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# The Messenger of the Kingdom

## Mark 1:1-8

*Dan Turner*

**Big Idea:** *The coming message will come from a messenger of joy announcing the beginning of the time of salvation.*

Do hard times cause you to question who God is and what He is doing? Is it right for God to allow his people to experience trouble? Was it right for God to allow his own Son to experience trouble? Can suffering ever be good? How does suffering fit into your understanding of salvation and service? Does suffering result in salvation? Does salvation ever result in suffering? These types of questions will be explored as we begin our 5 month series in the book of Mark.

From September through January of next year, we will be on a journey through the gospel according to Mark—a biographical sketch of Jesus Christ. The author likely John Mark was a follower of Jesus who started off badly but ended well. He wrote this gospel with the help of an apostle whose name was Peter. He wrote what we are about to hear to a church in Rome in the mid to late 60s of the first century. This church lived under the oppressive regime of Nero. Christians were suffering with joy and hope while non-Christians wondered what was so good about the good news they preached. We will enter the world of Mark's gospel with an aim to see what Mark wants us to see, to feel what Mark wants us to feel, to glad-heartedly follow who Mark wants us to follow.

In this world of gospel we will encounter the hero of the story: Jesus Christ. We will get to know Him. We will notice his mission and why He came to earth—not to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. We will also hear Him calling us to Himself and His mission. We will not feel satisfied with merely spectating as if this is just a story. Rather, we will want to follow Him through this delightful and dangerous world because this story is the true story of life itself. We will be called to participate in this grand story called the Gospel according to Mark.

In this grand story we will be introduced to strange things—like a man in the wilderness dressed in strange clothes, eating strange food telling us that our problem is not so much that we have behaved wrongly but that we have been drawn to love wrongly and calling us away from an inward-looking, self-obsessed life and pointing us to the all-satisfying One who loves us. Strange things we will be confronted with—like a king who is a servant, like a king who gets killed and yet rises from the dead to usher in His kingdom. Like a kingdom whose boundaries are not drawn around a particular nation or geography but rather the entire world. And these followers of this peculiar and precious King will suffer too yet be welcomed into his consummated kingdom with great joy for all eternity.

Yes, these next few months are going to be a tremendous journey. A journey that just might change your life as you enter into the presence of the king of this kingdom who will escort you into His saving love and then send you into relationships that need this story to live.

This is the Gospel according to Mark. Let's pray.

What better place to start this life-transforming story than the beginning of the story. Please open your Bibles to Mark 1. What we find in the first 13 verses of Mark's gospel is his prologue. His introduction supplies the key to the entire Gospel by introducing the central figure of his narrative—Jesus Christ.

For our purposes today, we will focus in on v.1-8 and think together on the message and the messenger of the Kingdom.

## **An introduction to the message**

**v1**

Mark opens his gospel in a unique way. He uses what is known as a superscription—an affirmation of what everything else that follows is about. In verse one, Mark tells us everything about his book. He calls this whole book:

*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* We are confronted with the theme of the entire book in just one verse.

To notice the introduction of the entire message of the whole book focus with me on three aspects.

### **Beginning**

The first aspect of the theme of Mark's gospel is found in the term "beginning". By opening his book with this term "beginning" Mark gives his writing biblical overtones leading to an awesome ring to the opening phrase. Like Genesis 1:1 which says, "in the beginning"; like John 1:1 states, "in the beginning" we as listeners of Mark's gospel scoot to the edge of our seats with anticipation. We know something magnificent is about to happen. God is going to speak something (or someone) into this world that will change this world.

By just starting his gospel with the word "beginning" Mark reminds us that it is God who creates an historical event which introduces a new situation that will revolutionize the entire world. The Beginning! . . . of what?

### **Gospel**

The second aspect of the theme of Mark's gospel can be understood in the word "gospel". This term simply means "good news or good tidings". In the Roman world, the context of the recipients of Mark's writing, the term "joyful tidings" would have been used for an emperor and a special occasion; like his birthday or his initial rising to power. These special events initiated festivals that were to be enjoyed throughout the known world as an honor of the Emperor. From this perspective, Mark's Roman world would have understood Mark's proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah, the king has come and has risen to full power.

Still, from another vantage point, verses 2-3 make plain that what signified gospel drew heavily from the Old Testament. The OT book Mark mainly has in mind is Isaiah 40 where we hear of the good news as an announcement of a coming salvation.

Mark starts his book off telling people that the coming message will come from a messenger of joy announcing the beginning of the time of salvation. Something (or better

said) Someone is coming; someone is near who is about to invade this world with a kingdom that will overthrow all rival kingdoms to his. He will bring in the kingdom of God to this world.

And who is this prophesied One who is to come and bring good news of great joy to this world of sin and sadness and suffering?

## **Jesus**

The final aspect to Mark's theme happens to be the totality of the gospel. His name is Jesus. His function is the Christ – the long-awaited king to carry out the will of the One who sent Him. And his identity, we notice in verse one, is the son of God – the second person in the trinity whose nature is God and whose relationship to the Father is beloved son.

Who is this man who is both divine and human? Who is he who comes with power to change the world and compassion to redeem his people? The beginning of joyful tidings of salvation comes not as information merely, comes to a weary world not as an abstract theory, come to a rebellious people not as a despot but comes as the sweet and sovereign Jesus the Christ the son of God with healing in his power and hope in his purpose.

Who will introduce a Person like this to a world like this? Verses 2-8 give us insight into the messenger of the message.

## **An introduction to the messenger**

**v2-8**

Verse 2 starts with a common formula found in the Bible. The phrase “As it is written” tells us that this explosive news found the in this utterly unique Person as witnessed in v.1 was predicted years ago by a prophet named Isaiah in the OT. We soon understand that the context for the gospel is the future salvation prophesied in the second half of a very big book we find in the OT titled Isaiah (You can read of this future salvation in Isaiah, chs. 40-66). Well, back to Mark and his two verses he quotes. Take a listen to the OT passage Mark quotes. In verses 2-3 we hear:

*“Behold, I send my messenger before you face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”.*

## **Prediction**

**2-3**

The prediction of this messenger is actually found in a couple of passages in the OT. Mark likely takes prophecies from Exodus 23:20, Isaiah 40:3, and Malachi 3:1 and blends them together to form this composite quotation. This OT quote communicates three key ideas.

- 1) Wilderness. 2) a promise to send a messenger. 3) a promise to send a messenger to a people in a wilderness who need hope that they will be rescued out of a repressive burden that crushes human souls and keeps people in bondage.

For those of you more familiar with the OT you may have noticed that by quoting these passages Mark carries the listeners (of the 1<sup>st</sup> century and of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) back into Egypt and back into Babylon where God's people were banished from the promise land.

Now by the Law and the Prophets a prophetic Word about the end of Exile and the beginning of new life is heard. Though the believers of this promise are promised that they will still need to journey through the wilderness, those who believe have hope that at last the separation from God and his promise is over. There is reconciliation. There is hope for redemption. There is expectation that the people will enjoy the fulfillment of the promise given so many years ago.

We are to feel the weight of exile upon our backs. We are to sense the slavery of sin we all are accustomed to. We need to hear these people in the first century crying in hopelessness who are given hope.

Perhaps what you are hearing is your own cry for hope and mercy and joy: an expectation of being brought back home from a faraway place of sadness and sin and suffering.

Perhaps the LORD has brought you to the gospel of Mark for you to think of your own banishment, your own private sins that stubbornly say to you, “I will never, ever let you go”. Could it be that this passage will rest upon your heart today? Is it possible that God sends this message into your ears to get to your heart this morning? Let’s read on to hear more about the unique messenger of the matchless message of hope.

## **Presentation**

**4-8**

Picking up where we left off, listen to v4-8 as I read them to us.

*John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 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. I have baptized you with the water but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”.*

In these verses Mark presents the messenger. His name is John. And in these five verses we hear one or more of the following elements of his ministry.

1. He is said to be one in the wilderness.
2. He is baptizing in the wilderness.
3. He announces that One greater than he is coming.

Now we are in this story; this narrative world called The Gospel according to Mark. We are starting to see some strange things. Notice that John is calling all of Israel to repentance—turn from the awfulness of sin and turn to the awesomeness of the One coming; Jesus Christ. This call to repentance is not a surprise. Throughout the OT we hear prophets calling for repentance. But there is a surprise in this calling.

John calls for an action that was completely novel in their day—baptism; being dunked in the Jordan River? That’s unusual. What’s the significance with this? What are we to make of this strange man—dressed in camel’s hair and eating locusts, in this strange place—the wilderness and its wild animals, undergoing this strange activity—being submerged in a river?

The call to be baptized in the Jordan meant 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel must once again leave the promise land and go east to the wilderness. Now listen carefully. I'm going to tell you a story found in the Bible that 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel knew quite well.

The Bible tells us the history of God's people starting with Adam and Eve. The first people on planet earth lived in paradise. Then they desired less of God and more of His gifts. They rebelled. They then were banished from the garden. They were driven eastward into a land of thorns and thistles. Would they ever get back to the lush beauty of Eden?

Fast forward the story and we find God's people carried out of the promise land and brought into Egypt where they found themselves in slavery. They could not escape. Nothing could rescue them. Nobody could save them from their plight . . . except God. Long ago, under the leadership of Moses, God saved Israel out of slavery and then separated His people from Egypt by a journey in the wilderness through the waters of the Red Sea.

The nation now is exhorted to experience separation from worldly ways, separation from disbelieving in God's grace found in His promises, departing from believing that the Bible is about what we can do to win God's favor and blessing upon our earthly activities, Israel was summoned away from anything contrary to the good and gracious will of God the Father. They were to hear the clarion call to a new exodus in preparation for a new covenant found in the One coming. The final salvation for God's people is to be revealed in the wilderness as we observe in Mark 1:4-8.

This call to the wilderness is more involved than merely saying you are sorry. The nation of Israel was to return to the place known as the wilderness. (In the Bible it meant judgment). Coming to the place of judgment, they were acknowledging their history of rebellion but also acknowledging their desire to begin once more as God's beloved son. They now could by faith venture out into the wilderness under clear acknowledgment of their past failings because of the hope that their sins could be forgiven.

Where will this forgiveness be found? If favor with God is not attained through rituals and regimens then what did John mean when he talked about "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"?

The answer to these types of questions leads us to the last 2 verses of the passage for this morning; v7-8. "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit".

Here we find the answer to the life-long cry of the soul. Here we listen to the messenger of the Kingdom introduce us to the King who will grant us salvation our hearts so desperately need.

The king is described in two ways. He is mighty. He is merciful. He is so grand, so glorious, so otherly that John says that he is not even worthy to function like a 1<sup>st</sup> century slave and assist the master with his sandals. This master, this king is infinitely majestic though when we begin to see him next week in the following passage he may not resemble regal authority. It takes the eyes of faith like the messenger has to see what is truly

there: Jesus is the King of the Universe. Those who see him for who he is bow in his presence and proclaim “I am unworthy of your presence”.

Aww, but look at v8. Notice what Jesus will do. John says that all man can do is baptize with water. All they can do is just get people wet. But there is coming One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. This is the capstone of the good news of great joy. When Jesus lived the perfect life you could not live and died the death you should have died and was raised in triumph for your eternal life he ascended to the throne of God. He then poured out His Spirit on all His people in order for them to experience God’s presence; not as an unapproachable mightily man but as a loving Father to his children. His Holy Spirit, the promised presence of God, will now lead each of His children to their destination—Himself in paradise forevermore.

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Let’s summarize the message this morning and apply ourselves to it as we read together the words of Romans 10:14-15 found on the screen.

*How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?*

(Romans 10:14-15)

This morning you have heard the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ the son of God. This message came by a messenger to 1<sup>st</sup> century Israelites calling them from their sin and to their Savior. This same message came by a messenger to a church in Rome in 65AD—the same message just a different messenger. And the gospel has not stopped ever since. Spreading through the Roman Empire it captured men and women, boys and girls with the good news of great salvation found in Christ’s death on the cross and his resurrection life. Swiftly speeding, the message stayed alive even in the Medieval period of 590-1517AD and was broadcasted through the Reformation and after. Rationalism and modernism and universalism and totalitarianism and syncretism and stoicism and spiritualism and skepticism have not snuffed out what you will hear in the gospel of Mark. God is faithful. He preserved this message and sent messengers with this message to people in all social order calling them from their sin and to Jesus Christ.

And now September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 you are confronted with the same message through just a different messenger. I call you to repentance. I call you out to the wilderness to identify your problem as sin deserving God’s judgment. You have turned your love away from the glorious creator and redeemer. You have turned your love toward his creation and perverted its intended enjoyment. This is rebellion. There is no hope apart from what you heard today. So receive His love found in His gospel. Repent, turn to the only solution for your problem: Jesus the Christ the son of God who came to identify with your humanity, who lived in perfect love of the Father, who died a torturous death in the place of all who trust Him for their eternal life, who was raised from the dead to live forevermore with all who call upon Him for salvation. Turn from sin. Trust in Him. And treasure all His everlasting love found solely in His Son Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.