

## What is a Gospel? Mark 1:1-20

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

<sup>2</sup> *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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.”*

<sup>9</sup> *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>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*

<sup>12</sup> *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.*

<sup>14</sup> *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*

<sup>16</sup> *Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men. <sup>18</sup> And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup> And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.*

– Mark 1:1-20, ESV

We commonly see the word "gospel" used as an adjective. We can speak of gospel music (which might mean either black gospel or country gospel), a gospel message, gospel tracts or booklets, gospel t-shirts or simply "the gospel truth" (which, when used by a salesman, usually means a lie). You probably know that the word "gospel" means "good news" or "good tidings." But what is a gospel, as in "the Gospel of Mark" or "the Gospel of Matthew"?

Today's reading in Mark 1 is probably the first chapter of the first gospel ever written. So, what does Mark give us? It's not a biography, because Mark isn't interested in telling us everything about Jesus' life. Rather, it is a book with a purpose: to show us the person and work of Jesus. That's why this is "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He is the Son of God in His person and He is the Christ - the anointed one - in His work for us and our salvation.

Showing us "the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," Mark is focusing on those things we need to know in order to understand and believe in who Jesus really is and in what He has done for us. Mark's Gospel - unlike a biography - doesn't begin with the childhood of Jesus. It begins the prophet Isaiah. Why?

Let's consider why Mark includes the details he does in today's reading:

**Why the Prophet Isaiah?** Mark is showing us that Jesus' coming was foretold in the Scriptures and that He fulfilled God's promises in His life and ministry.

**Why John the Baptist?** John the Baptist was a key witness to the person and work of Jesus. The Jewish people know that John was a true prophet of righteousness, so the fact that he recognized and testified about Jesus helps us understand and believe who Jesus is.

**Why Jesus' Baptism?** This shows us the testimony of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, helping us to understand Jesus' relationship to the Father and the Spirit. His baptism is also His anointing for ministry as our Messiah, the anointed one. When was the Messiah anointed? At His baptism! Who anointed Him? The Father Himself anointed Him with the Holy Spirit.

**Why forty days of being tested in the wilderness?** This copies a regular pattern in God's dealings with His people. The Israelites wandered 40 years in the wilderness before they entered the promised land and Elijah spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness in 1 Kings 19. In the same way, Jesus was prepared to bring God's people into the promised land of the kingdom of God as the anointed prophet, priest and king of God by His 40-day fast and trial in the wilderness.

**Why the arrest of John the Baptist?** Mark is showing us the transition from the preparation ministry of John the forerunner to the fulfillment ministry of Jesus the Messiah.

**Why the calling of the disciples?** Mark is showing us how Jesus brings His kingdom. Jesus calls disciples to follow Him., He trains them and then they go out to make more disciples and proclaim the good news of the kingdom. The calling of the disciples is the beginning of the New Testament church, the called-out people of God.

What we can see clearly is that Mark is very efficient. He includes every detail for a reason and moves quickly from one detail to the next. Mark is a Gospel that can be read quickly but which should be read carefully. Whether you've been following Jesus for 60 years or are just starting to get to know Him, this Gospel has so much to teach all of us!