

The Way Prepared

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[0 : 0 0] Let's join together in a word of prayer. Let's pray. Lord our God, we come before you this day and we humble ourselves down before you.

We come before you, our God, who is highly exalted. Our God, who is just singing your praises right now, we are reminded as to your majesty, reminded as to your glory, and we're also reminded as to our creatureliness, that we are the ones who have been made from the dust itself.

We come before you and we come and we understand and we confess that we are so small before you, that in and of ourselves we have no right to even approach your glorious name, that in and of ourselves we have no right to even lift up our voices in praise to you.

But we come this day and we do lift up our voices. We come this day in worship to you, knowing that we do not do it in our own merit or in our own strength, but we come this moment as sons and daughters, as brothers and sisters, to worship you, our God, because of the finished work of our Saviour, the one who we have just sung these glorious words about, who is so much better than any earthly human, that is so highly exalted, the man who excelled all other men, because he was fully man and fully God, the one who is at your right hand at this moment and making intercession for us, the one who is our great high priest.

And because we can praise him for these things, it gives us the full confidence to come at this moment and to lift up our voices in praise, knowing that as we praise you, that you not only hear our worship, but Lord, that you receive our worship, that you value our worship, that our worship is of importance to you, that you take great joy, your word tells us, and the praise and the thanksgiving of your people.

[2 : 0 6] To this morning and this day, we do come and we do offer our praise, we offer our thanksgiving, for the great many ways, even this past week, that you have blessed us, that you have shown your love and your care towards us as your people.

We thank you for this chance to be here today. We do pray for us this morning as your people. We ask you to gather us together in one spirit, with one heart.

We be here today with no other reason than to worship our risen Savior, to glorify it in you. We ask we would be here today with a heart and a mind ready and willing to listen.

We know there are so many distractions around us and we find ourselves so easily distracted, so easily taken away from the worship of you.

We just now take these distractions. We take the burdens of this past week. We take the many, perhaps, disappointments and the many worries that lay heavy on our shoulders.

[3 : 1 3] We take them to you just now. With this brand new week laying ahead of us, we take the anxieties, the worries, the stresses, the, perhaps, responsibilities that are heavy on us this coming week.

We take these things to you just now, knowing that where we feel ourselves so unable and so beyond us, that you, Lord, are able.

You are eternally able to take these burdens and take these worries and to give us peace. We pray just now for those who know you and who love you here today that we ask we would grow in our knowledge and grow in our love of you.

We pray for those who love you and who care for you but who are missing from our number today, those who cannot be here but who long to be here, those who are missing because of illness, those who are missing because of ongoing illness, those who are missing for various reasons that perhaps only you and they know about.

Lord, we ask you would comfort them, you would come alongside them. In time of pain and in time of suffering, you would be a strength and a guide to them. In times of physical and mental and perhaps even spiritual pain, that you would comfort them with that comfort that only comes from the ultimate comforter.

[4 : 35] We ask that he would work in their lives to relax them and to calm their spirit. We pray, Lord, for those who are missing from this place and for those who we would long to see here.

We pray for those in this area, in this district, who do not pray for themselves. We think especially of our own loved ones, our own family members, those who we have prayed for for perhaps many years.

We ask for that spirit of ongoing prayer, that determination, that holy zeal to keep praying for them, even as they continue not to think or pray for themselves.

And we do pray for them, that they would understand the lostness, they'd understand the danger they find themselves in. We pray for unbelieving parents, unbelieving spouses, unbelieving children, unbelieving siblings, unbelieving family members and friends, those who we love so dearly, but who as of yet despise the gospel, who as of yet show no interest in seeing their own lostness, in seeing the glorious goodness of you.

Lord, help us to be witnesses. Help us to be salt and to be light to them. Help all our conduct to glorify our Savior. Lord, take away from us envy and spite and bitterness.

[6 : 00] Take away from us all our pet sins, which do so much damage to the cause of Christ in this place. Lord, we ask for, as a people here, as brothers and sisters, you would equip us to serve you well in this place and in this day.

We remember just now, and we pray just now for our friends here with us, those here who, as of yet, who as of yet cannot say that they know Jesus for themselves.

We ask that even as they find themselves gathered here together today, Lord, you would speak to them through your word. They would come to know, perhaps, and to hear, perhaps, for the first time, to truly listen for the first time to the glorious good news, the glorious gospel, that Jesus has come to save sinners, that Jesus has come for the needy, that Jesus has come for those who know they cannot save themselves, and his salvation, it is free.

It was paid for by himself with precious blood. It is free and open to all who will come and receive it from him. Lord, we leave these realities with you.

We know that we strive to do your work in this place. We strive to serve you here, that we may plant and we may seek to water, but only you give the increase.

[7 : 22] We pray, Lord, with that in mind, with the upcoming communion services. We pray for those who will be involved, those who will be ministering, Lord, in them. We pray they will be times of blessing and times of renewal and refreshing, Lord, for listener and for preacher alike, as we come to remember the fact that we worship a Savior who gave himself for us.

But as we remember on our Lord's day, we remember a Savior who rose again, who is now living eternally, who is our Savior eternally, our King eternally, our elder brother and our friend eternally.

We pray, Lord, for the boys and the girls. We thank you, Lord, for the boys and girls here today, Lord, for the teens here today, for our friends here today. We pray for them just now as they enjoy this short time of holiday.

We pray for them as they go back to school, as they go back to studying. We also pray for next week, for the starting again of Sunday school. We pray, Lord, for the teachers and those who look after the boys and the girls.

We pray for the mums and the dads and the grannies and the granddads and all the family members and friends in this place who care for the boys and the girls here. We ask, Lord, that you would look after our parents, our grandparents.

[8 : 44] We ask you to bless them. We thank you for them. We ask, Lord, even in their young days, who would come to know Jesus and love Jesus and call him their Lord and their Saviour. We give you praise that age is not a limit to you nor is anything else at a limit to you.

Not age, not language, not culture. We pray, Lord, for the gospel cause around the world today. With that in mind, we do pray for Marshally as she comes to share, Lord, with the WFM.

We thank you for her, for her lifetime of service. We ask you to bless her as she begins this new adventure, this new cause, seeking to administer help both physically and spiritually to those who are in desperate need.

We ask you to bless her personally in her walk with you. We ask, Lord, you bless the upcoming meeting. It would be, Lord, an experience for her and for your people here where they could grow and feel and see the good, gracious work you're doing in different parts across this world.

Help us to see our own mission field, a mission field of our homes, of our area, of our villages, our mission field of where it is you've placed us. Help us in our places of work, our places of study, perhaps, our own homes with our neighbours, with our friends in the village to be salt and to be light.

[10 : 09] Give us chances, we ask, to share the gospel. We would see your name glorified in this place for your name's sake. We pray as always for our brothers and sisters also next door as they meet to worship you.

We ask, Lord, you bless the word to them also. Help us today to have our minds focused on you. We confess that we come just now so easily distracted. The ways of this world and the evil one distract us so quickly.

Help us a short time to have our mind on your word, on the glorious promises and truths we find within it. Lord, forgive us our sins. We come asking forgiveness from the one who has given forgiveness to all who come to him, who has purchased for us eternal forgiveness.

It's to that glorious, blood-bought forgiveness we come and we cling on to and we hold on to and not in anything we find in ourselves. I ask all these things in and through and for Jesus and his precious name's sake.

Amen. Amen. Well, I know we're still Sunday school today but I'm seeing some young friends and as always, I'm not going to say boys and girls, I'm going to say young friends.

[11 : 19] Young friends, I know we do children talks, right, and talks for children. The reality is the mums and the dads and the grandads and grandads love the children talk far, far more than you guys do.

And I'm seeing some smiling faces telling me I'm right and being very honest. Sometimes the mums and dads and the grandads listen far more to the children's talk than they do to the sermon. So really the children's talk is for everyone in the church.

Now next week when Sunday school starts again we might try and do something a wee bit different. I go back to the old way I think you guys did things when the boys and the girls come down to the front and I might go down and chat to you guys properly.

Because I'm so far up here and so far away from seeing you all and maybe, maybe next week and you answered Ian back last week, next week if I ask questions it would be really nice if you guys answered me back please.

Because I'm here until, I've got all day I can ask questions until 6 o'clock tonight I've known answers I'll just keep asking them and keep asking them. So next week be ready to answer questions and we might come down to the front and have a wee chat together.

[12 : 26] But just one quick, it's not really a story just something happened yesterday. Yesterday I was in the Castle Grounds with Emma and went for a wee walk I actually met some people in this congregation in the Castle Grounds yesterday on our wee walk some boys and girls and mums and dads and other age groups in my wee walk in the Castle Grounds.

In the Castle Grounds I found something or Emma found something and it wasn't in the trees it wasn't on the road it was actually in the wee bit of shore you get where the water comes in there's a wee bay if you go past Cuddy Point there's a wee bay there and there's a lovely gentle just constant wave that hits the shore again and again and on that bit of beach that bit of shore there's no sands there's no rocks we found something small and something shiny and something beautiful will I try and test the waters boys and girls and see if I can get any answers today if not what did I find go on take a guess what did we find in the shore there's no wrong answers whatever it is there's only one right answer but give it a go what did we find just shout something out go on what did we find what's shiny you see on the shore I'm seeing some thinking faces go on you're right in my eye line say something

I can see you what's shiny on the beach I'm hearing whispers louder maybe glass do you want your bang on right it was about glass now it wasn't shiny because it was sea glass about glass that had been going around the seas for years and years now what is sea glass well sea glass is a bit of glass bottle a bit of glass jar that someone chucked into the sea chucked off a boat maybe chucked off the shore maybe fell off a boat maybe someone said this is rubbish and they chucked into the sea which of course is bad isn't it it's bad to do that it's God's creation and we must look after God's creation as best we can but someone at some point chucked some glass some rubbish into the sea maybe somewhere right across the world and this bit of glass bottle had floated around the world perhaps for years and it landed at some point on a wee bit of a shore in Stornoway and this bit of glass which was once a glass bottle a glass jar over years and years was now a beautiful almost perfectly round a thin bit of glass it was even more cool and even more special that there was actually

I saw somewhere in Stornoway starting soon and they will take sea glass and make it even more beautiful they'll add some some gold or some silver to it and they'll make you a ring or a bracelet or a necklace out of sea glass now why am I talking all about sea glass for because sea glass a wee bit is sometimes like Christians isn't it sometimes we think and boys and girls as you get older you might think this more and mums and dads you definitely think this and grandads and grandads too sometimes we think we aren't much use sometimes we think we can't do very much sometimes we think we aren't really any good at things and sometimes we think we're like that bit of glass floating into the sea we can't do anything there's no point to us and we think what's the point and sometimes it gets worse than that sometimes we think

I'm quite bad I say bad things I do bad things I'm like a bit of rubbish thrown into the sea I'm not getting nice sometimes I'm certainly not precious sometimes and we think that the Bible tells us something amazing the Bible tells us that yes sometimes we are bad and we're being honest and mums and dads and everyone else this is for all of us sometimes we are bad quite often we're bad we say bad things we do bad things we think bad things don't we we think I am just like a bit of rubbish just there's no use to me the Bible tells us that God sees all these things and God of course isn't happy with all these things of course he's not the Bible also tells us and we'll see this later on even when things are really bad God tells us if we come to him and if we tell him that we're sorry for things we've done and the things we do and things we say that are bad and think that are bad and do that are bad and if we say that

[17 : 40] God I know I am bad I know I do bad things but I want to love Jesus and follow Jesus and I believe that he is very very good God tells us that he now sees us if we love him if we follow him he sees us not as a bit of rubbish in the sea he sees us like that new bit of sea glass it's been cleaned up it's been polished it's been made all sparkly and nice perhaps made into a ring or some jewellery and God calls us in the Bible he calls his people his precious people he calls us his precious jewels doesn't he God says yes once you are like a bit of glass a bit of rubbish floating around maybe but now because you know me and because you love me and because I love you says God to those who follow him you're now precious really really precious and much more precious than a bit of glass we found outside

Cuddy Point and Stornoway much much much more precious remember that and fun fact sometimes even the beach here and in Gary Beach we found quite a lot of sea glass over the years but be careful it's all quite sharp sometimes so be careful but if you say a nice wee bit it's nice and smooth maybe take it home with you make sure it's clean and safe mums and dads take it home with you and remember that God calls you precious if you know him if you love him he calls you precious and you're much more precious than even the nicest bit of sea glass on the beach next week Sunday School starts again I'll be so happy to see you all of course and as with your teachers and we might come down to the front have a wee chat together just us mums and dads can just be quiet for a while and we have a wee chat together sounds good?

good ok let's again sing to God's praise Scottish Psalter and Psalm 2 Scottish Psalter and Psalm 2 it's on page 200 of the Psalm books Scottish Psalter Psalm 2 on page 200 we can sing verses 1 down to verse 6 of the Psalm again a Psalm a messianic Psalm a Psalm talking about Jesus why rage the heathen and vain things why do the people mind the kings of the earth who set themselves and princes are combined to plot against the Lord and his anointed saying thus let us asunder break their band and cast their cords from us he that in heaven sits shall laugh the Lord shall scorn them all then shall he speak to them in wrath and rage he vex them shall Psalm 2 verses 1 to 6 to God's praise why rich the heathen and unbidden why do the people mind kings of the earth who set themselves and princes and princes and princes are combined to plot against the Lord and his anointed receive by the God and dalene who ■■■ prepares faith ■■■ Justine Shit

He God in heaven Sillow The Lord shall Scorn them all Then shall he speak To them in wrath In which he bestens shall Yet notwithstanding I have been To be my King appointed And overside my Lord Thee hell I have him King

Now I tell Let's now turn to reading God's word The Gospel of Mark in chapter 1 The Gospel of Mark in chapter 1 We'll read from the start of the chapter The Gospel according to Mark Chapter 1 Let's hear the word of God The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ The Son of God As it is written in Isaiah the prophet Behold I send my messenger before your face Who will prepare your way The voice of one crying in the wilderness Prepare the way of the Lord Make his paths straight John appeared Baptizing in the wilderness And proclaiming a baptism of repentance For the forgiveness of sins

[23 : 40] And all the country of Judea And all of Jerusalem were going out to him For being baptized by him In the river Jordan Confessing their sins Now John was clothed with camels here 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 his sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie I have baptized you of water But he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee And was baptized by John in the Jordan 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 And a voice came from heaven You are my beloved Son With you I am well pleased The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness

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 Now after John was arrested Jesus came into Galilee Proclaiming the gospel of God And saying The time is fulfilled And the kingdom of God is at hand Repent and believe in the gospel 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 And Jesus said to them Follow me And I will make you become fishers of men And immediately They left their nets and followed him And going on a little further He saw James the son of Zebedee And John his brother Who were in their boat Mending the nets And immediately he called them And they left their father Zebedee in the boat With the hired servants

And followed him And they went into Capernaum And immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching And they were astonished at his teaching For he taught them as one who had authority And not as the scribes And immediately there was in the synagogue A man An unclean spirit And he cried out What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth Have you come to destroy us I know who you are The Holy One of God But Jesus rebuked him saying Be silent And come out of him And the unclean spirit Convulsing him And crying out With a loud voice Came out of him And they were all amazed So that they questioned Among themselves Saying What is this A new teaching With authority He commands Even the unclean spirits And they obey him And at once

His fame spread everywhere Throughout all the surrounding region Of Galilee And so on To God's name And to God's praise We give praise to God For his glorious And his perfect Word Let's once more sing To God's praise This time singing From Psalm 93 Scottish Psalter And Psalm 93 It's on page 354 Psalm 93 On page 354 You can sing verses 1 Down to verse 5 Of the psalm Which is The whole psalm Psalm 93 The Lord of rain And clothed is he With majesty most bright His works to show him Clothed to be And girt about With might Psalm 93 The whole psalm To God's praise The Lord of rain

And clothed is he With majesty most bright His works to show him Glow to be And girt about With might The world is So Stabbed Shared That it cannot Be hard Thy Thorn is Fixed On And Thou From Ever The City of The

[28 : 47] Holy The Lord shall lift up their voices, their blood shall lift up their wings, and make a mighty voice.

But yet the Lord, the Lord shall lift up their voices, their blood shall lift up their voices, their blood shall lift up their voices.

Thy testimonies, every one, in faithfulness excel, thy holiness forevermore, thy love's become as well.

Amen. Let's turn back for a short time to the chapter we had, Gospel of Mark and Chapter 1. Gospel of Mark, Chapter 1.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. For the Lord's help, we hope to begin a series in this Gospel. We've broken up over weeks.

[30 : 32] Perhaps it wasn't wise starting a series two weeks before communion services, but we'll start today and see how we get on over the weeks. We'll be in segments. We'll be broken up with various other series.

But let's begin looking at this glorious Gospel, this wonderful Gospel of Mark. And for our time today, we can just take verses 1 down to verse 8 of our chapter.

As we see Mark introduce his Gospel. Before we begin, we can just add a quick and a very brief word on background on the Gospel of Mark.

Now, we can't say with biblical certainty, I want to watch how we say these things, who the Gospel was offered by.

It was, of course, by Mark. We do know that. And the early fathers and the early church and the majority view, and its view personally I would go with, is it's offered by the John Mark we find mentioned in Acts, Chapter 12.

[31 : 36] I'll replace this too, but Acts, Chapter 12. John Mark, or Mark, as he was known, was Peter's associate, Peter's scribe. He recorded Peter's writings.

He travelled with Peter. So the Gospel of Mark is, of course, really from the perspective of Peter.

As Mark travelled with Peter, he recorded Peter's account of his time spent with Jesus. And one very interesting and one very obvious evidence that this was from the account of Peter, which, of course, gives us great confidence in the book, is that Mark, out of all the Gospels, Mark is the account which, speaking carefully, is harshest towards Peter.

It is most honest about Peter's faults and Peter's failings and the amount of times and the way Peter just messes things up.

Mark records that clearly, which tells us, I have very strong evidence, as we know, as Peter finished his time with Jesus on earth, as Christ left Peter, and we'll see this in the weeks to come, but Peter was a changed man, wasn't he?

[33 : 03] He wasn't quite as brash, quite as forward. He wasn't no longer ashamed. He was restored. And who better to be honest about himself than Peter himself?

So this is a Gospel account written by Mark, attested to by Peter. So why did Mark write this Gospel account?

What was Mark's purpose in compiling this Gospel account? Well, right from the start, we can see that this Gospel, compared to the other Gospels, is the most, we could say, fast-paced Gospel account.

It's just account after account, event after event, page after page. You see that even in the Bibles, the paragraph breaks are so short. Baptism, temptation, ministry begins, disciples being called, unclean spirit, healing.

It goes on and on and on through the whole book. It's just account after account. In quite a short Gospel, Mark is trying to fit in as much as possible. Mark's audience, as far as we can understand, as far as we see, Mark's audience was that of Gentiles.

[34 : 17] He was writing to those who weren't, at least, born Jewish. He was writing to those who are hearing about Jesus for the first time. As the Gospel was spreading out more and more, Mark writes this account to try and explain to those, those without a Jewish background, who weren't culturally from the place, just who Jesus was, just what he did.

Compared to the other Gospels, Mark perhaps relies a bit less on the Old Testament prophecies, although they are included, and we'll see that even today. Mark does rely slightly less on the Old Testament prophecies.

He is writing to an audience who didn't have the Old Testament, perhaps, who at least didn't know the Old Testament. He's writing to Gentiles, to those who are hearing all this for the first time.

And he offers them this wide, glorious, fast-paced explanation about who Jesus is. Mark's often labelled, and rightfully so, as the most evangelical, we can say that, the most evangelical of the Gospel accounts.

It's all about the good news itself. And again and again, throughout our study, we come back to that central point. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[35 : 43] That is Mark's starting point, and that is his central point throughout everything he writes. He brings it again and again back to the fact. This is the Gospel. The Gospel, of course, we know this.

The Gospel, just to refresh our memory, the Gospel means the great news, the good news. This is the good news. This is the incredible, the great news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This is the news of who he is and what he's done. There are some here who I know have been on the Christian walk for many, many years.

And you've heard and read the Gospel of Mark, I'm sure, countless times. You know the Gospel, and the Gospel accounts off by heart. You could preach one back to me with quotes from preachers who are famous in their day.

They go, why are we here again? Why are we going back to these basics? The truth is, we never graduate away from the basics in one sense, do we? The Gospels should never become dull or boring to us.

[36 : 51] We come again to this Gospel of Mark. We come looking once more to be reminded us to the wonder and the glory of who Jesus is. In our time today, in these first eight verses, we actually don't see much of Jesus.

Interestingly, Mark, who is often so concise and so precise, he begins his whole Gospel of Jesus Christ talking about someone completely different.

He talks about the messenger. John the Baptist. As we spend a short time in his verse today, we can see what Mark says about John, the importance of John, just under three very general and brief headings.

First of all, we see in verses 2 down to verse 3, we see the messenger being predicted. Then in verses 4 and down to verse 6, we see the person of the messenger, what he was like.

And then finally, verses 4 down to verse 8, we see the message. So the messenger predicted, the messenger his person, and the messenger his message.

[38 : 10] So first of all, the messenger predicted, we see that verses 2 down to verse 3. This is one of the few times that Mark does go back to the Old Testament in his Gospel account.

He begins his Gospel by quoting these words from Isaiah chapter 40. Verse 2. As it's written in Isaiah the prophet, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way.

The voice of one crying in a wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Just as an offside, if you're wondering why this reading is slightly different to the reading in our Scriptures, the same chapter we know this comes from, is because Mark would have been quoting from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

It's just a translation difference. It's like us quoting from the Gaelic straight into English. It's the same words, but the order is different. But the same words they had, the same meaning they had, just a slightly different translation than Mark would have been using.

He was a Greek speaker after all in his day, a Greek or Aramaic speaker in his day. But he quotes from Isaiah. He begins by taking us right back to the day of the prophets, the days of the prophets, we should say.

[39 : 34] Mark reminds us by quoting Isaiah that John the Baptist and Jesus following after him, these two men didn't just appear in the scene out of nowhere, but right back from the start.

And we'll see this, God willing, on Thursday evening at the prayer meeting, which, of course, everyone is welcome to. Just this reminder once more, I'll say this, for as long as I'm here, everyone is welcome on Thursday nights.

Everyone. We're looking for Thursday night, and we'll see right back in the garden that the Saviour was predicted. All the way through the prophets, the Saviour was predicted. And Mark reminds the people here that the gospel was predicted right back even in the times of Isaiah.

Isaiah predicted that one would come who would bring the messenger straight after him. Mark quoting Isaiah 40, he quotes these verses to remind the people just a few things about John the Baptist.

He quotes Isaiah 40 because Isaiah 40, these verses, were a message of hope to Israel. Israel at that time in Isaiah's day were going through national disaster.

[40 : 51] Pagan worship had overtaken the people. The nation was in disarray. There was chaos on all sides. Evil abounded. And Isaiah prophesied.

In the midst of all this decline and sin and misery, that God was bringing a Saviour one day.

A future was coming to Israel. A messenger would be sent to prepare the way of the coming Saviour, the coming Messiah. Mark quotes these verses to remind the people of his day that God had not forgotten them.

God had promised many, many years before a Saviour would come. And the messenger was coming before him. And the messenger had arrived.

The messenger had arrived. Who was this messenger? He's a man, in verse 3, who'd be found crying out in the wilderness.

[41 : 55] The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. Why was John in the wilderness? Why was John the Baptist so far out, away from the town?

Why wasn't he doing his job a bit closer? It wasn't just a location option for John. We're pretty sure he wouldn't have chosen to be out in the wilderness.

It's like us being out in the moor today. You wouldn't do it. You wouldn't choose it. But he was. He did always work out of the town, way out in the wilderness.

Why? Because the wilderness, as it was in the days of the prophets, to Mark's day, to John's day, the wilderness had real meaning, real importance.

We'll see that more next week. The wilderness represented being outside of the camp, literally. Outside of God's favour. In the Old Testament times, as we see the people of God travelling through those 40 odd years in the wilderness, to be outside of the camp, or to be against God.

[43 : 07] To show that God's favour had stopped. So by John preaching outside of the camp, outside the wilderness, it meant the people had to go to John.

As they walked out to John, they were reminded they had long since abandoned God. They were so far away from his care, so far away from his worship, they had abandoned him tens and hundreds of years ago.

Away from God's presence. But John being there, the prophecy is being fulfilled. God had not abandoned his promises, had not abandoned his people, despite them abandoning him.

What's to note here is, this is not how the people expected the Messiah to be proclaimed. The Messiah would come and would destroy Rome, they believed. The Messiah would come and would make the Jewish people a great nation once more, they believed.

The Messiah would come and pomp and ceremony and would destroy his enemies with great armies. So they believed. But if they had stopped to actually read what God had said to them in generations past, they shouldn't have been surprised the Messiah would come quietly, predicted by a man out in the wilderness, as was told to them those years before.

[44 : 37] God always, God always fulfills his promises. And more often than not, God uses the lowly to inform the high.

It has the same sense as God used this lowly man out in the wilderness to predict the coming of a lowly and gentle saviour who is the Messiah.

The promise is about to be complete. As John the Baptist does his work in the wilderness, God is fulfilling his promise. God has not forgotten his people.

Friends, God to this day does not forget his promises. God completes his promises in his own time. God is not slow to act, as some count slowness.

God does what he does in his perfect, loving, caring, sovereign time. Time had come for the Messiah to appear.

[45 : 40] John is there, out in the wilderness. The messenger predicted. What was John like? What was he doing? What was he saying out there?

What did he look like? Why was he the way he was? It brings us to verses 4 down to verse 6. The second half of verse 4 down to verse 6, we could say, the person of John.

John appeared. John appeared. Verse 4. Baptised in the wilderness and so on. But John appeared.

As is often the way of God, God again works in the way he chooses to work. And the work of God so often begins in a way that no one would think it begins.

Even Christians, brothers and sisters, in your own life, think back to when God started working in your life. I'm sure it was a way that was quiet perhaps, a way that was small.

[46 : 43] If it wasn't quiet, it wasn't small, I'm sure his work began in a way that was so different to how you might have imagined his work might have begun in your life. John appears.

As if out of nowhere, John appears baptising in the wilderness. The people's hope of a Messiah had become so weak and so small.

But at the perfect time, John appears. What's John doing? He's baptising in the wilderness.

Now baptism, of course, wasn't new to the Jews. Baptism had been there from very early on. Every Gentile, every non-Jewish person who wasn't from a Jewish background, who wanted to become a Jew, had to be baptised.

That was at the start of the process. It wasn't a start, but it was part of the process. A long, lengthy process, but that's a never-dazed discussion. A process that was mostly man-made by the scribes and the Pharisees, but we'll touch that another time.

[47 : 51] But the Jews knew about baptising. To be baptised meant you were a Gentile, a non-Jew. You were outside the camp and you wanted to become part of God's precious people.

But John here isn't calling the Gentiles to come and be baptised, is he? It wasn't just the Gentiles John was baptising.

No, John called the Jews also to come and be baptised. Jew and Gentile alike. It's no wonder John caused so much controversy, isn't it?

Can you imagine? Imagine the leaders of the day, and we'll see this more in the weeks to come. Can you imagine the leaders of the day being told this prophet who is from God is proclaiming that you all need to be baptised?

Not the unclean, disgusting Gentiles out there. No, you. You all need to be baptised. Unheard of. Almost heretical for them in a day.

[49 : 00] Baptism was for the outsiders who wanted in, for the unclean, not for them. But more than that, the baptism with which John baptised with, it wasn't just a baptism for entry into the religion.

John's baptism was different. He baptised for a baptism of repentance, forgiveness of sins. Before the Messiah was to come, this great preparation work was being done by John.

He was preparing the way for one who would come and baptise, not in water, but in the Spirit. And we'll see that more later.

The great preparer, the great messenger, John, had to come and prepare the people for what was going to happen in their midst. He came baptising.

He came to humble them, to tell them they needed to repent. They needed to repent. Things haven't changed.

[50 : 12] In 2,000 plus years, things haven't changed. One of the great barriers of people coming to love Jesus and to follow Jesus and to serve Jesus is the fact that to follow Jesus, you have to be willing to admit that you need Him.

And to be willing to admit that you need Him, it means you have to admit that you are not perfect, that you are not good, that you haven't got it all sorted, so to speak.

You have to repent. You have to confess that I haven't got things sorted out. I am actually living a life of sin, a life of rebellion against a holy and perfect God.

And just like those in John's day, it's hard to hear that. And many do not respond to that. Many of us would rather be stubborn and stay pretending, and it is pretend, pretending to ourselves we do not need Jesus because we can't begin to admit to ourselves the fact we aren't quite as good as we think we are.

In fact, quite the opposite. We are so much worse than we realize that we are. John came for baptism of repentance. He was also, how did he look?

[51 : 35] What was his person like? Verse 6. John was clothed of camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist eating locusts and wild honey. Was this just John's style choices?

Was John just out in the wilderness because he fancied looking like that and dressing like that. Again, much like the location, I can't imagine for a second that John would have chosen this attire or chosen his diet to be what it was.

There's more to the strange look and the strange diet of John than preference. These are the clothes and the diet of someone who spends their whole life out in the desert.

Camel hair designed, literally designed, to keep cool in the day and to be warm at night. This is the garb of one who would spend his day and his nights in service to God out in the wilderness, out in the deserts.

More than that, the clothes John wore were the exact, exact same as the prophets of old wore. John, of course, is, we say, the last in the line of the old prophets who predict the coming saviour.

[53 : 04] Jesus, in Matthew 11, he calls John the Elijah that is to come. The Elijah that was to come. That's how Jesus describes John, the Baptist, in Matthew 11.

We find described in Malachi this prophecy, Malachi 4, verse 5, where God says, Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

Elijah was going to come back, or one like Elijah. Of course, he was not literally Elijah, but he was like Elijah. And what did Elijah the prophet wear? What did he look like?

2 Kings 1, speaking of Elijah, he wore a garment of hair that built a lever about his waist, and he said, it is Elijah the Tishbite.

In his manner, in his preaching, in his style, John the Baptist was the prophet Elijah. One like the prophet Elijah come back as prophesied.

[54 : 14] He wore the clothes of a prophet. He ate the diet of a constant desert dweller. His life was a life of service. His whole life was dedicated to this moment we read about, to the coming of the Lord.

That brings us, finally, to the message of John. What did this man in the wilderness, this man in the desert, dressed in camel hair clothes, what was he preaching?

Our whole section, verses 4 to verse 8, gives us a summary, really, of that. But more than what we have in these verses, we actually know what he preached from Isaiah also.

Again, Isaiah 40, Isaiah 40, verses 3, down to verse 5, tells us what this messenger would preach. Isaiah 40, verses 3 to 5, says, A voice cries in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill be made low, the uneven ground shall become level, the rough places are plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

[55 : 36] John showed in outward signs what the coming Messiah was about to do inwardly for his people. As John baptized in the Jordan, it was an outward sign of the coming Saviour who would wash clean his people.

A foretelling of the glorious work of salvation that was about to take place. And John preached a baptism of repentance, as we said, foreshadowing the great work of Jesus, the Messiah who would preach the need of repentance.

the Jews of the day, the people of the day, they were happy with their rituals, happy with the temple sacrifices, doing their weekly work, going to the temple, doing all that needed to be done, but we know they did it with a heart that was cold.

They did it for the sake of doing it. It's all about process, but not about worship. they had forgotten the promises of God.

They were no longer doing it in a spirit of repentance. It was so necessary for them to be reminded why it was they were doing what they were called to do.

[57 : 00] Again, things haven't changed. As we preach a gospel today like John that says we must repent, we hear responses, I'm a good person. I go to church, look, I'm here before you just now, I go to church once, twice a week.

I give to the church. I'm good to my family. I've not done any big sins, any bad sins, not really. And naturally we think of every excuse under the sun why we don't need to repent.

The gospel tells us to your friends. We must repent. We must repent. And just as the people that John the Baptist preached to, they were about to face the Messiah and before they faced their Messiah they needed to first repent.

They couldn't come to know Jesus as their Lord and as their Saviour unless they first acknowledged their need for him. you can't love Jesus.

You can't begin to serve Jesus. You can't know Jesus. You can't be known by him unless you first come to him for repentance.

[58 : 20] repentance. I've been here a week and in a week I've got to know some of you just very generally. I don't know the first thing about your lives. Not yet anyway.

I just don't. There's one thing I can say for certain about your lives right now. For certain. If you as of yet do not know Jesus you must first repent.

the gospel is not the good news if we don't first say what people need saving from.

Is it? We need to boldly and gently and lovingly proclaim the truth. If you do not repent you will not see God.

If you do not repent you will never ever be in glory. You will be sent to a lost eternity without hope and without help.

[59 : 22] Such was the spirit of repentance that John preached. That's a simple gospel truth. But note that John preached more than this.

He didn't just preach a baptism of repentance. We must repent. We must say Lord I have sinned against you. Lord rescue me. There's more isn't there?

There's also hope. There's reality and there's hope. Repentance. Yes we have sinned against God and we must come to him. As we come to God what do we find? We find forgiveness of sins.

The good news must include repentance. The need of repentance. But the good news preached properly must always always include the offer of salvation.

As the people came to John to be baptised they repented of their sins and they confessed their sins. What a glorious foreshadowing wasn't it?

[60 : 25] Of a saviour that was to come. Dear friends, friends, and I say that word as genuine as I can.

I'm not here to do a job. I'm not here just to take the box off for doing my job this week. I am here to serve the Lord and here to serve you.

And I serve you by the same gospel that John shared to his people that we share today to you. If you are still without Jesus, if you have not repented and confessed your sins, if you have not come to Jesus asking forgiveness for your sins, clinging on to him for eternal life, you are in grave, grave danger.

This is not just for drama sake. This is not just for the sake of saying it. It's genuine. This is real. You are in grave danger. And I am duty bound to remind you of that grave danger.

But with that, I am also duty bound to remind you as John the Baptist did, with repentance of sins, there is also forgiveness of sins. Yes, you are lost without Jesus.

[61 : 49] Yes, you are lost and hell bound without him. But with him, with him, there is repentance of sins and forgiveness of sins.

Eternal forgiveness, full forgiveness, blood bought forgiveness. John came and he foreshadowed the one to come.

As he looked towards the coming Messiah, as he prepared the people, he reminded them that they did not repent, they could not be saved. But if they did repent, there was forgiveness of sins for them, the one who was coming after him.

True, full, eternal forgiveness of sins. One mightier than I, said John.

Verse 7, After me comes one who is mightier than I. Before Mark introduces Jesus to his readers, to his listeners, perhaps, Mark leaves us one more image of John the Baptist.

[62 : 58] One mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. John was a messenger.

He was just a messenger, a forerunner of the great one who was to come. John, who Jesus himself, again in Matthew 11, calls great.

Jesus calls John great. John the Baptist, this great one sent from the Lord, he humbles himself so beautifully before the coming of the Saviour.

Brothers and sisters, as we touched on last week, as we come to share the goodness and the greatness of Jesus, we must have the same mindset that John had.

We must be willing to see ourselves Lord and Lord so that he would be glorified and lifted up. Is that not what we want to see in this place? It's not the glory of this building or the glory of this congregation, glory of our brother and sister next door, no, we want to see the glory of Jesus exalted.

[64 : 09] Let us this week even have the mindset of John the Baptist that we ourselves aren't even worthy to as it were touch the dust of his feet but yet he uses us to do his will in this place.

That's the glorious thing here. John was called great by Jesus only because John humbled himself before Jesus. The great saviour of the world did not need John the Baptist.

He did not need him but he used him to prepare the way for him. Dear brother, dear sister, Jesus does not need me. He doesn't need anyone here to save anyone here but he chooses to use his people.

you and I together brothers and sisters, he chooses to use his people in your homes, in this village, places of work. He chooses to use you like John to prepare the way.

John did not save. John didn't preach he could save. John prepared the way for the coming saviour. That is our job, mine and yours with me.

[65 : 20] That is our jobs together isn't it? To prepare the way, to proclaim the good news of the Messiah who can save, who does save and who will save.

Our first step in glorifying Jesus is seeing ourselves the same way that John saw himself, a simple servant. And like John it is our duty and we are duty bound as his people all together as brothers and sisters in this place to be salt and to be light.

Like John the Baptist to be willing to lower ourselves to see Jesus glorified. As we leave the start of this section next week we begin to be introduced along with the readers of this gospel to the appearance of Jesus.

As we begin this study we've heard a thousand times before but we must as we come to read these verses together try our best to put ourselves in the mindset of the first readers, the first hearers of this gospel.

They hadn't heard this before. This is all brand new to them and can you imagine the excitement. Mark said there's one coming, a great saviour's coming and I about to tell you all about him.

[66 : 41] He's coming to save you from your sins. the joy, the excitement, the anticipation of hearing who this person is, who this saviour is.

And next week we begin to have the privilege of seeing together just who he is. Who is this Messiah? Who is the one John predicted? The one who wouldn't baptise of water, who baptise instead with the power and the Holy Spirit of God.

What a joy we have together to study these verses as we remind ourselves once more of us to the beauty and the wonder of Jesus. I'll end by saying again what I said at the start.

And you might think this new minister just repeats himself again and again. At times you might be right. But I will never apologise for repeating what I'm about to say. I will never apologise and dear Christian neither should you.

The gospel is simple. The gospel is simple. And we'll see that as we go through the gospel of Mark again and again. The good news is truly that.

[67 : 52] It's truly good news. As Jesus begins to call people to himself and begins to heal people, to save people in the following chapters.

What is the gospel? Come to Jesus that you might live. Come to Jesus. Repent.

Turn away from your sins. The gospel does not act good. Don't mishear that. The gospel does not pretend to be good. The gospel does not try hard to be good because you will fail.

The gospel is come to Jesus who will wash you clean off your dirt and your darkness. Come to Jesus as John preached.

Repent. Repent and know for yourself forgiveness of sins. Full forgiveness of sins from the saviour who has come to forgive, eternally forgive the sins of his people.

[68 : 58] Spare our heads in a word of prayer. Lord we ask as we begin this new study in your word you would open our minds and open our hearts to be willing to listen to you, to be willing to listen, to listen as you remind us once more from your glorious word just what it is to know Jesus, to follow Jesus, to have him as Lord and to have him as our saviour.

We confess Lord that we come to your word so often knowing it, so often being so accustomed to it, to the truths and the wonders we find in it. We find ourselves perhaps growing so cold against it.

Help us Lord to have warm hearts, to have receptive minds. We do pray once more that for any here who as of yet do not know Jesus, that as we come to here each week just as to the love and care and power and glory and majesty of our risen saviour, that our dear friends here would come and know him for themselves.

Help us we ask to sing this final item of praise of hearts and minds full joy. We ask you support for the one who sings.

We thank you Lord for those who each week present and each week lift up sung praise to you. Lord, support them and bless them in their work to you. Let's call these things in and through and for Jesus.

[70 : 23] In his precious name say, Amen.