

# The Voice In The Wilderness (1)

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[ 0 : 00 ] The following sermon is made available by Lakeside Bible Church in Cornelius, North Carolina.

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Mark chapter 1. Let's go ahead and start reading at verse number 1 and we'll read down to verse number 8. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophets, John did baptize in the wilderness and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

[ 1 : 16 ] And there went out unto him all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

And John was clothed with camel's hair and with a girdle of skin about his loins. And he did eat locust and wild honey. And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

I indeed have baptized you with water, but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. Everything that we study in the gospel of Mark must be primarily viewed through the lens of Mark's stated purpose in verse 1, which reads, This is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Now Mark's goal in writing this collection of eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus was specifically to proclaim that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.

His desire here in this gospel is not to tell the story of Jesus. His desire in this gospel is to make a definitive statement about Jesus.

[ 2 : 35 ] So we do not understand the gospels to be biographies. That's not what they are. They are gospels. They are proclamations of good news.

And the material contained within the pages that we'll study is the evidence that Mark gives to support this purpose statement. So in verse 1 he says, Jesus is the Christ.

He's the Messiah. He's the Son of God. Everything that then follows after is the evidence that builds and supports Mark's case. And so when we come to each and every passage, beginning with this one today, we have to first start with this question.

How did Mark intend for this passage to point us to Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the Son of God? So that's where we begin.

Not only here, but really any particular passage that we would study in the Bible, ask that question. But as we view this book through the lens of Mark's gospel, we ask how does he want us to see Christ here?

[ 3 : 37 ] How is he proving to us in these verses that Jesus is indeed the Son of God? I spoke at length last week about the significance of this term gospel, the Greek equivalent being euangelion.

It's used in the first verse to describe exactly what Mark's doing. Now both the ancient Jews and the Romans would have understood the reference here. He's speaking specifically to a herald that would go from town to town announcing the arrival of a king that has come to save his people.

In the scripture, it always refers to the message of salvation. So Mark stated that his writing was such a proclamation, and Jesus is that very king.

That's the significance of the term itself. But as he begins to give evidence to the fact that Jesus is indeed the king, that he is indeed the Messiah and Son of God, if he's going to use this term gospel, it only makes sense that there would be a literal herald that would go before this king, that would go before this Messiah in order to announce his arrival, to announce his coming, and to prepare the

way.

And that's exactly what he does in these verses. He builds his case by speaking to the significance of a man that we have come to know as John the Baptist, or probably even better, John the Baptizer.

[ 5 : 07 ] Look with me again at verse 2, the very first phrase there. As it is written in the prophets, this is the beginning of Mark's proof. He doesn't do his proof based on his own rationale or his own capabilities of reasoning.

Mark turns to the scriptures. That's where we must always turn first. If it's going to be our goal to share the gospel of Jesus with others, to persuade and convince others that Jesus is indeed the Christ, we must not start with our own reasoning.

We cannot start with our own rationale. We must turn to the scriptures. And that's exactly what Mark does. Now it's important for us to acknowledge here that John's ministry didn't happen by chance. It wasn't that the gospel writers were noticing John and noticing what was going on in this ministry prior to Jesus and this wilderness fanatic, which is really what most people would have viewed him as.

It's not that they noticed this guy's life and thought, you know what, this would make our story about Jesus so much spicier, so much more significant. Maybe we'll add this in there, and maybe we'll get a few more copies and publications sold to make a little more money.

[ 6 : 23 ] That's not what's happening here. They're not including John's story here to make their story better. This was a part of God's plan from before the foundation of the world, as Ephesians 1 tells us.

We cannot separate the ministry of John the Baptist from the gospel of Jesus. The true identity of who Jesus is cannot be understood fully apart from the fulfillment of these prophecies to which Mark is referring here in these first two verses.

And so we don't come to it thinking this was a really unique guy, maybe this helps us understand the context. No, there is a specific purpose that Mark has written about John. It is the specific purpose of proclaiming who Jesus is, and so that's the lens that we see.

All four gospel writers, even Jesus himself, emphasizes the life, ministry, and preaching of John the Baptist. John was a voice.

John was the voice. The voice that was set aside hundreds of years before to prepare the way for Jesus. And to help us with our understanding today, I've kind of grouped these verses into two categories.

[ 7 : 45 ] We're looking at the voice in the wilderness. First, we'll see the voice prophesied, and then we're going to see the voice personified. Let's first look at the voice prophesied in verses 2 and 3.

Would you read it with me again? As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord.

Make his paths straight. Now, it's helpful for us here to be reminded of the fact, and maybe even exult in the fact, that God is a God who speaks.

He speaks. It's by the very power of his word that all of creation came to be. God said, let there be light, and there was light.

And we see that demonstrated through the creation story. Really, all throughout the scriptures, we see the power of God's word in creation. We also find that as we study the scriptures, that the scriptures themselves are the very words of God.

[ 8 : 54 ] It is his way of speaking, his revelation of himself, the revelation of his plan of redemption. He speaks that to us. Now, take just a moment before we move any further and contemplate how glorious of a truth that is.

That not only did God create you, not only did he provide this life that you enjoy today, not only does he know that your life can only be fulfilled as it is related to a personal relationship with he and his son, Jesus Christ, but he has actually spoken to you through his word, through creation, in order that you may know him.

He is a God who speaks. And as we come to this passage, and we're looking to verify the identity of Jesus through the identity of John the Baptist, we see that it is God's grace that has spoken to us in this way.

He has spoken about John the Baptist, and then he has spoken through John the Baptist. But the most significant way in which God speaks is through his son.

Hebrews chapter one, and the whole book opens this way. Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, that is the days in which you and I live, he has spoken through his son.

[10:23] And he goes on, the writer of Hebrews, to say that the son is the exact imprint of the nature of God. It's a wonderful revelation. How do we know who God is? We look at Jesus.

How do we understand God's love for us? We look at Jesus. How do we understand God's purpose for us? We look at Jesus. He has spoken to us, not only through creation and through the prophets, but in these last days, through his son.

So now we understand that all true revelation points us to Jesus Christ, because that's the way in which God has now spoken.

Mark wasn't writing about John because he was particularly impressed by him, even though I'm sure that his ministry would have impacted Mark in a unique way as he was not alive during that time, but at least as he recalled it and heard of it.

The ministry of John the baptizer was only relevant to the gospel writers in so far as it was connected to the person and the work of Jesus.

[11:30] So they only wrote of John the baptist as it was in connection with these Old Testament prophecies about the herald of the coming Messiah. That's why no other intertestamental preachers are mentioned for us in the New Testament.

Why is it that John is singled out? Because there was a specific purpose to John. He wasn't just a preacher. He was the voice, the one that long ago had been said would come and prepare the way for the Messiah.

So let's look at these two prophecies. There's two of them that Mark actually quotes here, Malachi chapter three and Isaiah chapter 40. In fact, I think it would be helpful for us to actually turn to them. So if you would, turn with me first to Malachi chapter three.

This is the passage that Mark is quoting in verse number two. Malachi chapter three, verse number one. Behold, I will send my messenger and he shall prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom you delight in.

Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. Now keep your finger there and flip over to Isaiah chapter 40. This is the other one. In verse number three, Mark quotes Isaiah chapter 40, this other prophecy.

[12:54] The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

These are the two scriptures that Mark quotes here. It's how he opens his gospel. He gives his stated purpose and then he immediately goes to the scripture and he says, here's what the scripture says.

Malachi 3, 1, Isaiah 40 and verse three. And then he applies those scriptures specifically to John the Baptist. Now there's a couple of ways that these scriptures speak about who John is.

Let's talk about what they say about John. First, they say that he will prepare the way. We just read it. A voice of one crying in the wilderness, Isaiah says, prepare ye the way of the Lord.

In Malachi chapter three, I will send my messenger. He shall prepare the way. There's a cultural significance to this statement. There was a custom of near Eastern kings that as they would travel from place to place, they would send a herald ahead of them.

[14:01] And that herald had a specific job. He was not only to proclaim the coming of the king, that's a part of it, we'll get to that in just a second. He was to prepare literally the way of the king, the way that the king would travel.

That involved clearing obstacles out of the path. It involved straightening crooked roads or crooked valleys that the king and his envoy would have to travel through.

It involved creating causeways over swampy areas or areas that would have been difficult to traverse on the ground. It involved preparing the way quite literally.

And these Old Testament writers take this cultural context and they say that when the Messiah comes, there will be one that goes before him and he will prepare the way.

He will remove the obstacles. He will not only announce the coming of the Messiah, but he will make the way of the Messiah straight. He will prepare the hearts of the people to receive him. [15:00] So what do these verses say about John? He'll prepare the way. Then they say that he will be a voice and specifically that he will be a voice in the wilderness.

Both prophecies emphasize the fact that the forerunning herald would be a voice and a messenger. Voice is the word used by Isaiah 43 and messenger by Malachi chapter three.

Speaking on behalf of God, the preparations would be made for the Messiah by this forerunner and would be focused particularly on his preaching.

That's the significance of this herald. How do we know that this was John? Because this is what the scripture said he would do. There's a focus on his preaching. He would be noticed by the people specifically because of the content of his message and the way in which he would deliver it.

Isaiah says he will be a voice of one crying out in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord. All four gospel writers take these two prophecies and they apply them specifically to John the Baptist.

[16:17] Matthew does it in chapter three of his gospel. Here's what he says. Now in the days, in those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea saying, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand for this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Luke chapter three does the same thing. And he came into all the district around the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah.

The prophet Luke writes, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every ravine will be filled.

Every mountain and hill will be brought low. The crooked will become straight and the rough road smooth and all flesh will see the salvation of our God. And then we get to the gospel of John and his claim comes in a little bit of a different way.

This time it's John the Baptist himself making this claim. He says, I am that one. The gospel of John chapter one in verse 23. He said, I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as Isaiah the prophet said.

[17:41] And you may be here today and you may say, well, it doesn't really matter to me very much what John claimed himself to be. And maybe those other gospel writers were just getting together and they were coming up with this story in and of themselves.

But that's not the only claim that we see in the scripture. Jesus Christ himself in Luke chapter seven and Matthew chapter 10 says this about John the Baptist.

Here's what he says in Luke seven. But what did you go out to see? That is in the wilderness. A prophet? And Jesus said, yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet.

Why? Because this is the one about whom is written, behold, I send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way before you.

The fact that these prophecies were perfectly fulfilled by John the Baptist give validation to the fact that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.

[18:39] Because hundreds of years before, it said there will be a herald. This is what he will do. This is how he will do it. And he will go before preparing the way for the Messiah.

And now we see John the Baptist perfectly fulfilling that. And so we say not only is John the Baptist the voice in the wilderness, but because of that, Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.

So we see what these Old Testament passages say about John. Now let's look at what these two Old Testament passages say about Jesus. The prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi are not only about John.

They are indeed, first and foremost, about Christ. In fact, if you'll allow me just to take a side trip here for just a second, all of the Scripture is ultimately about Christ.

The entire book in your hand, it doesn't matter where you turn in one way or another, it is there for the purpose of directing you towards the person of Jesus Christ.

[19:48] Jesus said this. And we see the example of this in the Gospels. Remember after Jesus' resurrection, a couple of the disciples were discouraged and they decided that they were going to go home to Emmaus.

And they begin walking the road on Resurrection Day to the town of Emmaus. And Jesus shows up and walks with them. But he prevents them from recognizing that it's him. And what is it that Jesus

did?

Luke tells us in chapter 24. Then beginning with Moses, that's the law, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, and with all the prophets, that's the rest of the Old Testament, he explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures.

What was Jesus explaining to them? The Bible is about me. Everything you read is meant to point you to me, Jesus was telling those men.

But then Jesus makes the claim expressly in John chapter 5. He told some religious people who are having a hard time accepting him, he said, you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

[ 21 : 02 ] And then he says, it is these that testify of me. And you are unwilling to come to me so that you may have life.

In other words, he was meeting with a bunch of religious people that loved the Bible, that studied faithfully the Bible, but they couldn't understand that the Bible was actually about him.

They went to the Scriptures searching for eternal life as if they could just follow the rules just the right way and if they could just conform to the religiosity just the right way that they would gain salvation.

But Jesus says, you've missed the whole point. If you study and know every passage of the Bible but you've missed me in the Bible, then you've missed life in the Bible. All of the Scripture is about Jesus.

So when we come to these two prophecies, it's not just indirectly about Jesus, it's actually specifically about Jesus. And it cannot be overlooked by us today.

[ 21 : 58 ] They're absolutely essential to our understanding of who Jesus is in nature. Now let's look at them again. Look at Malachi's prophecy first.

Malachi chapter three. What is it that he says? Behold, this is God speaking through Malachi, I will send my messenger and he shall prepare the way before, what's that next word?

Me. Who's speaking? God. This is not Malachi writing Malachi's word. This is Malachi speaking on behalf of God.

And God says, behold, I will send my messenger before me. Look at the next phrase. And the Lord, God, Yahweh, whom you seek shall suddenly come to his temple.

what's the purpose of this? What does this tell us about Jesus? The messenger to which God is referring is John the Baptist.

[ 23 : 07 ] But the person whose path John would be preparing is God himself. In other words, the Messiah would not be merely an extraordinarily gifted man that would lead the nation.

No, this would be Yahweh himself in the flesh. Malachi's prophecy insists that the one to suddenly come would be none other than God himself.

Now look with me at Isaiah chapter 40. We'll see it again. Isaiah chapter 40 verse 3. The voice of him that cries in the wilderness prepare ye the way of the who?

Lord. Whose way is he preparing? The Lord's way. You notice in your Bible Lord has four capital letters.

That's the covenant name. Yahweh. Whose way is the voice in the wilderness preparing? Yahweh's way. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

[ 24 : 17 ] And then he goes on. Every valley shall be exalted. Every mountain and hill shall be made low. The crooked shall be made straight and the rough places made plain. That is by John's preaching and John's ministry.

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed. And all flesh shall see it together for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The voice said cry.

And he said what shall I cry? All flesh is grass and all the goodliness thereof is of a flower of the field. The grass withers the flower fades but the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it.

Surely the people is grass. The grass withers the flower fades but the word of our God shall stand forever. What word? Isaiah's word Malachi's word John's word what were all three of them testifying of?

That not only is Jesus the Messiah but the Messiah is God himself. Jesus was not just a man. He is God.

[ 25 : 23 ] He is the only one that could ever provide atonement for sin not because he was a superhuman but because he is God. So Mark says in verse number one my goal in this book is to

proclaim and evidence that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and then he tacks on that next phrase and the Messiah is the Son of God and the very first thing Mark does is he says let's look at the scriptures.

Here's what the scripture says. There's going to be a man that comes and the way that he prepares is a way for God himself and then John himself testifies of this God as he walks up to the river one day and he says behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

What's the significance of John's ministry is because it points us to Jesus and what is significant about these Old Testament prophecies that we find out that long before we ever got to Philippians chapter 2 that the Old Testament said that the Messiah would come and the Messiah would be God in the flesh.

Who is Jesus? He's God. He's God. How do we know? Because the Bible tells me so. Where does it say it? We can start in Isaiah 43. And Malachi 3.

And then we can go to Mark 1. And then we can go to Philippians 2. And then we can go everywhere else in the scripture that you want to go because it all testifies of him. What's the significance of Mark writing about John?

[ 26 : 51 ] Nothing really except for the fact that he's writing about Jesus. Jesus made these divine claims himself as being one with the Father. But it was not a claim that was unsubstantiated in the rest of the scripture.

These prophecies about John aren't really about John at all. The importance of recognizing that these prophecies referred to John cannot be overstated as they clearly reveal that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed God in the flesh that has come to save us from our sins.

This is the gospel. This is the gospel. Listen this morning. This is who Jesus is. What are you going to do with him?

What are you going to do with him? You cannot look at Jesus and do nothing. You cannot just accept Jesus as being this really awesome powerful preacher of days gone by.

You cannot come to understand what the Bible says is the true nature and purpose of Jesus and walk away from that indifferently. You must either believe him and follow him as Lord or you must deny him and reject him and follow your own way.

[ 28 : 23 ] And anything indifferent is really just a choice to follow yourself. as you take the word to people in your family and you take it to people across this community and across this world we introduce them to who Jesus is but we cannot introduce him in a way that leaves them indifferent.

If Jesus truly is the son of God as the Bible insists and attests to we must do something with him. We must either fully embrace him or we must fully reject him as a liar or a lunatic as C.S. Lewis said.

He's either liar lunatic or Lord. You cannot walk out of this room today indifferent to that. You walk out of this room either acknowledging him as Lord or as a liar or a lunatic one or the other.

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[ 29 : 42 ] We meet every Sunday morning at 10 a.m. We'd love to meet you. NINGNING