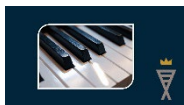




A Voice of Anticipation

Then Christ Came #2 | Dec 10, 2023 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell



Opening

Do you know which two musical notes are the most important?

[Walk over and play two notes]



I learned this a long time ago...I believe from Victor Borge (watching a performance with my dad).¹ These two notes (play again) are absolutely essential.

Why? Is it their harmonic frequency? Is it their statistically significant presence in musical works? No...the reason they're important is that if those two notes hadn't been written, we wouldn't have this:



[Thank you, Thank you]

Why does that musical joke work? The answer is going to be important in our sermon today. We'll come back to it in just a minute.



Today we're in our second week of this Advent sermon series, "Then Christ Came." In this series we are looking at the way the gospel writers introduce us to Jesus. Instead of presenting Jesus' arrival with Mary, Joseph, and the manger, the gospel writers give us our *first glimpse* of Jesus in *other* ways. They might *include* the birth narrative, but their *introduction* starts elsewhere. They tell us some information, and *then...Christ came*.

Last week we had the pleasure of meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew's introduction was wrapped up in a carefully constructed genealogy, helping us to have **confidence** in the **legitimacy** of Jesus! After Mathew finishes, we can have no doubts that Jesus is the Messiah!

¹ The source material may not be correct...but I couldn't find the original.

Today, we move on to the next gospel – Mark. And in Mark, I’m excited to show you how he shapes the introduction. Are you ready to meet Jesus in this gospel?

Let’s turn to Mark 1:1-8.



Meeting Jesus in Mark

Mark’s gospel is generally understood to be the first Gospel account written. His is the most concise, and his writing flows with an intense pacing. Mark is in the moment, and he wants us to see action. His story makes quick transitions (“suddenly,” “at once,” “immediately”), and the action emphasizes what one of my college professors labeled “power encounters” where Jesus demonstrates authority over enemies, both physical and spiritual.

This is our writer, and this is how he chooses to begin his gospel:

“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. 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. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair 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 whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”” (Mark 1:1–8, ESV)

If we expected Mark’s intro to start with a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, Mark didn’t get the assignment! Instead, he focuses on a different person – a grown man wrapped in camel duds and living a sustainable life in the wilderness!

Yet the reason Mark focuses on John the Baptist is important. It ties back to our opening musical illustration.



Mark’s Anticipation

Why was the musical joke hilarious (or mildly amusing)? It’s all about *anticipation* and *resolution*! The notes set up us and prepare us for something. When all signs point to one obvious conclusion, we **anticipate** the answer and we’re ready for it to be **resolved**.

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- You see anticipation in the weather...
 - o The forecast calls for high intensity storms.
 - o The radar shows a build-up of storms along the front line.
 - o You hover in *anticipation* waiting for the tornado sirens to kick on...so you can make it downstairs to safety, or you grab your phone to film a dramatic video.
- You see anticipation in entertainment...
 - o The movie theater lights go dim.
 - o The first of 19 trailers plays on the big screen.
 - o You wait in anticipation for the fanfare to play...so you can watch the big movie you've been waiting to see.
- You see anticipation in sports...
 - o The Chiefs are tied with :06 seconds to go.
 - o Mahomes has the ball, and its first and goal.
 - o You lean in, staring in anticipation for a pass to Kelce...so you can immediately cut to a shot of Taylor Swift in the box seats celebrating.

In a similar way, Mark starts off with words of *anticipation* that prepare his readers for a *resolution*. He builds **anticipation** in two stages.

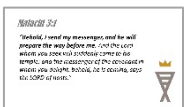


Isaiah, the Prophet

The first stage of anticipation comes from a quote in verses 2-3.

“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,’ ”” (Mark 1:2–3, ESV)

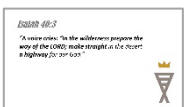
Mark attributes this quote to Isaiah the prophet, but if he was in school, he'd totally get a few red marks on his paper for improper citations! The “quote” he shares is a surprising mashup of two or three different verses.



Malachi 3:1

““Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.”

Note: Malachi itself borrows wording from the opening of Exodus 23:20 “Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.”



Isaiah 40:3

“A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

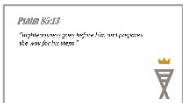
We'll cut Mark some slack for his sloppy quotes. Just like Matthew using Hebrew methods of counting last week, Mark uses Jewish methods of quoting. He wasn't ignorant; he knew the source of those prophecies, but he follows the Jewish practice of quoting the *most prominent* source when sharing their words (aka highlighting Isaiah, not Malachi).²



Mark wants us to focus not on the exact wording but on the *anticipation* that the wording brings. What is the focus of these prophecies? They talk about:

- A **messenger**. He will be a voice crying out a word from God. Like all good messengers in Scripture – whether prophets or angels – this messenger is responsible for receiving and declaring a word from the Lord. His words carry the weight of divine authority.
- **Preparation**. The prophecies use the verb “prepare,” which is a present act with a future focus. To prepare is to act in the now, but to act for the then! And what is being prepared?...
- A **straight way**. The road or highway of the king is to be made straight, honoring Him and clearing the way for His priorities.
 - o Think of all the interstates you've driven through somewhat hilly country. What do they do to the roads? They cut through and flatten the hills, they raise up the valleys. They make the road straight and clear, without obstacles or hindrances.

And how does one prepare a straight, clear way for God? The prophecies don't spell that out, but we see an answer in Psalms (allowing Scripture to answer our question):



“Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.”
(Psalm 85:13, NIV)

Righteousness – obedient actions that reflect God's heart and character – prepare the path for Him.

So, the prophecies help us anticipate the arrival of *someone* whose actions of righteousness will help pave the way for God's plans! We read these prophecies from Isaiah and Malachi, and we anticipate the messenger's arrival...whoever it could be.

Thankfully, Mark doesn't leave us waiting long.

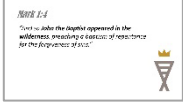


John, the Baptist

Identifying the Voice

“The voice” in the wilderness is quickly identified in Mark's gospel with a simple statement:

² [New Living Translation Study Bible](#) (Mk 1:2–3). (2008). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.



*“And so John the Baptist appeared **in the wilderness**, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mark 1:4, NIV)*

John! John is the voice!

Note: This is a different John than the author of the Gospel and Letters of John (of John 3:16 fame). That guy was a follower and friend of Jesus. This John is different.

This John is a man born in miraculous circumstances, and from the start he has been chosen by God for *this* purpose. An angel foretells his birth, and I want you to connect the dots with what the angel says:



*“But the angel said to [John’s Dad]: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. **And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.**””*
(Luke 1:13–17, NIV)

The angel shares that God has set aside this child for a special purpose, and in doing so the angel quotes a different prophecy from Malachi. The last sentence of this passage is a citation from Malachi 4:15...the same book where we just quoted. It was literally the last piece of the Old Testament – the final thing God said before everything went silent.

God had promised a Messiah who would come and make everything right. And people were ready!!! But God says, before the Messiah arrives, he would send a messenger, a voice, a person who would arrive and get people ready for the Messiah’s arrival.

They’ve been waiting for him...



That promise was made about 400 years before the events of Mark 1. In the subsequent years, there had been a growing anticipation of the Messiah’s arrival.

Anticipation of the Messiah had a lot of connections to the Jewish hope of political independence. They hoped for a Messiah who would restore their kingdom of Israel and give them freedom from foreign occupiers. They wanted the Messiah, and so they eagerly hoped for the arrival of the “Voice in the Wilderness” and the “Elijah to come” that Malachi mentioned.

When John arrives on the scene, he is that person. Scripture makes the connection several times – in the angel’s message, and in Jesus’ own words in Matthew 11:7-15 and 17:10-13. John’s arrival is amazing and exciting. They’ve been waiting for him!

John's ministry strikes a nerve in the Jewish population, and he draws large crowds with his challenging words and spiritual leadership.

However...

He's waiting for someone else...

... John has been waiting for someone else! He knows that he is not the main attraction. He has been actively preparing the way for God, encouraging righteousness in God's people. He has been actively preaching repentance (turning away from sin) and baptizing people as an outward display of that change. He has been preparing them for righteousness. Yet as he preaches and immerses people, he makes this statement:

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. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:7-8, ESV)

The people were waiting for John, but John was waiting for someone else...someone vastly more important!!! As important as John was, he was nothing compared to the coming Messiah.

The details of baptism show why: John used only water in a symbolic immersion; the Messiah would use the Spirit of God Himself to effect a change! It's what makes Christian baptism/immersion so powerful

"Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38, NIV)

While repentance is a good action, it pales in comparison to the presence of God! The arrival of God's spirit is what has power, and it is what John awaits as he ministers.

How Mark Views Jesus

Anticipation!!!!

As Mark opens his Gospel, then, he hits us with this double dose of anticipation.

1. The prophets point to John's arrival.
2. John the Baptist points to the Messiah's arrival.

Mark wants to share that anticipation and build up our excitement about Jesus' arrival. He wants us to look intently for the coming Messiah.

It's like the build-up we have to Christmas each year. We add layer and layer of anticipation – the music, the lights, the decorations, the presents, the gatherings. It grows in a crescendo until we finally arrive on December 25.

And in Mark's gospel, the build-up grows. He helps us have anticipation...

Anticipation Resolved!!!!



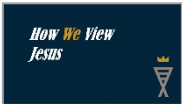
And then, Christ came.

*“At that time **Jesus came** from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.””*

(Mark 1:9–11, NIV)

In dramatic fashion, we have the Messiah's arrival and inauguration! Jesus appears, and God makes his identity apparent as he showcases Jesus' connection to the Godhead. He has access and relationship that no one else could comprehend! The power of God's Spirit rested upon him, and everything John the Baptist proclaimed was now here...in this man...at the intersection between a local river and the throne of Heaven.

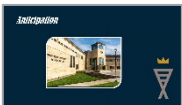
Mark will continue to show Jesus as the Christ as he announces the Kingdom of God, restores people, and makes His way to the cross to die as a ransom for sinners. But there is no more anticipation needed once Jesus arrives. He is anticipation **resolved!**



How We View Jesus

Anticipation!!!!

As we read Mark's gospel, we have a chance to participate in the anticipation of Jesus' arrival. We benefit from sharing in it because anticipation makes the resolution more satisfying.



This past month, our family had been waiting and waiting as our son, Jacob, put in his application to Law School. He has been attending Washburn University with this goal in mind ever since high school, and his path forward to become a lawyer hinged on this application. He had taken the required classes; he had taken the LSAT test; he had letters of recommendation; he had written essays...and then he submitted it last month.

There was no definite timeline for a response. Instead, he just had to wait. And wait. And wait...and we had to wait with him! “Will today be the day we hear?” The anticipation was almost unbearable. He had good grades; he SHOULD make it. But when? And if not, what then?

Well, on Tuesday he got a phone call from Admissions while he was working out at the gym. He made it! (Yay!)

Of course, he wanted to shout with excitement! He called Deb first – because mom is better at celebrating with emotion. Then he called me. He was so excited and he said he just wanted to go tell all his friends. “Then go!” I said. “Forget the workout! Go find your friends and let them know the good news!”

That moment was sweeter because of the period of waiting and uncertainty. It was better because of anticipation.

Anticipation resolved is a great feeling! 😊

Anticipation Resolved!!!

As Christians, we find great satisfaction in knowing that the anticipation of God’s plan finds resolution in Jesus. We are in a great position, knowing that the things God was doing in regard to salvation have now been accomplished.

“This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ’s suffering and his great glory afterward. They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.”

(1 Peter 1:10–12, NLT)

Church, never take it for granted that you know God’s plan of salvation, that you know the answers! It is a huge blessing to live on this side of the cross, to know without a doubt that Jesus is the plan!

But don’t take it for granted that **you know the anticipation**, either. We are blessed to see the lead-up to Jesus. To see the twists and turns in salvation history as people wait for the problem of sin to find some answer.

When we know the build-up, we appreciate the explosion of emotion at the end.

- You can look at a picture of astronauts climbing out of a reentry module after a mission, but you don’t fully appreciate it unless you know the perilous and almost deadly journey that Apollo 13 experienced as its crew survived electrical and life-support failures to make it home alive.
- You can look at a picture of a man casting a ballot, but you don’t appreciate it unless you know the story of Nelson Mandela and his 27 years in prison for fighting against apartheid in South Africa before finally being freed and getting elected as president of the country.

It is anticipation that makes the resolution matter!



Application



Mark reminds us that we need to see the whole story, that the build-up matters.

Your own story about Jesus needs the build-up, too. It didn't begin when you stepped into the baptistry. Your faith in Jesus came with history, and challenge, and anticipation.

Your story was filled with brokenness that needed healing...pain that needed comfort...evil that needed overcoming...sin that needed salvation.

But then...Christ came.

Do you allow yourself to see and recall that change? Do you remember your own anticipation that found resolution in Jesus? If you forgot or neglected it... REMEMBER!

Do you share that anticipation and resolution with others as part of your own story? Do you clearly communicate the colossal shift in your spiritual situation? If you have been quiet or not forthcoming...SPEAK!

Jesus has been the one you needed, the one you waited for. He is the one that others are needing and waiting for right now. They are anticipating Jesus! They just might not realize yet that He is the one their soul craves.

So, help them hear that anticipation. Help them look for Him. Remind them of what Jesus' arrival meant in your own life and what He could mean for theirs.

One of the frequent complaints about Christians is that we think we are better than anyone else. But that's because they only see the resolution. They see the new creation we have become in Christ.



"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV)

But they need to know the backstory. They need to know what we once were. They need to hear how our own emptiness pointed us to Jesus.



"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11, ESV)

So, take a cue from Mark as you talk about Jesus. Share the things that helped you look intently for His arrival in your life.

Hear the anticipation...and celebrate its resolution in Jesus!

Prayer



Invitation

There is still time to share in Mark's anticipation. The prophets spoke about Jesus' forthcoming arrival...the first time. But they also speak about Jesus' forthcoming arrival...the second time!

Jesus will return and usher in a day of the Lord when sin is vanquished, Satan is defeated, the saints glorified, and salvation realized. His return is certain...but the date is unknown.

"Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."
(Matthew 24:42, ESV)

We anticipate NOW. But it isn't a passive anticipation. It needs to be active preparation! Righteousness still goes before Him and prepares a way for His steps! There is still time for repentance and obedience. It's not too late!

If we can help you prepare – to have a better anticipation of Jesus' soon resolution – then please come forward and ask for prayer today. We can help you as you prepare for Christ's coming!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Notes

Meeting Jesus in Mark (Mark 1:1-8)

Mark's Anticipation

Isaiah, the Prophet (Malachi 3:1, Isaiah 40:3; Psalm 85:13)

John, the Baptist

Identifying the Voice (Luke 1:13-17)

They've been waiting for him...

He's waiting for someone else!

(Mark 1:7-8; Acts 2:38)

How Mark Views Jesus

Anticipation!

Anticipation Resolved! (Mark 1:9-11)

How We View Jesus

Anticipation!

Anticipation Resolved! (1 Peter 1:10-12)

Application (2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Corinthians 6:11)

Discussion Questions

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- What is something that you are looking forward to? (ex: a cruise, retirement, a birth)
- Why are you excited? How are you preparing for that event?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Spend some time learning more about John the Baptist. Look over the following passages and list important facts you should know about his life and ministry: Matthew 3; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 1; John 1:19-28
- What Old Testament passages does Mark quote in Mark 1:2-3? (see the cross-references in your Bible)
- Why do you think God planned to send a messenger ahead of the coming Messiah? How did he prepare the way for Jesus?
- Is there any significance to this “voice” coming from the “wilderness?” What does the location communicate about John’s ministry?
- John recognizes that his purpose is to point to the Messiah. How challenging is it for you to focus on Jesus instead of yourself? What can you learn from John’s attitude?
- Do you ever get complacent with the truth about Jesus, taking it for granted? Read 1 Peter 1:10-12 and compare your approach to the angels’ anticipation.
- We don’t have to wait for the first coming...but we anticipate the second coming of Jesus. How do you think our anticipation is similar? How is it different?
- Think about your own story. How did you anticipate Jesus’ arrival in your life? What prepared you for His coming? Do you often recall the changes that have happened since? Why or why not?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Ask God to help you boldly share your story about Jesus. Pray for help as you share the things that made you search for and anticipate Jesus, and ask for wisdom as you challenge others to discover Him as well.