

Mark 1:1-15 (PM)

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[0 : 00] Right, so this is the sermon now. We're going to do the sermon. And here's the thing about it. We're beginning a brand new series looking at the Gospel of Mark.

And that series will take us all the way through to Easter 2023. We'll take a break for Advent, which is the weeks leading up to Christmas, the four weeks leading up to Christmas.

So the Gospel of Mark, I'm just going to give you a few really introductory comments on Mark. Mark is the shortest and probably the earliest Gospel.

It was written about 25 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. It's very fast-paced. Bang, bang, bang. Just action after action after action after action.

Mark often transitions from one story to the next very quickly. And if you counted them up, you'll see so many times he uses the word immediately.

[0 : 59] See, he'll say, story, story, story, immediately. Story, story, immediately. Story, story. In fact, I think twice in our reading tonight, we heard the word immediately. This is one thing that's really interesting about Mark is there's lots of things in there that aren't in other Gospels.

There's no genealogy, no Christmas story, no resurrection appearances. It ends really abruptly, which we'll get to later on. There's no Beatitudes, no Lord's Prayer. It's just, it's kind of all action.

And it creates this sense of momentum, like we're moving very quickly towards something. And the thing we're moving towards is the cross. So it's very fast-paced for the first half.

Then it slows down a bit in the second half. The second half of the book is just dealing with the final week of Jesus' life.

So first half, action, action, teaching, teaching, miracle, miracle. Second half, it's mostly the last week of Christ's life. And this is the shape of Jesus himself.

[2 : 00] So, I mean, Mark is a very careful writer, the way he's put everything together. This is the shape of Jesus. Jesus, powerful king, in control of everything, but also someone who will suffer.

So the last half of the book is about suffering. So who was this guy, Mark? Well, Mark wasn't one of the, you know, like the famous disciples, one of the initial disciples. He worked with Paul.

Somewhere along the line, he got connected with Peter and became Peter's kind of traveling companion. And Papias, who was a very, very early Jewish historian, said what happened is basically Mark collected a whole lot of stories from Peter, eyewitness accounts and memories, and then he put them together, shaped them into this thing called the gospel of Mark, the story of Jesus.

Final thing I'll say about Mark. He is completely preoccupied with Jesus. He's mesmerized by Jesus. Now, there's a lot more to say by way of introduction.

But I'll press pause on it. We'll get to it over the next few weeks. We're going to jump straight into it. What I want to look at this morning, or this evening, is just the first 13 verses.

[3 : 15] That's the prologue, the introduction. And a lot happens in those 13 verses. But the main point is this. The story you're about to hear.

So this is the main point of the prologue. The story you're about to hear is all about Jesus. It's all about Jesus.

Verse 1, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark makes it very clear. That's Mark speaking. Very clear. It's all about Jesus. Verses 2 to 3, the Old Testament quote, prepare the way of the Lord.

It's pointing us to Jesus. Verses 4 to 8, that's the bit about John the Baptist. Very interesting guy. Very popular. Could have done a lot with his life.

But he says, it's not about me. It's all about Jesus. And then verse 9, Jesus actually physically turns up for the first time to get baptized. And the heavens are torn open.

[4 : 14] It's quite violent language. The heavens are torn open. God finally speaks. And the Father doesn't say, bow before me. Look at me. I want to tell you something about me. No.

He points us to Jesus. He says, you are my beloved son. It's only in verse 12 that Jesus actually, we see Jesus doing something or speaking. The rest of it is all these other voices saying, it's about Jesus.

It's about Jesus. It's about Jesus. As our lives should be. Mark is continually bringing Christ before us. Just bringing Christ before us.

Making Christ the center of the story. And in doing that, he's implicitly saying, what are you going to do with Jesus? He's the most important thing in the universe.

And he does that right up to the end of the gospel, which when we get to, it's so interesting. Chapter 16, verse 8, is the official end of Mark's gospel.

[5 : 15] And it tells the story of some followers. There's this wonderful woman who have gone to the tomb to mourn. And an angel says to them, he's not here, he's gone. And how did these followers react?

Verse 8. It's the last official verse of Mark's gospel. And they went out and fled from the tomb for trembling and astonishment had seized them. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. It's how the whole thing ends. It's brilliant. I love it. There's no closure, no happy reunion. It's Mark's way of saying, are you going to run away from Jesus as well? Or are you going to recognize him as the Messiah?

Are you going to make him the center of your life? That's what Mark is about. Make him the center of your life. Right then, let's get into the details. So the basic structure of this sermon, which won't be super long, but the basic structure I've already mentioned, it's this.

What does Mark say about Jesus? What do the Old Testament prophets say about Jesus? What does John the Baptist say about Jesus? What does God say about Jesus? And the sermon will feel a little bit choppy. A bit choppy.

[6 : 22] A bit staccato. And that's because that's how Mark writes. Okay, he goes from one thing to the next. So let's crack on here. Verse one.

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

You know what's really interesting about that? This is the only time Mark gives us his opinion in this gospel.

This is another distinctive about this story. Mark gives no editorial input, unlike the other gospels. He doesn't drop his ideas into it.

There's no sort of explanatory notes. What he's doing is he's pushing himself into the background. He doesn't want to be in the foreground. He's not saying what he thinks.

[7 : 18] He doesn't add his own notes to it. He just tells a story because he wants Jesus to be the center. So, verse one. It's a big statement. Let's look at it a bit closer. The first word, beginning.

The beginning of the gospel. Even that first word, it's a very loaded word, beginning, isn't it? It takes us back to Genesis, doesn't it? Mark is saying something new is about to happen.

Get ready. The next word, gospel. So, you might know this, but gospel feels like a very religious word now, doesn't it? It wasn't always a religious word.

Way, way back in the days, it just meant big political news. Like a war has been won. That was a gospel. So, our new king, King Charles III, you've been reading about him in the paper, right?

We have a new king, King Charles III. That is a gospel, according to the original meaning of this word. It's history-shaping news.

[8 : 19] Now, for us, that's really important we understand that. That it's news. It's a proclamation of something.

Something really big has happened that's gonna affect you. This is so important. This tells us that the gospel is not advice. It's not primarily about a new way of living.

Not primarily. It's primarily the story of Jesus doing something for us. Now, what Jesus did does affect how we live.

But if you get the order wrong, if you make Christianity primarily about how you live, you'll end up with a different religion. It won't be Christianity. So, this word gospel is sometimes translated good news.

And it is good news. It's amazing news. It's not good news because we have this spiritual guru in Jesus who's, you know, this, you know, provide us with these amazing life hacks.

[9 : 25] You know, it's not something you do. It's something you hear, and you receive it, and you celebrate it. The good news, the gospel, is a declaration about something God has done through Jesus.

And let me add, if it's not the best news you've ever heard in your life, you don't understand it. The beginning of the gospel. There were two words in.

Of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I could talk a lot about Christ. I'm just going to move on to the Son of God, though, for time here. So, Mark says God is doing a new thing. It's news.

It's not a new action plan for humanity. It's news about Jesus, the Son of God. Son of God. What does that mean? What does Son of God mean? Does that mean Jesus is just another, you know, one of many heavenly beings?

A type of angel? Does it mean that Jesus is the Son of God? Like, we're all sons and daughters of God in the sense that we all, you know, possess this divine spark?

[10 : 32] No. To help us out, Mark moves us quickly to the Old Testament, to what Isaiah says about Jesus.

So, now we're moving from what Mark said in his introductory line to what the Old Testament says, pointing us to Jesus. So, what does this mean, the Son of God? It is explained here, I think.

Verses 2 and 3. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, Behold, I will 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 straight his paths. This is a mushing together of a few different Old Testament prophecies, but the basic gist is this.

Someday, this prophecy is saying, someday God will come to us, and one of the ways we know that God has come is because he'll send a messenger first to announce it. Now, we're gonna see shortly that is John the Baptist, but before we get to John, look at verse 3 of this Old Testament scripture.

[11 : 36] The voice of one crying out in the wilderness, and what is that voice saying? Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Stick into that.

The word Lord here, it's a special word. It's a special Old Testament word. It's the personal name of God. It's the personal name that God gave his people. And the Jews considered this word so holy and so sacred, they didn't write it.

They wouldn't write it down. Even to this day, I was looking up some Jewish websites to get some background in these passages, and they wouldn't say this word. It was abbreviated.

But here, Mark puts that name, Lord, right under the name Jesus. For hundreds of years, the Old Testament has been saying, God will come.

And Mark is saying, it's happened. It's Jesus. And let me add, you know, because I think lots of us live in churchy land, we forget how distinct this makes Christianity, don't we?

[12 : 43] That God has come to us. All the other religions say, we reach out to God. We strive. For the Buddhists, it's the eightfold path.

For Islam, it's the five pillars. You reach, you strive. Not in Christianity. Christianity says, God has come to you. Keep going.

We've heard Mark, in verse one, point us to Jesus in verse one. We've heard the voice of the Old Testament, pointing us to Jesus in verses two and three.

Now we get to hear from the predicted messenger, John the Baptist. And he's brilliant, isn't he? He was a wild man. He was a preacher. And he made his home, the wilderness.

And thousands and thousands of people would come to hear him preach. Not only that, he would baptize them in water. So what's going on here? What's the deal? Well, first question, why the wilderness?

[13 : 39] Because that doesn't seem to make much sense. I mean, surely it would be better if he'd set himself up in a community center or like the town square or a synagogue or a field right beside the town.

But no, he places, he situates his ministry in the wilderness. Why is that? Well, the wilderness is very important in the Old Testament. God would send his people into the wilderness.

Why is that? Because there was no food there. Because there was no water there. And that's why God would send them there. So they would be completely reliant on him. If you know anything

about the Old Testament, you know the wilderness is a place where big things happened, a place where God spoke, where the people entered into a covenant with God and became his people. Wilderness was a place of new beginnings. So that's why the location. But why the baptizing? That's so weird. It doesn't seem weird to us, but to these guys, that was pretty weird. The only people that would get baptized back in the days were Gentiles converting to Judaism.

But here, everyone's getting baptized, Jews and Gentiles. Seems like John was saying, those who think they belong already, wow, you actually need another crack at this.

[14:59] You actually need a whole other start. Now look at verse 7. John says this. After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandal I'm not worthy to stoop down to untie.

I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. John wants us to know that, he wants us to know a few things here. One of them is this.

It's not about him. It's not about John. He's not about making a name for himself, which is the great temptation for, you know, charismatic, sort of really personable, alpha type Christian ministers, right?

It's a great temptation. Who, because of sin in their hearts, become very personally ambitious. And the narrative of their lives becomes about them.

This is not John. It's pretty clear. It's not about him. After me comes one who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandal I'm not worthy to stoop down to untie.

[16:08] I've baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. So secondly, the baptism that he's doing, John is saying, this is not like this magic thing, you know? It's not magic what I'm doing, why I'm baptizing.

It's a symbol. It's a symbol, a very physical, tangible symbol that says you need to be clean. It's that symbol. But John says somebody's coming who's going to bring more than just a symbol.

He's going to bring more than just a right, R-I-T-E. He's going to do something supernatural. He's going to do something that doesn't just affect the outside.

He's going to do something in your heart. He's going to put the very life of God inside you, through the Holy Spirit. Okay. That's John the Baptist.

So where are we? We're getting there. We're getting through it, okay? Mark speaks. This is about Jesus. The Old Testament prophets speak. It's about Jesus coming. John speaks. He goes, I'm all about the Messiah.

[17:05] I'm all pointing to the Messiah. And then God speaks. This is 9 to 11. In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

It's interesting, hey? He's just out of nowhere. All of a sudden, Jesus is there. And when he came out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open. It's a very violent language, that. 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. So I've been talking about Jesus, talking, talking, talking, and all of a sudden, it's like out of side stage, Jesus just walks on and takes his place.

And there are two questions. Why did Jesus get baptized? And what does God mean by what he said? First, why does Jesus get baptized? I think it's a good question to ask.

Because it's not like he needs to repent of anything. Jesus doesn't need to be washed clean from something. So why did he get baptized? Jesus was baptized because he is identifying himself with the people he has come to save.

[18:19] It's a signal that he is going to get very involved in the solution to our problem. In baptism, Jesus is putting himself in our place.

And, of course, not for the last time. And now God speaks directly and audibly to Jesus. And we get to overhear it.

You are my beloved Son. Son, with you I am well pleased. You are my beloved Son. With you I am well pleased. I just find that wonderful and moving.

The Father loves the Son. It's not something we think about very often, I don't think. Is it? Because we tend to think about God's love for us.

God's love for our church. All the stuff God's doing for us people. But here, we get this little insight into the Godhead, the Trinity.

[19:23] The Father really, really loves the Son. And he is pleased with the Son and what the Son is doing.

The Father loves the Son. And saying this, you know, there's actually even more to it. Because God references, helpfully for us, very helpfully for us, three Old Testament stories, prophecies, sort of mashed together in that little phrase there.

Three stories. Three songs. Three, I'll just tell them to you. Psalm 2 he references. He references Genesis 22 and he references Isaiah 42. Psalm 2 is all about this Messiah King.

You should read it afterwards. It's all about a Messiah King who you need to make peace with, otherwise you'll be in trouble. Genesis 22 is the story of a son who would be sacrificed for another. In Isaiah 42, it's this section in Isaiah called the Servant Songs.

And in the beginning of Isaiah 42, it talks about a servant king who would suffer for his people. So these words that God says are very tender, but they're rich in helping us understand who Jesus is. [20 : 38] So helpful for us. Now, after everyone has pointed us to Jesus, Mark in verse 1, the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, God himself speaking audibly.

You'd think after all of that, it's all great stuff it says about Jesus. You'd think there would be some kind of party. You know, the Messiah King has come to us to save us.

That's the word. You'd think it'd be time to celebrate. You'd think, Mark, after that would put like a really great story of a really awesome healing. Kind of a pick-me-up, kind of like, yeah, let's finish this prologue with something peppy.

You know, get people excited. And what does he do? The very next thing, verse 12 and 13. The Spirit immediately drove him, Jesus, into the wilderness.

And he was in the wilderness 40 days being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals. And the angels were ministering to him. The word drove there is very strong.

[21 : 52] It's the same word in the New Testament they use when describing exercising a demon. Drive the demon out. The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness.

So what's happening here? After all of these great things they say about Jesus, the next thing that happens is Jesus is in a battle. A battle with evil. So the prologue doesn't just tell us that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior King.

It also lets us know that Jesus will face enormous hostility in his earthly ministry. It's one of the big messages of the prologue.

That Jesus is entering a battle for us. He didn't come just to die on the cross to save us from our sins and substitutionary atonement.

As central as that is, Jesus came here to destroy the power of Satan. And he takes the fight straight to Satan.

[22 : 54] Right. Right. How do you summarize all this? Mark's gospel is unusual.

It's unusual. I've said that already. He offers no editorial input into the stories. He doesn't say what he thinks they mean, except for that one verse right at the start.

He doesn't explain why things are happening. He just presents the words and the events of Jesus and we do the hard work of interpreting it. So I'm sort of weary to make lots of application here. But I will say this.

Mark 1 to 13. This is who Jesus is. This is who he is. Messiah. King. Who would suffer for us. Who would enter the battle for us. If this is true about Jesus, folks, we cannot fool around with him. We don't fool around with him.

[23 : 54] We don't mess with him. We need to accept the truth that he's the most important reality in the universe. We need to make him the center of our lives.

Because if this is true, he deserves our allegiance. He deserves our trust. And we must be vigilant in continuing to orient our life around him.

It's the prologue of Mark 1. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.