person can truly be saved you take them to Luke 1. And he's going to be going about in the spirit and power of Elijah – the most miraculous, thunder-breathing, fire calling down from heaven prophet in the Old Testament AND he is going to spark a major revival in Israel in order to prepare people to receive and respond to the Lord – that's a pretty impressive resume and ALMOST ALL OF IT is omitted in the Gospel of Mark.

Mark's Gospel cuts right to the chase. Mark tells us that John is the prophet spoken of in the Old

Testament who will herald the coming of Messiah. (Show chart)



Do you remember this chart? Well in this time period the prophets began to speak about a coming prophet who would break the silence and who would herald the coming of Messiah. The first prophet to speak about that was Isaiah but then the clearest expression of that comes in Malachi – the last prophet in the Old Testament. Now Mark has mashed together a couple of prophecies – the quotation he gives in verses 2-3 is a mash up of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 – that’s why if you have a KJV version of the Bible it says:

As it is written **in the prophets**, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. (Mark 1:2 KJV)

Meaning that some of the oldest manuscripts cite the prophets plural and some cite only the principle prophet Isaiah – either way – the point Mark is making is that John is the messenger that was prophesied to break the silence and to herald the coming of Messiah.

The last one of these dots (refer to chart) is a big flaming arrow pointing at Jesus!!!



That is the main point for Mark! Mark is eager to get to Jesus but he recognized that John the Baptist had a very important, God-given, Scripture-prophesied task: his job was to prepare people to see and respond to Jesus.

So Mark cuts right to the chase. He doesn't tell us about angels and old parents and run-ins with the Pharisees – he says – JOHN SHOWED UP AS THE SCRIPTURES SAID and he began TO DO what the Bible said he would do. He began to prepare people to meet the Lord. And this is what he did:

How John Prepared People To Meet Jesus:

1. He took them out into the wilderness

Look at verse 4:

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness (Mark 1:4 ESV)

Verse 5 says:

all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan (Mark 1:5 ESV)

John was a wilderness man – the brother ate locusts and lived in the desert – and he did not go into the city to reach the masses – the masses went out to him.

Listen to me church, there is a sense in which you have to come out of the world in order to come to Jesus. In the Bible salvation is always OUT OF and IN TO. Think of the Exodus. That salvation event was OUT OF EGYPT and IN TO the desert on the way to the Promised Land. The desert or the wilderness – in Old Testament culture became a symbol of seeking and being sought by the Lord.

In the prophet Hosea God says that after a time of punishment he would take his people out into the wilderness and WOO THEM AGAIN to himself. He says:

behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. 15 And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

16 “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ 17 For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. (Hosea 2:14–17 ESV)

So the New Testament authors seem to be pointing at John and the crowds that were going out to him in the wilderness and they are saying “this is that”. This is God drawing people out into the desert to separate them from their sins and to reunite them to himself.

Union with Christ always goes hand and hand with SEPERATION from the world. Paul says that in 2 Corinthians:

14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 **Therefore go out from their midst**, and **be separate from them**, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:14–18 ESV)

This is a major theme in the Bible! You have to GIVE UP THE WORLD – you have to get some separation, you have to unplug, you have to get out of that SPACE, you have to untangle yourself from those allegiances – in order to give yourself to God. That’s what the wilderness is all about and that is how you prepare yourself to meet the Lord.

The second thing we see John doing here is calling on people to renounce their native allegiances.

2. He called on them to renounce their native allegiances

Look at verse 4 again:

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4 ESV)

Verse 5 says:

all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan (Mark 1:5 ESV)

Now we Christians are so familiar with the word “baptism” that it doesn’t make an impression on us – some Christians even call themselves “Baptists” because they love this word so much – crazy, I know – but it might help you to understand that “baptism” is a uniquely Christian word. R.T. France says:

*“baptisma is an exclusively Christian word, which appears for the first time in the New Testament”.*²

We basically invented this word which appears in other forms elsewhere, but baptism is a uniquely Christian concept. The Jews did ritual washings on their way up to the temple but those were not baptisms. For one thing, they were self administered, for another thing you did them multiple times on several different occasions so other than the presence of water they had little in common with what we see here. The only frame of reference we have for this actually comes from the conversion ritual associated with Gentiles who decide to become Jews. They went through a ritual washing – a full immersion - that was intended to communicate a clean break with the impurities of the Gentile world and a wholesale embrace of the Old Testament covenant.

But here is the thing – John is doing this to Jews! Do you see why this was so controversial? John is basically saying to these Jews, “You are not Jews! You think you are because you are children of Abraham but you do not have the faith of Abraham! Your religion has become a man made system of self-justification and there is no sorrow over sin, no trust in God and it is therefore completely powerless to save you. You need to CONVERT! You need to leave behind this DEAD WAY in order to embrace the NEW WAY that is coming in Jesus Christ!”

That’s what John is saying – that’s what baptism originally meant! It meant to DIE to a false way in order to be BORN AGAIN into a living way. No, you don’t have to take my word for it because John says that to the Jewish leaders in Matthew’s longer version. He says:

do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ (Matthew 3:9 ESV)

Don’t trust in the fact that you are Jewish! If you are trusting in that, then you are in deadly peril.

² R.T. France, *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 66.

John's job here is to weaken the faith that people have in NON SAVING THINGS in order to prepare them to put their trust in Jesus – who IS the Saviour of the world.

Hear that church. Part of evangelism is getting people to doubt their damning certainties. Everyone is trusting in something – these Jews were trusting in their Jewishness – your friends are trusting in something just as useless and damning and part of your job is to get your friends to begin doubting their damning certainties. Evangelism is necessarily DESTRUCTIVE at the outset. You have to tell people the bad news that what they are trusting in is fundamentally inadequate to address their actual damnation. If you don't tell people they are lost, what does it even mean to invite them to be saved?

John understood that. That was a major part of how John prepared people to meet with Jesus.

The third thing we see John doing here is calling on people to confess their sins and to admit their essential ignorance.

3. He called on them to confess their sins and to admit their ignorance

We see that again in verses 4-5:

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. (Mark 1:4-5 ESV)

Now, just like the word “baptism” can be taken for granted by church folks so too can the word “repentance”. We hear that word all the time and so it is easy to forget what it actually means. The Greek word used there is the word *metanoia* and it means literally “a change of mind, also with the nuance of remorse as regret for shortcomings and errors.”³ That is the dictionary definition – it is a change that involves both the heart AND the mind, that's the point. One commentator said that it has to do with:

“the need for a reorientation to the paradoxical values of the kingdom of God.”⁴

³ BDAG.

⁴ R.T. France, *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 66.

I like that – it’s a REORIENTATION – at the heart level and at the intellectual level that recognizes that the former path was ignorance and sin and that the new path represents the long awaited kingdom of God – that is what it means to repent! It is to turn away from the path that leads to death and to see it for what it is – a path of darkness, ruin and pain. On that road, God is dishonoured and people get hurt – but on this road – the Jesus road, God is honoured and people walk in the light!

See how all this goes together? You have to go out into the wilderness – you have to unplug from the fallen machine – you have to get off the tracks that lead to ruin, you have to let go your former connection to those things and you have to make a NEW ALLEGIANCE, you have to get on a new track, you have to reorient yourself to NEW PATH that leads to life. That is what it means to repent and John shows up in the narrative as a gift sent from God to help people do that. Because nobody does this on their own! Nobody wakes up one day and completely RENOUNCES everything they have previously FELT AND BELIEVED. You have to be assaulted by the grace of God! You have to get knocked on your butt by a meteor from outer space and that’s what John is!

John’s ministry was a gift from God! He showed up like fire from heaven in the power of the Holy Spirit and he said to his generation: “You are not saved. You don’t know anything. You are lost and deceived.” And in John’s day, as in ours, nobody gets saved until they understand that.

Now, that’s the bad news that comes before the Good News. I mentioned that evangelism is first of all destructive IN ORDER to be constructive. You get people to doubt their certainties and then once they’re not sure that what they are trusting in is reliable – THEN you point them to Jesus. And that is what John does. John points at Jesus and he says – “stop looking at me friends, Jesus is the one who will save the world.”

So what does John say about Jesus in this passage?

What Does John Say About Jesus?

Look at verse 7:

7 “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.” (Mark 1:7–8 ESV)

So, I am not the guy – JESUS IS THE GUY! Don't look at me, look at Jesus! Jesus is the guy who has come to save the world! And how is he going to do that? He is going to do that, John says, by "baptizing you with/in/by⁵ the Holy Spirit".

Now, I already told you that the word "baptism" or "baptize" is basically a Christian word. We didn't invent it, but we took it out of relative obscurity and we began using it for our own particular purposes. I said that baptism basically means to completely convert – or to die to one thing so as to live in a completely different way. One of the meanings of the word in the dictionary is "to overwhelm". So this is John saying that Jesus is going to completely change the way people live. He is going to overwhelm the system, he is going to turn the world upside down, he is going to fundamentally change the game; and he's going to do it by means of the Holy Spirit.

The pouring out of the Spirit on the world is going to come like a flood – like THE FLOOD – and nothing will be the same on the other side.

Now, I think there are two parallel meanings here inside that incredible statement. First of all, Mark is going to make it clear that everything Jesus does on the earth in his ministry he does in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the baptism account which we will read next week Mark says that Jesus 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. (Mark 1:10 ESV)

The Greek actually says "descending INTO HIM like a dove". Everything Jesus did he did as a human being FILLED WITH the Holy Spirit. So Jesus turned the world upside down in the power of the Holy Spirit. I think is meaning #1.

But then looking forward to the very end of Jesus' ministry we remember that after Jesus' rose from the dead he ascended to the Father's right hand so that he could pour out the Holy Spirit on the church. We read about that in Acts 2 and following. And if the story of Acts is about anything it is about the incredible impact that the Holy Spirit had on the disciples of Jesus Christ. Before Pentecost

⁵ All are grammatically possible.

they were a rolling tire fire. Just wait until we get further into Mark's Gospel – they get EVERYTHING WRONG! They fail in every conceivable way, but then after Pentecost, when they have been baptized in the Holy Spirit – they are world changers! They are Jesus things! They are healing the sick, raising the dead and preaching with power.

This is what God's people have been waiting for! Way back in the heart of the exile – in the dark of the dark – Ezekiel the prophet brought a promise from the Lord. God said:

I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:27 ESV)

I will pour out my Spirit and I will cause you to do what you have never been able to do. I will save you and I will restore you to your original design and purpose.

John points to Jesus and he says: THIS IS THAT.

This is the one who brings the Spirit of God into the realm of men! This is the one who will finally and fundamentally change the world!

Conclusion:

And with that, in Mark's Gospel, John the Baptist begins to fade off the screen. He has done his job. He has told you to come out of the world and to come to Jesus. He has told you that you are deceived and that the path you are on leads to ruin. He has called you a sinner, but he has pointed you to the Saviour. So, come. Forsake this dying world and COME. COME! Come unto Jesus and be saved. Let's pray together.