

Mark 1:1-8 Discussion Guide

TEXT - Read Mark 1:1-8 (ESV) **The Beginning of the Gospel**

¹The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ²As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, ³the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" ⁴John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And 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. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And 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. ⁸I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

- What sticks out to you in this text? Any questions that come up?
- What is going on in this text (summarize the main points)? What is the context for the text?
- Does the OT reference this text? If so, how do the NT writers interpret this text?
- How does this text connect with the Gospel? What Gospel themes do you see in the text?

THEOLOGY - What do we learn about God from this text?

- What attributes or aspects of the character and nature of God do you see in these passages? What else can we learn about God from the text? Take a moment to list these out together.

LIFE

- Who or what has been most helpful to you in understanding who Jesus is? How do you describe Jesus to others?
- Mark explains the role of John the Baptist in this introduction. How and when do you share the gospel story?
- John proclaims a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. What does repentance look like or mean to you?

PRAYER

- Pray in response to what God revealed to you in this text. If there is sin, confess it to him in prayer. If there is a need, petition God in prayer. If there is encouragement, praise God and share with others.
- What is one personal need you have that we can pray for you as a group?
- Pray for one friend, family member, or coworker with who you want to share the love of Jesus with.

Commentary on Mark 1:1-8

v. 1 **The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** Every word in Mark's description of Jesus is important. First, this is the good news of Jesus, a genuine, historical person who walked this earth like other men. It is the good news of the Christ (which simply means "Messiah"), the promised, anointed Savior of men. And it is the good news of the Son of God, and a Son in more than a sense that we think of all men coming from God. Jesus is the unique Son of God, who is also God the Son.

v. 2 **As it is written in the Prophets:** The first thing Mark says about the ministry of John the Baptist is that it was prophesied in the Old Testament (Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3). My messenger is important because this is the first authentically prophetic voice to Israel (with the slight exceptions of Anna and Simeon in Luke 2) for 300 years. Some thought that God stopped sending prophets because He had nothing more to say, but John shows this wasn't the case at all.

V. 3 **Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight:** The idea of preparing the way of the LORD is a word picture because the real preparation must take place in our hearts. Building a road is very much like the preparation God must do in our hearts. Jesus was the coming Messiah and King, and John the Baptist was the one **crying in the wilderness**. Through his message of repentance, he worked to **prepare the way of the LORD**. We often fail to appreciate how important the *preparatory* work of the LORD is. Any great work of God begins with great *preparation*.

v. 4 **John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins:** This describes how John prepared the way. He came baptizing, offering a ceremonial washing that confessed sin and did something to demonstrate repentance. Baptism was already practiced in the Jewish community in the form of ceremonial immersions but typically it was only among Gentiles who wished to become Jews. For a Jew in John's day to submit to baptism was essentially to say, "I confess that I am as far away from God as a Gentile and I need to get right with Him." This was a real work of the Holy Spirit.

V. 5 **Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem:** John's ministry met with wonderful response. There were many people who recognized their sinfulness and their need to get ready for the Messiah. They were also willing to do something about it. John's main message wasn't, "You're a sinner, you need to repent." John's main message was "The Messiah is coming." The call to repentance was the response to the news that the Messiah was coming.

V. 6-8 **Clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt:** In his personality and ministry, John the Baptist was patterned after the bold Elijah ([2 Kings 1:8](#)), who fearlessly called Israel to repentance.

There comes One after me who is mightier than I: The message of John the Baptist was simple. John preached Jesus, not himself. John pointed to Jesus, not to himself.

Whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose: This might sound like spiritual exaggeration on John's part. But John said this because in his day, the rabbis taught that a teacher might require just about anything of his followers, except to make them take off their sandals. That was considered to be too much. But John said that he was not even worthy to do this for Jesus.

Babylonian Talmud, Ketuboth 96a: "All services which a slave does for his master a pupil should do for his teacher, with the exception of undoing his shoes." (Cited in Lane)

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit: John recognized that his baptism was only a prelude to what Jesus would bring. The Messiah would bring an immersion in the Holy Spirit that was greater than the immersion in water as a demonstration of repentance. John's baptism could demonstrate repentance, but it could not truly cleanse one from sin, nor could it impart the Holy Spirit in the way Jesus would after His work on the cross was completed.