

A Voice for God

Mark 1:1-8

Slide 1

Today we begin a series on the first chapter of Mark. John Mark is named in Acts as an assistant who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys.

Early on, Mark had a rocky relationship with Paul because he abandoned Paul's team on their first missionary journey.

But later, Paul spoke favorably of him. He even became Peter's assistant and protégé.

The book of Mark is the first record of Jesus' life. Matthew and Luke probably used his writings as their primary source.

As you study the book of Mark, you'll find that the book of Mark is the Gospel of realism. He offers little interpretation or explanation. It's an on-the-spot, unvarnished account, with few embellishments.

Next, you will discover that Mark is the Gospel of action. The key word you find repeated again and again is the Greek word *euthús*, which means "*straightaway or immediately.*"

It occurs over 30 times in Mark, painting a vivid, fast-moving record of Christ's life. It rushes the reader from one event to the other in breathless fashion.

For this reason, its main target was thought to be Roman readers who were a people of action, as Matthew targeted Jews while Luke targeted Greeks.

Finally you'll see that Mark is a Gospel of Christ's emotion.

Even though Mark's purpose was to prove that Jesus was the Son of God, no other Gospel emphasized Jesus' humanity, especially His varied human emotions like Mark did.

Slide 2

So, let's hear what Mark has to say. While Matthew eased into his Gospel with Jesus' genealogy narrative, and Luke began with a backstory before Christ's birth, Mark begins as if he is in a rush.

Mark 1:1, "*The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.*" That's the entirety of his introduction—short and sweet.

Mark's gospel is unvarnished and to-the-point. In this first verse, Mark tells us the purpose of His book: *To prove that Jesus was the Son of God by His life and miracles.*

Mark uses the term, "Son of God," as a term of endearment showing God the Father's special relationship with Jesus; to point to Jesus' deity.

In the rest of the New Testament, it's used as a title to show that Jesus was fully God, with all the characteristics and attributes of God the Father and God the Son.

Then he introduces John the Baptizer.

Mark 1:2-4, "*As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way*"—"a voice of one calling in the wilderness, *'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'*"

As an aside, even though he's called "John the Baptist," he wasn't really the first Baptist preacher as some believe since denominations weren't in existence then.

John's role was to prepare the way for the Messiah's coming. He was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that a forerunner would come to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Isaiah 40:3-4, *"A voice of one calling: In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain."* So, think of John as a highway builder.

At the turn of the 20th century, as cars were becoming more numerous, the highways followed the paths of the old cattle trails and wagon paths.

They winded around mountains with hairpin turns with steep inclines up and down mountains. But later came modern, interstate highways.

Interstate builders cut straight through mountains, tore down whole hills, built bridges across little valleys, and overall, smoothed and straightened the way.

John's job was to prepare people for the Messiah's coming. If they repented of their sins and centered their lives around God, and His will and Word, the coming of the Messiah would be smooth.

They would be ready and primed for an extraordinary shift in their former ways of thinking.

In John 1:29, it says that one day Jesus came to where John was baptizing, and when John saw Jesus, he shouted dramatically, *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

John's job was to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus and to point people to Him. That's where John's life intersects with ours.

If we're followers of Jesus, then we too are called to prepare the way of Jesus in people's lives and point them to Him.

After all, there was someone who pointed the way for us. It might have been a parent, a pastor, or a Sunday School teacher, but someone helped us find and follow God.

And now that we know the Lord, it's our job to carry the Good News to others. All of us who know Jesus as the Lamb of God should be pointing Him out to others.

Are you pointing people to Jesus? God has called us to be highway builders, smoothing the way by our godly lives for others to come to Christ.

We're to be signposts, pointing them to Jesus as the answer for sin.

Slide 3

Mark 1:4, *"And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."*

Mark's phraseology, *"a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"* sounds like John was preaching a baptism that saves.

But a closer look at the Greek indicates this idea of baptism was an outward manifestation of repentance for the forgiveness of sin.

The Jews in John's audience were familiar with baptism. Because, when a Gentile proselyte came into the Jewish faith, he had to undergo three things:

- He had to be circumcised, the mark of the covenant people.
- A sacrifice had to be made for him, for he needed atonement and only blood could atone for sin, and...

- He had to undergo baptism, symbolizing cleansing from all the pollution of his past life.

This baptism couldn't be a sprinkling of water, but a bath in which his whole body was immersed.

The Jews understood that baptism didn't save, like the sacrifice, it was just a symbol of the washing of the inside.

But there was something unusual about John's baptism... he was asking Jews to submit to that which was only required of a Gentile coming into the Jewish faith.

John was foreshadowing Paul's concept that being one of God's people was not an issue of race or ethnicity; it was a matter of a heart relationship with God.

Since one could be born a Jew and still not be a part of God's family. That's why the centerpiece of John's message was repentance.

To "repent" means to have a change of mind about your relationship with God, to make a U-turn from sin to God.

Today, people don't like to hear that they need to repent. They think they're fine just the way they are.

In fact, there are even some churches that no longer talk about sin. They're simply a center for human improvement.

But the message of the Bible is that we're all sinners and if we want to experience God's forgiveness, we must admit we're sinners and turn to God. This message is found throughout the Bible.

For example, Noah. He was a preacher of righteousness. He told the people, *“Repent, or you’re going to drown.”* But they laughed at him and died in their sins.

Or Jonah, who went to the wicked city of Nineveh and preached, *“Repent, or God is going to destroy your city.”* In that case, the people did repent, and God spared them His wrath.

But the Bible also teaches that repentance alone won’t save. We must put our faith and trust in Jesus as the only hope for our salvation, not in any work or merit.

The prerequisite to come to Jesus is to admit our sinful condition before God, to realize that He’s not just a jolly old guy who’ll say to you on Judgment Day, *“Aw, it’s alright. Come on into heaven. I’ll just overlook your sin.”*

You must turn from your sin and trust in God’s Son who died in your place. So, have you turned from sin to Christ? God hasn’t repealed His call to repentance!

You must turn from your dependence on yourself, your self-effort, and your own good works and turn to Jesus as your only hope of salvation.

Slide 4

Then, verse 5 tells us that John’s ministry was wildly successful. Mark 1:5, *“The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.”*

People from all over Judea and Jerusalem were repenting of sin and being baptized to testify of their turning from sin to be ready for the coming Messiah.

With all these people being baptized, it would've been easy for John to get a big head and think he was a hot shot. But he didn't. He minimized his role and magnified the character of the One to come.

In fact his description in Mark 1:6 shows that he wasn't trying to be something he wasn't, "*John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.*"

From this description you'd be tempted to think he looked like a cross between a homeless man and Bigfoot. So, what's up with the odd garb and strange diet?

William Barclay says, "*He was a man who lived his message. Not only his words, but also his whole life was a protest.*"

Remember, John was a Nazarite from birth, which meant he had dedicated his whole life to God.

To fulfill the Nazarite vow, a Nazarite couldn't eat of any product of the grape, fermented or unfermented, couldn't cut his hair, and couldn't come near a dead body.

John chose to live by these strict rules so, when he preached his message of repentance, he'd have credibility.

He didn't just call people to repent and turn to God; he lived every day as a life of self-denial and commitment to God.

He realized that Kingdom living was not about having things and enjoying the pleasures of this world, but in knowing and serving God.

Rather than playing the megachurch pastor card and dressing in the latest fashions and living high on the hog, he lived a life of simplicity and self-denial.

He recognized that his job was to magnify Jesus even though his influence would dim. In fact, He even said he wasn't worthy to untie the sandal of the One who was to come after him.

Mark 1:7, *“And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.”*

The job of the lowliest slave was to stoop down and untie the leather strap of his master's sandals. John said he wasn't worthy to do the lowliest task of a slave for the Messiah.

If he had claimed to be the Messiah, many of his followers would've believed him. But John didn't have a Messiah complex. He was willing to step aside and give all the glory to Jesus.

The Gospel of John tells us that John lost disciples once Jesus came on the scene. His disciples even complained about it, but John knew his role.

John said he was just the friend of the bridegroom; the bridegroom should get all the attention at the wedding.

And then John explained, *“I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him... He must increase and I must decrease.”* (John 3:28, 30)

God wants to be number 1 in our lives and He wants us to be number 2! But we live in a culture where nobody is satisfied to be number 2.

Think about it. When a team loses the Super Bowl, they don't run around the field in jubilation shouting, “We're number 2! We're number 2!”

We don't like to be number 2, yet, as we grow in Christ, He must increase, and we must decrease! He must take center stage and we must step back behind the curtain.

His will must take priority in our lives and our will must diminish. The truth is, the greatest joy in our lives comes when we put Jesus first!

Is Jesus the Ruler and Controller and Lord and Master of your life?

Slide 5

Conclusion

John's message was "*repent and be baptized.*" Later Jesus said, "*Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.*" God's giving you the opportunity today to turn to Him and trust in Him for forgiveness.

Wabush is a town in a remote part of Labrador, Canada, that was completely isolated for years. But then, a road was cut through the wilderness to reach it.

Now Wabush has one road leading into it, and one road leading out. For all who go to Wabush, there's only one way they can leave, and that's by turning around.

Each of us, by birth, arrives in a town called Sin. There's only one way out—a road built by God Himself. But in order to take that road, you must first turn around.

That complete, about-face is what the Bible calls repentance, and without it, there's no way out of God's judgement and the ultimate destination of Hell.

May the testimony of your life not be, "*It's about me,*" but rather "*He must increase and I must decrease.*"