



Mark 1 & 2 - January 2024

Introduction



Mark 1: 1-13 The Beginning of the Good News

(sermons: Jan 7)

Mark 1: 1 The Beginning of the Good News

- v.1 *beginning – or ‘origin’: this is how it all started. See Tom Wright’s translation, in ‘Mark for Everyone’: ‘This is where the good news starts – the good news of Jesus the Messiah, God’s son.’*
- v.1 *the good news – some older translations have ‘the gospel’; the word means the message about Jesus, his life and teaching, and how it is ‘good news’ for the world. It doesn’t mean just a written account of the life of Jesus, although that’s what it came to mean 100 years or so later. Mark would have been surprised to have been told that he had written ‘a gospel’ as opposed to an account of the origin, or the beginning, of ‘the gospel’ or ‘the good news’ about Jesus and his kingship.*
- v.1 *Jesus – the Greek form of the common Hebrew name ‘Joshua’, or ‘Jeshua’ in the everyday Aramaic spoken in Judea at the time. The name means ‘Yahweh is salvation’ or ‘God saves’, as the angel explained to Joseph in Matthew 1:21.*
- v.1 *the Messiah – or ‘Christ’. Both ‘Messiah’ (Hebrew) and ‘Christ’ (Greek) mean the ‘Anointed One’. Kings were anointed, as were priests. The Old Testament prophets spoke about a ‘Messiah’ who would rule and rescue God’s people. ‘The promised king’ sums up this title.*
- v.1 *the Son of God – or ‘son of God’ (no word ‘the’ in the original Greek). Some old manuscripts do not include these words. This title implies a special relationship with God but it isn’t fully explained at any point in Mark’s Gospel.*
1. What does this verse tell us about Mark’s purpose in writing his account?
Do we see what Jesus did and said as ‘good news’? Does that come across in our conversations and church services?
 2. What does each name, or title, of Jesus mean?

Mark 1: 2-8 John the Baptist Prepares the Way

- v.2 *as it is written in Isaiah the prophet – the quotation in v.2 is from Malachi 3:1; v.3 from Isaiah 40:2. Malachi describes a messenger preparing the people for God himself to come to them. Isaiah describes preparations for the people to return to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, led by God himself. So both quotations point to God’s plan to intervene to help his people and the need for them to be ready to meet him.*
- v.4 *in the wilderness – perhaps a day’s journey from Jerusalem, down in the Jordan valley*
- v.4 *a baptism of repentance – being baptised as a sign of repentance (a change of mind and direction away from sin). At this time some Jews practised baptism but only for Gentiles (non-Jews) who wanted to follow the Jewish religion – for them it was a sign of being cleansed from Gentile ways as well as from sin. By offering baptism to Jews, John was saying that they needed cleansing and forgiveness as much as non-Jews, which many Jews would find offensive.*
- v.6 *clothing made of camel’s hair – John’s appearance would have reminded people of descriptions of the great Old Testament prophet Elijah*
- v.7 *the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to... untie – a very menial task but John says he is not worthy to do even that; John pointed away from himself to one he knew was much greater than he was.*
- v.8 *he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit – John’s baptism in water was a sign of washing away past sin but it could not change lives. Jesus could offer renewal by the Holy Spirit coming to his followers.*
3. How did John the Baptist prepare the way for Jesus?
What do the Old Testament quotations tell us about his role?

4. Who today is called to a ministry like John the Baptist?

Are there ways that we could all '*prepare the way for the Lord*' in what we say, or what we do?

On the other hand, are there ways we could put obstacles in the way of people knowing Jesus?

Mark 1: 9-13 Jesus is Baptised and Tested

v.10 he saw heaven being torn open – this means that what follows is a revelation from God

v.10 the Spirit descending on him like a dove – so there was some visible sign of Jesus being empowered by the Holy Spirit, even if we cannot say exactly what it was.

v.11 You are my Son.... – the words echo Psalm 2:7 (a psalm about God's Kingship) and Isaiah 42:1 (one of the Servant prophecies that includes the Suffering Servant)

v.12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness – literally 'threw him out'

v.13 forty days – a long period of time, which recalls the Israelites being in the desert of Sinai for 40 years between leaving Egypt and entering the Promised Land, a period of testing for them.

v.13 being tempted by Satan – all through the New Testament the devil is seen as a personal evil spiritual being; 'tempted' can also be translated as 'tested': although the devil is trying to make Jesus give in to evil, this period of temptation is also a time of spiritual testing and strengthening.

v.14 He was with the wild animals and angels attended him – God's supernatural protection

5. Although he had no need of forgiveness himself, Jesus identified with us sinful human beings in being baptised by John. What did the words from heaven mean?

How did this help to prepare him for beginning his public ministry?

What might have been the effect on those around him?

6. There is only a brief description of Jesus being tempted, or tested. What do these verses tell us about the importance and purpose of this testing process?

Have we experienced challenging times of testing for which we can see a purpose when we look back?

Malachi 3:1

'I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,' says the LORD Almighty.

Isaiah 40: 1-5

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

Psalm 2: 7-8

⁷ I will proclaim the LORD's decree: He said to me, "You are my son; today I have become your father.

⁸ Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

Isaiah 42: 1

¹ "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.