

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:1

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the Prophets: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' 3 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.' " 4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. 5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. 8 I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." 9 It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. 11 Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 12 Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. 13 And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him. 14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, & believe in the gospel."”

"The Gospel of Jesus Christ"

This year, Lord willing, we will spend the next nine weeks doing a short series on the Gospel According to Mark. This fits nicely with the Church Calendar which moves from Epiphany Sunday through Palm Sunday counting the weeks of Epiphany and Lent where the focus is on the life of Jesus. Most years we have continued on with our exegetical sermons, but as our children grow older I thought it would be good to focus on the life of Jesus.

The Bible presents the life of Jesus as the Good News, or the Gospel. We have four accounts of the life of Jesus: Matthew Mark Luke & John which are commonly referred to as the four Gospels. Of course, it is important for us to remember that there are NOT four Gospels, but rather one Gospel...

➤ The Gospel of Jesus Christ!

This is why most Bibles give the proper titles as “The Gospel According to Matthew and according to Mark etc. The fact that we have four accounts is very important because it gives us confidence to know that we are being given an accurate and thorough picture of the life of our Savior.

The first three accounts, Matthew, Mark and Luke are often called the synoptic Gospels because they are basically chronological and provide a threefold witness as would be required in serious criminal cases. John uses a series of stories or events to present Jesus as the Word and to provide all the evidence that is needed to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing in Him you can have eternal life.

Now obviously I am not going to be doing a full exegetical series on the Gospel According to Mark in just nine weeks, so my focus is going to be on the life and ministry of Jesus, which is always good to review. I hope that many of you will take the time to read through Mark’s account a few times during our short series.

For those who want more detail, we still have via Sermon Audio the more than one hundred sermons that I preached a few years ago going through the Gospel According to Luke. If we come to something, or even quickly pass over something in Mark’s account that you want more detail about, you can cross-reference the passage to Luke in most cases and find a sermon or two on the subject.

So the Gospel according to Mark opens with these words: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” And moves quickly through John the Baptist and the temptation of Jesus by Satan.

Then we have Jesus proclaiming “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, & believe in the gospel.” So I think that we should begin with a simple but very important question:

- What is the Gospel?

The Angel Gabriel proclaimed it when he said to Joseph, “you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” That is the simple Gospel: Jesus came to save His people from their sins...

- BUT people do NOT get to choose who Jesus really was nor how He is going to save them from their sins.

Jesus came in a particular way, at a particular time, to save His people in a particular way...

- That is the story of the Gospel, the Good News.

That is why it is important that we KNOW the Gospel accounts well... AND it is why these accounts should be very precious to us all.

- We should never tire of reading them and getting to know our Savior better and better each time we do.

We must also take the warning given by the Apostle Paul to the Saints at Galatia very seriously as well:

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. *[the simple Gospel]*

6 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

Again, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is simple and yet Paul issues a very strong warning against turning from it.

- We can ‘preach another Gospel’ by adding to the Gospel or taking away from the Gospel.

We can take away from the Gospel by not believing that man’s problem of sin is a real moral problem: ALL the children of Adam are in rebellion against God and thus both John the Baptist and Jesus call everyone, including God’s chosen people the Jews to repentance.

We can take away from the Gospel by not believing that Jesus is the eternal Son of God who has truly come in the flesh. We see this proclaimed by John the Baptist and confirmed by God the Father and God the Holy Spirit when the Spirit descends upon Jesus and the Father proclaims, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

- Those who make Jesus just a wise man or anything less than the eternal 2nd Person of the Trinity are preaching another Gospel.

As we go on in Mark’s account we will see clearly that Jesus came as a man to give Himself as the great sacrifice for our sins. Anyone, including the Apostle Peter himself who believes that such a sacrifice was not necessary is preaching another Gospel which is why Jesus gave Peter the strong rebuke:

“Get Thee behind me Satan.”

And finally, we can preach another Gospel by adding any of man's works or rituals to God's simple Gospel.

- Being born at the right time or in the right family does NOT save you from your sins.**
- Joining the right church or being baptized in the right manner or place cannot save you from your sins.**
- Keeping a certain set of rules or doing the right religious service cannot save you from your sins.**
- Being good or at least better than most of those around you cannot save you from your sins.**
- Even praying the right prayer or knowing the right doctrine cannot, by themselves, save you from your sins.**

➤ **It is Jesus and Jesus alone who can save us from our sins!**

This is why Jesus begins His public ministry by proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is at hand and commands people to "repent and believe the Gospel." We are to turn from our sin and ALL human efforts to solve the problem of sin and look to Jesus...

➤ **To believe in the Gospel.**

This is what was promised by the Prophet Isaiah and later proclaimed by the Apostle Paul:

In Isaiah chapter 53 we read these words about God's Messiah, Jesus: "3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And Jehovah has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

➤ **The Apostle Paul explained this simple Gospel to the Saints at Ephesus in this way:**

Ephesians 2:1: "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

That is what the Angel Gabriel meant when he told Joseph that the child conceived in Mary's womb would save His people from their sins.

➤ **This is the simple Gospel that we are to believe: Not adding to it nor taking anything away from it!**

This is what we must remember as we take this quick trip through the Gospel according to Mark. We must see Jesus and the work that He came to do. Jesus did not come to be an earthly King as many in that day expected from the Messiah... Although we know that today He sits enthroned as the King of Kings!

Jesus did not come as a wise teacher as many today want to portray Him... Even though we know from the Book of Proverbs that Jesus is the personification of wisdom itself.

Jesus did not come to be our friend as many in the Church today want Him to be... Although He calls His followers His own brothers and sisters.

Jesus did not come to serve in the Temple as many of the Pharisees expected... Although we know that Jesus was the Great High priest who has entered the real Holy of Holies in heaven.

These Gospel accounts are critical because it is here that we learn how Jesus came as a man to save man: How the Word became flesh to save His people from their sins as Gabriel predicted. How He humbled Himself to the point of dying on a cross to save His people as the Lamb of God Isaiah had predicted and John the Baptist proclaimed. Lord willing, we will learn more and more in the coming weeks about who Jesus is, how He came as a true man and how He came to save His people from their sins.

- **So our first lesson to remember is that Jesus came as true man!**

Matthew & Luke give much more detail about this with the genealogies of Jesus and accounts of His virgin birth. Jesus came as true man, but not under the curse of Adam...

- **Jesus came as the new Adam!**

Here at the beginning of Mark's Gospel we see John the Baptist calling people to repentance, but also knowing that he is not able save these people from their sins...

- **He points them to Jesus, one greater than he whose shoelaces he was not fit to tie.**

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, has come as a man to save man...All of this brings us to a question that should honestly be asked here at the beginning of the Gospel accounts:

IF Jesus is virgin born without sin so He can live a righteous life that would be given for many, then why did He have to be circumcised as we are told in Luke's account and be baptized as we read here in Mark's account?

- **Put simple, these actions confirm His humanity and prepare Him for His priestly work.**

Through His circumcision Jesus identifies Himself with His people and confirms His humanity. It is also the first confirmation that there would be no remission of sins without the shedding of blood. When we consider the baptism of Jesus we must remember that it was not a baptism of repentance as is required of all of us as sinners.

- **Jesus had no sins to confess!**

What Mark covers in just a few short verses here in chapter one is a glorious coming together of so many images and pictures given to us in the Old Testament. From the Old Testament we know that men could enter into service at the Tabernacle at the age of thirty, the age of Jesus at this time.

Those entering the priesthood would first be washed and then anointed so they could serve in the Temple.

- **This is what Mark presents here as Jesus is baptized and then anointed by the Holy Spirit.**

All of this is confirmed by God the Father when He proclaims, "You are My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

- **The promised Messiah has come at the appointed time to save His people from their sins.**

The Son of God has come as a man to serve the Father who is pleased with Him. We hear the Father speak from heaven again when His Son is transfigured before three of the disciples and discusses His coming death with Moses and Elijah.

A cloud overshadows them and the voice from heaven says, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"

The Father is well-pleased with His beloved Son and WE are to hear Him!

It is the Apostle John in his gospel account who tells us of the third time that the Father speaks from heaven during the earthy ministry of Jesus.

We should take special note, because it comes at a time when certain Gentiles came to the disciple Philip saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

Philip takes Andrew and goes to Jesus with their request. Jesus gives what many might think is a strange answer, but not if we remember why Jesus has come. Jesus knows that His appointed time has arrived there in Jerusalem so He tells the disciples that He is about to be lifted up for all the world to see...

John 12:23 "But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. **24** Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. **25** He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. **27** "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. **28** Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." **29** Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." **30** Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. **31** Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. **32** And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."

- In just a few days, Jesus would be lifted up on that Roman cross as the sacrifice for sin, to save His people from their sins.
- As a result of His sacrifice, the ruler of this world would be cast down and the Kingdom of God's beloved Son would advance until the end of history.

This is why John the Baptist came proclaiming, prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight."

This is why Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of His early ministry, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel."

- This same call to repent & believe comes down to all of us today!

Truly it is more than a once in a lifetime call: It is the call of our lifetime, if we would see Jesus!

Communion Meditation: Ephesians 2

"**4** But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), **6** and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ...

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."