

Well, good morning; how are we? Good, good! I want to give a quick shout-out to my people joining us in our online community! I'm so glad you are a part of the Foothills Family and that you're with us in worship and studying God's Word from wherever and whenever you're at. Well, if I haven't been able to meet you yet, my name is Doug; I'm one of the Pastors here, and I would love to connect with you on the patio after we worship together. So, be sure to come and say hi.

We're starting a new series today where we will work our way through the Gospel according to Mark. So if you've got your Bibles, which I hope you do, if you could open up with me to Mark, that's where we'll be.

It's important we get our bearings right when we unpack Scripture. So, let's take a moment to understand the context that we find ourselves in. This writing, along with the three other "gospels" differs than the other types of text that we see in the New Testament, many of which are "epistles" or "letters" that were written to the earliest Christians and their congregations. This writing in particular was written about 66 A.D. making it the earliest writing of the four gospels. It is not merely a historical record of what occurred, but instead, it is the continuation of the story of God's plan of redeeming and reconciling humanity to Himself through the story of salvation in Jesus.

You may be aware that the word "gospel" can be literally understood as "good news," and it is, but there is a bit more to its usage that I believe motivates the author to use the introduction that he does, in the opening verse he writes, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." There are two parts of this that we need to unpack before we get too far into the text. First is the word "gospel." This was a common word used in Greek literature and throughout the Old Testament and was used

in a couple different ways. First, most commonly it was used to report victory in the battlefield to the people. It was also used in the Greco-Roman world. There is record of the birth of Caesar Augustus about a decade before the birth of Jesus using the same word. Being that they viewed Augustus as a god, they declared to the people that his birth was "good news for the world." So when Mark uses the word gospel here he's declaring to the people, who would have understood this well, that victory is found in the Son of God, that is Jesus.

But, in this opening verse there's still even more. Mark starts with, "the beginning." We also see this later in the writing of John, it's famously the opening of Genesis, and elsewhere. There is no question that when Mark chose to start his writing this way he was using it to point back, he was using it as a reminder of God's activity in history: in the beginning God created the world; so, too, in this new season, this new time, the age of the gospel is evidenced when the Son of God is born as a human being in Jesus Christ. This is a new beginning.

And the last thing I want to make sure we see before we move on is in the name that Mark points to in his opening verse. He writes, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He uses Jesus' name from the outset. Which, in itself carries more weight than simply pointing to who we're talking about. Jesus is a variant of the name "Yehoshua" which means "God is salvation." Mark writes, "the beginning of the gospel of the one who is God's salvation, the anointed one, that is the word 'Christ', who is the Son of God." This one short verse was packed with significance that would have been very clear and evident to the readers of the time. It is the foundation of what Mark is going to be sharing over the next many pages.

So, friends, there is no mystery here for people to try to piece together what this writing is getting at. It's not merely a record of dates or places without purpose or significance, and it's not just some interesting thoughts about life. No! From the very first verse Mark declares that we're in a new time and there is victory in the person of Jesus, the Christ, the salvation of God, who is the Son of God!

Friends, it's an old plan, in a new time, and an everlasting victory.

Now Mark was writing to an audience made up of Roman Gentiles, not Jews. So, he points to the Prophet Isaiah and catches their attention by using a phrase that would have carried a weight of authority in the Greco-Roman world, "As it is written..." join me in verse 2, "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, <sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"

Here Mark is introducing us to John the Baptizer, but it's important to note that he's doing that not just as an introduction but he's communicating that this is a well-thought out, intentional plan. Mark is linking the life and ministry of Jesus to the Old Testament. This is not an afterthought of God. God is not merely making things up as He goes. No, it is clear that Jesus stands in continuity with all that God has done from the earliest pages of Genesis, God's work in the history of Israel, and that He is the fulfiller of all of the law and prophets.

Friends, it's imperative that we do not lose sight of the reality of the situation the world has found itself in. I absolutely love that Mark adds this quote from the Old Testament because as one theologian said, "The gospel is understandable only as the completion of something that God began in the history of Israel."

People love talking about how kind Jesus is. How gracious Jesus is. How wonderful it is that He give us salvation. I love all that too, but the significance of all these realities is only illuminated by the contrast of the reality of the situation that the world has found itself in. In light of the history of Israel, the history of the depravity of world, God has prepared a way, a path through Jesus that reconciles and restores the relationship between a people, incapable of connecting to God on their own. This

way is through the life, death, and resurrection of the salvation of God, Jesus.

Friends, the way of God is ultimately the way of Jesus to the cross.

Let's pick it up in verse 4. **4** John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. **6** Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. **7** And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. **8** I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Mark jumps right into who the messenger is going to be by introducing us to John the Baptizer. John, we learn in other writings, is the cousin of Jesus born to Elizabeth in her old age. It's John who prepared the way for Jesus' ministry. John was traveling around urging people to repent and seek forgiveness and then symbolically purifying them through baptism.

For the sake of better understanding, it's important that we see the connection that John is making to God's covenant at Sinai where the people of God, Israel, were to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6)." To signify their acceptance of this covenant the people of Israel were to purify themselves through the washing of themselves and their clothes. The washing symbolized the moral and spiritual transformation that was necessary for them to enter into a covenant relationship with God.

But, here's what I really want us to grab hold of in verse 4, "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." There was an urgency to John's proclamation to repent and be baptized. For the last several thousand

years God had been dropping hints, as Pastor Brian talked about last week, about the coming of the Messiah, the Savior. There were calls for the people to repent and to be holy as God is holy. John's urgency is motivated by the reality that the Savior has been born which means God's judgement is imminent.

Friends, John's message is to repent because God's judgement is imminent.

It is so incredibly important for you and I to understand repentance. This is not an isolated call by John here at the start of this writing. Repentance is a pervasive theme present throughout the New Testament, as well as being a reoccurring theme throughout the Old Testament. In American Christianity we tend to pick and choose the aspects of God that we're comfortable with. Many in America, even in the church see God as moral therapeutic deity. That is, He's where we get the idea that stealing is bad and that God is more of a counselor that I tell my problems to than the Holy Righteous Judge that He is. Now, just as we can't isolate God being just a nice guy with a hipster beard, we can't isolate Him as only a judge either. But in the context of what we're hearing about John and as we see explicitly throughout the Scriptures, humanity must be made aware that He is a holy and righteous Judge.

I would argue that along with loving people and obeying the teachings of God, repentance is a vital, critical, aspect of the Christian life.

So this reality forces the question, "what is repentance?" Repentance lays claim to the totality of one's life, and not just for the worst of sinners, and not just for the Gentiles, but even for those righteous religious Jews.

It is a reform of your heart. A Reform of your way of life. It literally means to "change one's mind or to alter one's understanding." It's a rational decision and a willful act to turn from living your life one way and beginning to live it in another way.

Repentance is a rational decision and willful act to change the way that you are living.

The first-century historian Josephus wrote about John's call to repentance saying, "John exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice towards their fellows and piety towards God.

So, I cannot fail in my responsibilities as a pastor by not asking the hard questions. So, my question to you, the same question I have to ask myself, "what do you need to repent from?"

What are things in your life that you need to reform? How you spend your money? How you spend your time? How you treat others? Your actions as a husband or wife? Your parenting?

How do you need to change your mind, or change your understanding in a rational and willful act that seeks forgiveness from God and longs to live righteously, godly in whatever area you need to repent.

Jesus modeled this baptism for us by declaring His choice to live a purified, holy life as we continue reading in verse 9, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. **11** And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

We could spend a few weeks unpacking this entire scene. But suffice it to say for our time today that this passage reiterates Mark's opening statement about who Jesus is. The victorious One who we then see go into the desert where He is tempted to, not please the Father. But, instead, He is not swayed by the Devil and goes off to begin His ministry which we pick up in verse 15 with Jesus proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Where John was proclaiming repentance in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah, the Messiah was now here and He is proclaiming, turn! Make a rational change from ungodliness, to godliness, alter your understanding of yourself and the world and believe in the victory that is God's!

Church, Jesus is in the business of transformation.

When Jesus was born He transformed everything. It was the same message, repent and believe! But Jesus transformed what that looked like. We see it right away in the next few passages. It was a new era, a new teaching, and a new authority.

As Jesus was beginning His ministry, He was passing by the Sea of Galilee and encounters two brothers, Simon and Andrew. They were at work fishing as normal. They had a rough night, they hadn't caught anything. Jesus asked if He could use their boat as a podium of sorts so He could teach a crowd of people. When He had finished He told the brothers to cast out their nets, seemingly annoyed after a long night they threw their nets and got a massive catch. They immediately knew something was different about this guy. His teaching was new and He taught with an authority not seen before, let alone He performed some sort of miracle by know where the fish would be.

And so as we see in verse 17 Jesus says to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men. **18** And immediately they left their nets and followed him."

Jesus was doing something new. He called them to a new life. Now, the idea of following a rabbi wasn't new. But, what Jesus was going to teach them, what He was going to show them, was all new. He called them to put off the old way of doing life and to learn His way.

Now the reality is that these men could have said no. They could have thought, let me wait and see what ends up of this guy. But instead, they changed directions. They turned. They left behind their old way of doing life and embraced a new life. A life with Jesus. They didn't have all the answers, they actually had very little to none. They didn't know all that it would entail. But, they embraced a new life, really, they embraced Jesus and Jesus' mission.

Friends, Jesus is in the business of transformation.

The reality is that from the outset, all the way back in Genesis we have been separated from God. Unable to have a relationship with Him because of our brokenness. Because of our sin. People were called by God to live holy lives. Righteous lives. But, they couldn't. They couldn't measure up to God's standard. The result being that each person would have to be punished for their sin. The whole lie that if I do more good than bad, I'll be alright, doesn't work. No one can do enough good.

Jesus showed up and said, repent. Change your understanding of life. Of this world. Change your understanding of God. Believe in Me. The victorious Savior who will not only transform your life now, but will transform your eternity! Instead of eternal damnation in hell separated from the perfect and Holy God I will ensure that you will be in His presence...for eternity!

So friends, Mark is not writing a record of events or letter to some friends. Mark is revealing the continuation of God's redemptive, restorative plan to bring you and I into an incredible and transformative relationship with Him. And Mark says, it's a new time. We've been in chains. But now, there's victory! And that victory is through the Son of God, Jesus, whom the Father is well pleased with! And Jesus says, yes! Repent! Turn from those sins in your life that are preventing you from choosing Me in every area of your life and follow Me! Because I will transform everything about your present and your future!



All that's left than, is for you to make a decision. And I need you to hear me. This decision is for each and everyone of you. It doesn't matter if you've been tracking with Jesus for decades. Look at the Israelites. Look at the disciples. Repentance is a daily posture. Will you choose to make a rational decision about the sin in your life? Will you choose to turn and seek forgiveness from the Father. And will you choose to follow Jesus more than you did yesterday? Choose to follow Him in these areas that you need to repent?

Maybe you've been doing that. So, now, maybe the decision you need to make is to not just repent and to follow, but specifically, may you need to choose not to just follow Jesus, but follow His mission.

Are you serving? Are you tithing? Are you discipling someone? Are you learning and growing? As the Pastor of Adult and Student Ministry I can't emphasize enough the importance of learning and growing. We're kicking off some incredible classes in the next few weeks on Sunday mornings to help you. A Parenting class, Jewish class, Church History class, a class on the armor of God, a women's book club.

Maybe the decision you need to make today is got on board with Jesus' mission and taking these classes can help you do that.

For some of you this is all new. And you're like, I had no idea. Or, what I thought about Jesus was not this. Maybe for you the decision is for your pull a Simon and Andrew. Leave the world behind. Turn to Jesus as your Leader, your Lord, Your savior, the forgiver of all your sins and commit to following Him.

If you are making a serious decision today we want to know. You can fill out the connect card, you can tell your small group leader, or a dear friend who knows Jesus. The point is, we are designed to do this together. So share what decision your making.