

SERMON FOCUS: I must follow Christ with urgency.

SERMON FUNCTION: While hearing a very familiar narrative, the hearer will be inspired to follow Christ more closely.

BACKGROUND:

Since we are just starting out with Mark's gospel, I want you to pay attention to some things that make it different from the other gospels. Mark was the first gospel written, likely in the fifties or early sixties A. D. Writers as far back as the second century acknowledge the writer as Mark, even though the author does not identify himself. Long tradition has this Mark as John Mark from the book of Acts, who was with Paul for a short time, left the mission field, then later went with Barnabas.

It is also believed that this gospel was written in Rome to a Gentile audience. This makes sense, because of the explanation of some things that Jews would have known. This is the reason for the introduction that does not include the genealogy of Jesus. It was unnecessary for the intended audience. It is also very widely accepted that Mark at this time was following Peter, and he is telling Peter's memories of the life of Jesus. Many details in the book lead to that conclusion, because they are details that only an eyewitness would have.

One more point of interest is that usually when Bible translators are working to translate the Bible into a new language, they usually start with the Gospel of Mark. It is the gospel, it is the shortest, and it is written for an audience without a religious background. This makes it a good one to study in our context, surrounded as we are by people with no religious background.

SCRIPTURE READING: Mark 1: 1-13 (CSB)

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.^[a] ² As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:^[b]

**See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way.**^{[c][d]}

**³ A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight!**^[e]

⁴ John came baptizing^[f] in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. ⁶ John wore a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

⁷ He proclaimed, “One who is more powerful than I am is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. ⁸ I baptize you with^[g] water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. ¹⁰ As soon as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased.”

¹² Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels were serving him.

MESSAGE:

1. THE LORD’S COMING WAS PROPHESED

- a. (1:2-3) **See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way.**^{[c][d]}
**³ A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight!**^[e]
- b. Mark does not quote much OT scripture. It would have been meaningless to a Gentile audience.

- c. What Mark does quote is essential. He points out that both the Lord's coming and JTB's announcement of His coming were prophesied.
- d. He is actually quoting both Isaiah and Malachi.
- e. Even though Mark keeps this part brief, he has to include John the Baptist, because the baptism is the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry.
- f. It's important to see JTB for who he was; he was the last OT prophet. The New Covenant started with the blood of Christ.
- g. In Luke's account, some question if JTB was, in fact, the Messiah. He emphatically denied this and always pointed to Jesus. His role was to simply announce the Lord. This is a role that we share with him.

2. THE LORD'S COMING WAS ANNOUNCED

- a. (1:7-8) He proclaimed, "One who is more powerful than I am is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. ⁸I baptize you with ⁶water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."
- b. "John called for the baptism of repentance to prepare the way for the Lord. He himself led in that way by means of the sign and seal of repentance for all whom God was calling through grace to inherit the promise surely made to Abraham.... He called us to purge our minds of whatever impurity error had imparted, whatever contamination ignorance had engendered, which repentance would sweep and scour away, and cast out. So prepare the home of your heart by making it clean for the Holy Spirit." (Tertullian of Carthage 220)
- c. John knew who the Lord was. Luke tells us that John recognized the Lord while both were still en

utero. Surely his parents had taught him his role as the announcer of the Lord Jesus.

- d. John recognized that Jesus is worthy and recognized human unworthiness. He testified to who exactly the Lord is. We must join him in that testimony.

3. THE LORD WAS AFFIRMED BY THE FATHER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

- a. (1:9-11) "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. As soon as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased."
- b. Here, we see all three persons of the Trinity in one place and time.
- c. Mark does something with the language here that the other gospel writers do not do. Other gospel writers say, "the heavens were opened." Mark uses more force, saying, "he saw the heavens being torn open."
- d. There's a beautiful contrast here of power and gentleness. The heaven being torn open, the forceful voice of the Father, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased." Also, the gentleness of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove.
- e. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all in one place. The Father and the Holy Spirit testify that Jesus is the Son.
- f. We can trust the testimony about Jesus. Those of us who know Him can also testify about Him.
- g. Here, Jesus was identified *to* mankind. He also gets to identify *with* mankind by facing the temptations we face.

4. THE LORD FACED OUR TEMPTATIONS

- a. (1:12-13) Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, being

tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels were serving him.

- b. Here, we see another example of Mark's more forceful language with "Immediately" and "drove." Scholars note that it's a very unusual word that implies being thrown or cast into the wilderness.
- c. From the other gospels, we know some of the specific temptations.
 - i. Make these stones into bread
 - ii. Throw yourself down from the temple and angels will rescue you.
 - iii. I will give you the kingdoms of the world.
- d. We can get the impression from Matthew and Luke that Jesus sat in the wilderness for forty days and was tempted on these three occasions. Mark seems clearer that Jesus was being tempted the entire time for the forty days.
- e. This makes sense of Hebrews 4:15 where we are told that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are.
- f. Whatever that temptation is that you are ashamed of, you are not the first to experience it. Jesus has already experienced it and defeated it.
- g. As he was defeating these temptations, we see something else happening here, which is that created beings recognize their Lord.

5. CREATED BEINGS RECOGNIZED THE LORD

- a. (1:13) "And he was with the wild animals"
- b. After being in the wilderness emaciated after 40 days of fasting, the animals did not eat him.
- c. Would that happen to any of us?
- d. This is a tiny picture of restored creation.
- e. One day creation will be fully restored because the Lord will return.

6. THE LORD WILL RETURN

- a. We know from reading ahead that Christ eventually goes to a cross to pay for our sins.
- b. We also know that after three days He arose from the dead.
- c. We also know that 40 days later He ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father.
- d. We know that He has promised to return for the final defeat of the enemy and to gather His people.
- e. This knowledge requires that we submit to His Lordship and join with the testimony of John the Baptist, the Father, and the Holy Spirit in announcing His reign over us.
- f. This requires us first accepting His reign over us. Have we done that today?

FOUR QUESTIONS:

1. What do you hear God saying to you?
2. What keeps you from doing that?
3. If you were to do that, what might be a good first step?
4. Who are you going to tell?

INVITATION HYMN

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