

The Beginning of the Gospel – Mark 1:1-13

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was initially intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, don't hesitate to get in touch with Pastor Derek at Derek.berry1990@gmail.com.]

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 1:1-13...

One of America's favorite past times includes watching game shows on television. Perhaps you yourself have a preferred game show that you enjoy viewing. Whether it be Family Feud, Jeopardy, or the Price is Right. If you're my age or older, at least, I'm willing to bet you have a personal favorite. On December 29, 1969, *The Who, What, or Where Game* was first broadcast on NBC. The show consisted of three contestants, one usually a returning champion. Each player was spotted \$125 at the start of the game and used that money to wager on their knowledge of the questions presented. Each category had three question choices, a *who* question, a *what* question, and a *where* question. So there came scenarios where all of a player's money depended upon them answering a *who* question correctly. Who is...such and such? If answered correctly, instant riches. If answered incorrectly, the score drops to zero, and that player is eliminated from the game.

Well, there's another *who* question that holds far more in the balance than the elimination from a televised game show. And that question is, who is Jesus Christ? John Mark, our author this morning, seeks to get this across to his audience. Your answer to this question will determine your eternal state. In the very first verse of this gospel, Mark answers this question, and then he spends the following 16 chapters proving that Jesus is indeed whom he claims him to be. So this morning, and throughout this entire series, we're going to zoom in on our lens on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

- I. The Identity of Jesus (v 1-8)
- II. The Baptism of Jesus (v 9-11)
- III. The Temptation of Jesus (v 12-13)

Let's first set the scene concerning the occasion of this writing. Early church tradition has always held the author of this gospel to be John Mark. He was an African Jew and a companion of Peter.

She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.-1 Peter 5:13

So, although John Mark wasn't one of the 12, this gospel is actually Peter's account of Jesus' works, written down by Mark. Mark's audience includes the church in Rome, which primarily consists of Gentiles, so Mark often explains Aramaic phrases and Jewish customs that would have been foreign to much of his audience. And there are other nuggets of significance regarding

Mark's meticulous words written to the Roman church, many of which we'll consider throughout this study.

Now, let's reread verses 1-8 before diving into the text. Mark provides us with a summary of the next 12 verses in the very first sentence. Unlike Matthew and Luke, he skips past any genealogies and seeks to begin with the ministry of Jesus. And the proper place to mark the beginning of Jesus' ministry is with John the Baptist's forerunning, followed by Jesus' baptism and temptation. Although Mark directly refers to these first 13 verses, this first verse indirectly serves as the summary and heartbeat of this entire gospel letter. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Please don't miss that this is a divine claim. Mark is boldly declaring that Jesus is God! John's gospel clarifies that claiming this type of unique sonship is making one equal with the Father.

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. -John 5:18

We should understand this verse to include the messianic identity of Jesus as a central component of the gospel (good news). So to reject Jesus as God is to reject the gospel and ultimately to reject God the Father. This is one of the fundamental problems of Islam and Jehovah's Witnesses. Jesus makes this clear.

I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." -John 8:24

If that's not enough evidence, our author continues to point to the identity of Jesus as God with his Old Testament citations. We'll take some time to examine the motif that Mark is establishing with these quotations in a moment, but first, let's continue to consider the deity of the Lord Jesus. Notice how Mark utilizes Isaiah 40 to reveal the identity of not only John the Baptist but primarily of Jesus. Let's read 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. -Isaiah 40:3

Whenever you see Lord in all caps in the Old Testament, it's referring to Yahweh, the one true God. And what is Mark saying? That Jesus is Yahweh. Did you catch that? Beloved, this is vitally important. Skeptics claim that it is only the gospel of John that places a heavy emphasis on the deity of Jesus, which can be explained by the fact that it is the latest written gospel. However, they're wrong. They completely miss how Mark is employing this OT passage to reveal the identity of Jesus. They also miss how Mark highlights the authority of Jesus, even over natural creation, which is another indicator of his divinity. But we'll get to that in the weeks to come.

Beloved, there is no gospel if Jesus isn't God. If he's not God, there's no perfect and sinless life. If there's no perfect life, there's no perfect substitutionary sacrifice for sin. If there's no sacrifice for sin, then we remain enemies of God, destined to experience eternal wrath. Beloved, aren't you glad that God incarnated?!

So out the gate of this early gospel writing, Jesus is the eternal Son of God, or God the Son. Now let's push into these OT quotations. Mark references three passages, but keeping with Jewish custom, only mentions the most prominent by name, Isaiah. But he's quoting Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3.

Within all of these passages, we find the motif of the exodus. Here's a quick summary. God chose a man, Abram, later known as Abraham, to birth a nation representing Yahweh before the nations. They were to follow the laws and commands given to them so that the nations around them would be drawn into Zion to worship the one true God. Well, through a string of events, this nation dwelled within Egypt and eventually ended up becoming the slaves of the Egyptians. This led to Israel crying out to the Lord, which led to God raising Moses to lead the people out of the oppression and bondage of Egypt and into the promised land flowing with milk and honey. This is the Exodus that I'm referring to.

These passages are looking to a New Exodus for the people of Israel, and we need to see how they tie together to grasp why Mark is employing these passages in order to describe the ministry of Jesus. So, let's turn and read Isaiah 40:1-5.

God means to evoke the exodus within these verses. Again, the original exodus pattern is deliverance from Egypt, a journey through the wilderness, and arrival in the promised land. Now this pattern is transformed into the hope of a grander new exodus: deliverance of the exiles from the power of Babylon and its idols (remember, Israel, or Judah, is currently in captivity under Babylon outside of their land), Yahweh's leading of and provision for his blind people along the way, and his arrival and enthronement in a gloriously restored Zion. This is the greater new exodus presented, with Exodus 40:3 as the key text. Apart from Yahweh's presence, there can be no salvation or deliverance. However, things didn't necessarily go as planned due to the people's sinfulness, already predicted within Isaiah 40-55. So the new exodus is delayed and only fully fulfilled through the future messianic servant that the latter chapters of Isaiah refer to.

So now, let's jump to Malachi 3 to discover how this text fits into the new exodus motif and ministry of the Lord Jesus. Now, if you were to read this entire prophetic book, it's only 4 chapters, so perhaps this afternoon, you can do just that. But you'll discover that Malachi views the delayed second exodus as an ironic recapitulation of the first. In other words, the first exodus had Yahweh sending a messenger to prepare Israel's way by destroying the idolatrous gentile nation of Egypt, now, the messenger prepares Yahweh's way, and its faithless Israel who's under threat of destruction. Let's read Malachi 3:1-5.

So now this exodus, a picture of deliverance from bondage and a celebration of liberation for the people of Israel, will become a time of judgment for those who reject Yahweh. Now back to the gospel of Mark. Our author is making the forthright claim that Israel's new exodus hopes have been inaugurated in Jesus. He is Yahweh among us, Emmanuel, who will deliver his people from bondage. However, Israel must listen to him to avoid the curse that Yahweh's coming will bring. Because remember, that was the point of Malachi, that this new exodus would involve great judgment against faithless Israel.

So to wrap it all up with a summary statement. Jesus, the one whom John heralds, is the one who inaugurates Israel's longed for salvation (Isa 40:3), but there is the danger that Yahweh's offered salvation will become a curse, as Malachi 3:1 states.

So Mark provides his readers with a clear parallel between Jesus and Yahweh's kingly intervention as written in Isaiah. In Isaiah 49, Yahweh promises to deliver Israel from the strong man Babylon. In Mark, we find Jesus delivering Israel from the strong man Beelzebul. In Isaiah 42, Yahweh is leading his blind people along a path that they did not know, in Mark, Jesus is leading his blind followers along the way, cross-bearing discipleship that they do not understand. In Isaiah 52-54, Yahweh finally returns his people to Jerusalem through the suffering servant. In Mark, Jesus finally arrives in Jerusalem and suffers under the hands of Rome but ultimately, God the Father that he may deliver his people to the eternal promised land.

Unfortunately, he did indeed come to his own, and they rejected him. However, remember how Malachi spoke of his temple? Through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus for sin, he built a new people temple that includes both faithful Jews and believing gentiles from all four corners of the earth. Isn't our God a mastermind? A genius.

Let's continue by examining verses 4-8, the ministry of John the Baptist.

Firstly, it's important to understand that even the ministry of John is meant to highlight the Lord Jesus. So his person and work will be highlighted in this section as well. Nevertheless, it's important that we grasp the ministry of the Baptist. Notice his dress in verse 6, this should call to mind the wardrobe of Elijah in the OT.

They answered him, "He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite." -2 Kings 1:8

And that's because John is coming in the spirit of Elijah. He's the fulfillment of what we find in Malachi 4:5.

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. -Malachi 4:5

Jesus himself confirms this as well. These verses tell us what John's ministry consisted of action and preaching. We see the action in verse 4. This baptism was meant to prepare the hearts of the people for the Messiah's arrival. And this is the effect that it had according to Luke's gospel.

²⁸I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." ²⁹(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.) - Luke 7:28-30

You catch that? Those who were baptized by John did indeed receive Jesus as the Christ, and those who didn't rejected him. That was the very purpose of John's baptism ministry. So that's

the action of his ministry. And again, this points to the work of the Lord Jesus, which is to come and forgive his people of their sins. That is man's fundamental problem. It's not our checkbooks, our self-esteem, or even the social ills of our day. No, what we need is to be forgiven of our sins. This is the reason for the Lord Jesus' work.

I believe I was watching a football or basketball game, and I saw an advertisement for an organization called "He Gets Us." The commercial said a rebel took to the streets and recruited others to join him and they roamed the hood and challenged authority. And they continued about this misunderstood group spreading love and not hate. And then it ends with "He gets us." They were referring to Jesus. So, I checked out their website, and you see things like:

- Jesus invited everyone to the table
- Jesus was a refugee
- He was an activist
- He was lonely, impoverished and marginalized.

However, they don't mention the cross or the need for mankind to have their sins forgiven through repentance and faith in what Jesus accomplished. They even question the sinlessness of Jesus. Beloved, as the people of the book, we must know why Jesus came. And maybe you're here, and you're not a Christian. We're so glad you're here but what you need to know is that you have sin that must be dealt with.

In verses 7 and 8 we find what John preached. Let's reread those verses.

So, John preached the supremacy of Jesus! The task of untying someone's sandals was seen as extremely demeaning in John's Day. This was the task of slaves only. As a matter of fact it was stated, that "all manner of service that a slave must render to his master a student must render to his teacher, except that of taking off his shoe." And even though John saw himself as prophet sent by God to prepare the way, he didn't view himself as worthy of performing this menial act to the savior! He understood the great distance between himself and the Christ. This is why he was willing to have his fame eclipsed by the Lord Jesus, as he says he must decrease as the Lord increases. How about you? Students are you willing to have your glory eclipsed for the sake of the message of the gospel of Jesus. Adults are you willing to have your credibility eclipsed for the glory of God? This is how we follow in the footsteps of John the Baptist.

He continues in verse 8 by highlighting not only the great magnitude of difference between his ministry and the Messiahs, but he also points to the deity of Jesus. No one can bestow the Spirit in the OT except God himself. No one could be so identified with the Spirit that he has control to command the Spirit, except for God himself!

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. -Isaiah 44:3

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. -Joel 2:28

This is Yahweh speaking in these passages. The same Yahweh who took on flesh and was proclaimed by his forerunner, John the Baptist. So, Mark portrays John the Baptist as part of the old age and covenant. Remember, Jesus, says that the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John, the greatest prophet of the Old. So he has somewhat of a Moses-like ministry. Moses prepared for the coming of the kingdom of God but wasn't himself able to enter into the "promised land." It was Joshua, after him, that led the people into the land. And although John the Baptist dies before the full inauguration of the kingdom at the cross, our Joshua leads us to the "promised land" and gifts us with his Spirit that he may never leave nor forsake us. Let's transition to our second point this morning, The Baptism of Jesus. And don't worry, that was our longest point.

Let's pray.