

01. Mark 1:1-8

“The Messenger of God”

(8-30-26)

Today we’re going to begin a new study on Sunday mornings—the Gospel of Mark.

The Greek word translated ‘gospel’ literally means ‘*good news*’.

The 4 gospels are the good news about the most significant events in all of human history—the life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Each of the four gospels has its own unique theme that focuses on a particular characteristic of Jesus’ life and ministry and together they present—Jesus Christ in ‘quadraphonic.’

- The theme of Matthew’s gospel is Jesus, *the Messiah and King of Israel*.
- The theme of Mark’s gospel is to present Jesus as *the Suffering Servant*.
- Luke’s gospel focuses on the humanity of Christ the theme of which is to present Jesus as *the Son of Man*.
- And John wants to focus on the divinity of Christ, so the theme of John’s gospel is Jesus *the Son of God*.

Most scholars agree that the second gospel was written by John Mark.

John Mark (or simply *Mark*) was the son of Mary of Jerusalem, who owned a house there which the Christians used as a meeting place.

Mark was led to the Lord through the ministry of Peter (1Peter 5:13) as a boy—and in fact, was only about 12 years old when Jesus was crucified.

So where did he get the information he included in his gospel?

Many believe he got the information for his gospel from Peter.

Mark was a nephew of Barnabas, who accompanied his uncle and Paul on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:5).

However, as a young man the rigors of missionary life didn't suit him and so he deserted them when they got to Perga (southwestern Turkey) and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).

A couple of years later, when Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them on their second missionary journey—Paul flat out refused.

This caused a rift between Paul and Barnabas which led them to split from one another and go their separate ways (Acts 15:38–40).

But Mark eventually grew both physically and spiritually, and his earlier lack of maturity was replaced by a genuine commitment to the Lord—in fact, in time he even proved himself to be a valuable asset to Paul and to his ministry in the work of God.

So much so that when Paul was in prison in Rome, he wrote to Timothy and told him to, “*Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.*” (2 Tim. 4:11)

Scholars believe that Mark directed his gospel primarily to the Romans who were notoriously impatient people which caused Mark to keep his gospel brief and fast moving.

And therefore, the emphasis of Mark's gospel is on *activity*—the activities of the ministry of Jesus and how He rapidly moved from place to place meeting the physical and spiritual needs of all kinds of people—and not an insurrectionist. (Explain)

In fact, one of Mark's favorite words is “**immediately**”—a word he uses forty-one times in his gospel.

Mark doesn't record many of Jesus' sermons because his emphasis is not on what Jesus said—but on what He did.

He presents Jesus as God's Servant, sent to minister to hurting and lost people—ultimately by dying for their sins so that they might be saved from hell and receive the gift of eternal life.

Mark gives us no account of our Jesus' birth, nor does he record His genealogy—both of which are unnecessary with regard to a servant.

While Mark handles largely the same events as Matthew and Luke (all 3 are called *synoptic* gospels meaning ‘similar’)—he does add a few interesting and colorful details that we will look at as we move through his gospel presentation.

Mark's gospel, like any other historical story, has a beginning—and so he starts out his gospel:

Mark 1:1–3 (NKJV)

¹ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² As it is written in the Prophets: “*Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.*” ³ “*The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’*”

Long before John was born on the earth, his coming was foretold by the OT prophets—as God said through the prophet Malachi:

Malachi 3:1 (NKJV)

¹ "Behold, I send My messenger [herald], and he will prepare the way before Me...

You see it was prophesied in the Old Testament that before Messiah, the King, would make His appearance in Israel—He would first be preceded by a messenger or herald who would officially announce His coming.

It was customary in those days that whenever a king was to visit an area of his kingdom—they would send a herald out several weeks or even months in advance to announce the king's coming.

The herald would tell the people—*“The king is coming—fix your broken fences, clean up your yards, fill in the potholes in your roads—make ready for the king’s coming!”*

And so, as Mark opens his gospel, he quotes the prophet Malachi, who records how God told him that His Messiah (and King) would have a ‘herald’ who would precede Him—John the Baptist was that herald.

Only John didn’t tell people to clean up their yards and houses in preparation for the coming of the King—he told them to clean up their hearts and lives through repentance in preparation to receive the King when He comes!

What do we know about John from Scripture?

John 1:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. ⁷ This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.

Matthew 3:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

So, John was sent from God with a message, a message from God—which means that John was a *prophet* (someone who speaks on behalf of God).

In fact, Jesus Himself said of John that he was the *greatest* prophet that ever lived. (Matt. 11:11; Luke 7:28)

We read in Matthew 3:1 that John came preaching—“*In those days...*”

Those were dark days for the world morally and spiritually.

One historian commented on this—

“At that time the pagan world had lowered itself so deep into moral decay and spiritual darkness—that even the pagans themselves were crying out against it.”

But these were not only dark days for the pagan world—they were also dark days spiritually for the Jewish people.

You see for four hundred years God had been silent—for four hundred years there had been no prophet in Israel saying, “*Thus says the Lord...*”

After Malachi had finished his prophetic ministry, heaven went silent—GOD went “*off the air*” you might say—and because there was no prophetic word from God during this time, this period is called “*the four hundred silent years.*”

This silence was so deafening to the Jewish people that it caused many to believe that God had forsaken them altogether—their hearts were broken and their hopes for a coming Messiah and Kingdom were dashed.

And so, month after month, year after year, and century after century God was silent—and then all of a sudden, the silence was broken and God began to speak once again!

And He did it thru a most unlikely character—a man living out in the wilderness, wearing a modified ‘Tarzan’ outfit and living on locusts and wild honey!

His name was John, the son of a priest named Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth, whose birth was prophesied to them by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:15-17).

And again, Jesus would go on to say that John was the greatest prophet who would ever live.

He would be great not for the miracles he did (he did none)—but for the message he spoke!

You see, John had the privilege of closing out the O.T. period (Luke 16:16) and ushering in the N.T. period—by introducing the “Messenger” of the New Covenant—Jesus the Messiah! (Mal.3:1)

Who was this man and why was he important to the ministry of Jesus?

I. He was a Voice Crying

Matthew 3:3 (NKJV)

³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.' "*

Why was John crying out?—Because in the wilderness people don’t hear so well—just like today!

We are living today in a spiritual and moral wilderness—a time in our nation’s history where everyone is doing whatever seems right in their own eyes.

It’s a time when people are calling good evil and evil good (which always precedes judgment).

And because people are so jaded by sin and so dull of hearing to the Word of God—speaking in soft gentle tones isn't going to get their attention!

I'm not suggesting we have to literally shout God's Word at the people of this world—but we definitely need to proclaim it faithfully, unashamedly and definitively!

This is not a time for '*wishy-washy*' pastors to preach weak messages from watered down pulpits as they try to '*tip-toe*' around sin so as not to offend or make people uncomfortable—we need John the Baptists today!

Look, we are living in the dark—we were born into it, and it was born in us.

We were children of darkness at one time, but when we received the gospel, we became children of light.

At that point, the darkness inside us was replaced with the light of God's presence (the Holy Spirit moved in) and His truth—but we still find ourselves living in the moral and spiritual darkness of this world which is all around us.

We are living at the close of an age that is dominated by the prince and powers of darkness—a world where men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

The good news is, the night is far spent, the day of Christ's return is at hand—and yet it's always blackest before the dawn!

The darkness has never been more pervasive and persuasive in my lifetime than it is today in our nation.

But not only do we live in the dark—as Christians we've gotten used to the dark!

We have all had the experience of walking into a very dark room where all we could see was blackness—but after a few seconds our eyes adjusted, and we got used to the dark.

This has happened to many Christians spiritually and morally.

The old Baptist preacher Vance Havner said—

“We are all experiencing a slow, subtle and sinister brainwashing process that is gradually desensitizing us to the darkness.

Little by little sin is being made to look less and less sinful until the light that is in us is darkness, and as Jesus said, “If the light that is in you is darkness how great is that darkness.”

The result is that we, as the Church of Jesus Christ, no longer hate evil—we don't abhor it as we once did—in other words, *we've gotten used to the dark!*

When Scripture says that John was a voice **crying out** in the wilderness—it implies a sense of *urgency* and *concern* for the lost.

Listen to me, John had a *crying voice*—because he had a caring heart!

If you really love someone who is in grave danger, you'll cry, you'll shout—you'll do whatever you have to do to warn them.

Jesus is coming back soon, this is no time to be timid, it's no time to be whispering.

It's a time to be shouting from the housetops and pleading with people to be saved from the wrath (judgment) that is coming upon this wicked, Christ-rejecting world!

So, first of all John was **a voice crying**.

II. He was a Finger Pointing

John 1:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "**Behold!** [no doubt pointing to Jesus] **The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**"

After John, as *a voice crying*, got their attention he became ‘a finger pointing.’

John had a heart of humility—he wasn’t trying to draw attention to himself.

John wasn’t in it for the glory, he found his joy and fulfillment in simply being a finger pointing—pointing others to Jesus and saying, “*He must increase but I must decrease.*” (John 3:30)

Too many so-called ministers of Jesus Christ, while they point “*one* finger at Jesus”, are in reality pointing *three fingers* back at themselves.

In other words, they must increase and so Jesus is decreased—until it’s not the *Savior* that people are drawn to but the celebrity on stage wearing the \$2500.00 Armani suit, \$800 designer shoes and the diamond pinky ring.

There are too many ‘celebrities’ in the Church today (including TV evangelists and ‘hipster’ pastors)—people who are looking to make a name for themselves and draw attention to themselves rather than to glorify God.

But this was not the testimony of John the Baptist—he was a humble man, even though huge crowds were coming to see him.

So much so that when Jesus showed up, he was happy to point the finger at Jesus and direct everyone to Him while he faded into the background allowing Jesus to take center stage.

If you want to be great in the Kingdom of God, then you need to humble yourself and become a servant to all, lifting up Jesus and not yourself.

So, first of all, John was **a voice crying**; second, he was **a finger pointing**—and finally:

III. He was a Lamp Burning

John 5:35 (NKJV)

³⁵ He was the **burning and shining lamp**, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.

Jesus said that John was “**a burning and shining lamp**”—that speaks of John’s life being a witness—a life that was burning brightly for God!

Jesus said this about those who belong to Him—

Matthew 5:14-16 (NLT)

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

John didn’t hide his faith, he lived openly and publicly—and everyone knew where he stood!

You realize that you can’t be a **voice crying** and a **finger pointing**—if you’re not a **lamp burning**! (Explain)

Let me close by saying this, John was effective in his ministry because of everything we just said—but also for two other reasons—

1. He was focused

John was the kind of man who knew what he was supposed to do with his life—and he didn't let anything distract him from it.

Mark 1:4-6 (NLT)

⁴ This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had turned to God to receive forgiveness for their sins. ⁵ All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. ⁶ His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.

John stayed separate from the world when he could have been supported by the wealthiest people in Jerusalem, conducted his ministry in the biggest and most luxurious houses, and been supplied with the best food and clothing that money (other people's money) could buy.

John could have been a true celebrity (if he allowed others to treat him that way) in that he was the first prophet in 400 years.

But John stayed separate from the world to reach the world—this is a fundamental principle in reaching the lost and one of the main reasons John was so effective in his ministry.

The reason more of us aren't as effective as John or others who have gone before us is because—we let so much distract us from our mission. (Explain)

Say what you will about John—he was focused!

2. He was Spirit-filled

Luke 1:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. (Explain)

The idea is that of being *controlled* by the Holy Spirit.

In Ephesians 5:18 Paul admonishes Christians not to be filled with wine but to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We are not to allow ourselves to be under the influence of alcohol (or any other substance)—but only to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

How? Through surrender and obedience.

As John was called to herald Jesus' First Coming—we have been chosen to herald (announce, proclaim) His Second Coming.

And as such we need to be—*a voice crying—a finger pointing* and—*a lamp burning!*

May God give us grace to be John the Baptists in these last days!