

A Study of Mark's Gospel

Week One

Mark 1:1-28

Day One

1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"— 3 "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" 4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

v. 1 – The word gospel was a politically charged word in Mark's day, for Rome had a gospel of Caesar. Christians took the word and applied it to the message or good news about Jesus. What was this good news? It was the fact that Jesus had come to usher in God's kingdom and rule. Jesus had not come to do so simply as a prophet or a righteous man like Isaiah or the prophets. Jesus was the Son of God and the Kingdom He was to establish was a sovereign work of God Himself. God had intervened in the history of the world that He had created in the person of Jesus. That certainly was or is much better news than anything any Caesar could ever announce.

vs. 2&3 – Notice that there is no introduction in Mark's gospel as there was in Matthew's or Luke's. Even John's gospel gives more introductory remarks than Mark did in his. This will characterize the entire gospel. One always feels like Mark is out of breath as he races from one story to another to present his account of the good news. We will refer back to this tendency over and over again as we go through the gospel verse by verse.

Mark began his gospel with John the Baptist's ministry, specifically John's teaching concerning Jesus. John's ministry was foretold by Isaiah as recorded in Isaiah 40:3. This is consistent with my theory that everyone, including you, has a biblical passage that relates to and describes their purpose. My purpose is to "create order out of chaos" and my verse to corroborate that is Genesis 1:2:

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2).

That verse epitomizes the work that I do with God's help. I work with things and people that have potential and see them come to some semblance of order and productivity.

What is your purpose? Do you know? And what verse, passage, chapter or book goes along with your purpose, to describe your unique contribution to God's creation?

v. 4 – How did John emerge as a prophetic voice? He came without fanfare, church or agent. He worked in the wilderness where people had to make an effort to see him. What's more, John had a strange diet and outlandish outfit, yet he impacted all of Israel. That is the power of purpose. You don't have to work to make it happen; you must only

work to take advantage of the opportunities that God provides. You don't have to work for those opportunities to present themselves. **What situations find you without having to search for them? What does that tell you about your purpose?**

Day Two

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. 6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

v. 5 – I have never understood John the Baptist's revival, except that it fulfilled the Scriptural prediction of a prophet preceding Jesus. Why baptism? It must have been a rite that Jews were familiar with. How long did this revival last? How many people were baptized? Did this include men and women? I have more questions than I have answers. If this information was important, however, the Holy Spirit would have provided it. Suffice it to say that when God does something, no one has to promote or publicize it. It will happen by the word and will of the Lord.

v. 6 – As stated earlier, there was nothing glamorous about John. The people went to see him because God was doing a work in their heart and they knew it was the right thing to do. Someone once commented that if you met John after dinner, he had a locust leg sticking out of the corner of his mouth! He was an eccentric man who had a mission from God. Of course, we know that John was Jesus' cousin (Elizabeth his mother and Mary were cousins), but he is never defined by that relationship. He is referred to as the one who was to come and prepare the way for the Messiah. This work wasn't about nepotism or family connections; it was about the will and purpose of God for John and Jesus.

v. 7 – I have always admired John's ability to keep what he was doing in perspective. He knew who he was and that the One to follow, Jesus, was greater than he [John] was. He never ceased to remind the people of that truth. He even said, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). It is good to know your place and not try to be more than God intended for you to be. In my opinion, that is why Billy Graham was so effective. He never expanded into church planting, never opened a school or university, never got involved in anything but evangelism.

Too often, leaders who are successful in one area try to move into other areas where they weren't or aren't anointed. Kathryn Kuhlman, the great faith healer, comes to mind. She was anointed as a healer but a terrible teacher. When I listened to her on the radio, it was a painful experience. She had a severe speech impediment and wasn't a great theologian, by any stretch of the imagination. She should have stuck to healing and left the teaching to others.

I had a pastor say one time, "It's hard to be humble when you're good." He meant that success in one area can lead one to believe that he or she can be successful in other areas, whether they are gifted in that area or not. Again, one just has to look on Christian television to see some who should devote their time to other efforts. **Are you involved in anything right now that isn't producing fruit? Why do you persist in doing it? Why don't you focus on what you do best?**

v. 8 – John knew that Jesus would usher in the Holy Spirit and that would produce much greater fruit in a person's life than John's baptism ever would. John's baptism was symbolic, but Holy Spirit baptism would be intimate. In fact, the Holy Spirit would dwell in a believer's heart, something that John's baptism could not produce or promote. **How is your relationship with the Holy Spirit? Are you yielding to His leadership and work? What can you do to remove any impediments to the Spirit's work?**

Day Three

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." 12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, 13 and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

v. 9 – The trip from Nazareth to the region where John baptized was no short distance in Jesus' day. He had to exert some effort to get there, as did everyone who came to be baptized by John. **What effort should you make that you have been putting off, something that may yield a spiritual blessing in your life? Is it a missions trip? Attending a conference? Attending a seminar or class in another area? Why are you putting it off?** Do it now, or as soon as humanly possible! If God wants to meet you somewhere else than where you are right now, that's His choice. You just obey and find out what God will do for and with you when you get there.

v. 10 – When Jesus submitted to John's baptism (ironically, Jesus was the only One who did not need what John's baptism had to offer), the heavens were "torn open." Something significant happened when Jesus obeyed the work that God the Father was doing through John's ministry. Why did the heavens have to be "torn open?" The blessings of heaven don't come easily or cheaply. There is a great divide between God and man, and that is the result of sin. Only the work of Jesus could and would re-open the way to God for mankind. The fact that the sinless Son of God submitted to a rite designed for sinful man tore the heavens open.

I will never fully comprehend God's work through Jesus. In this instance, the heavens were torn open. Later at His death, the veil in the Temple was torn apart amidst thunder and darkness. After the heavens were torn open at His baptism, the Spirit descended on Him like a dove. The Spirit did not descend on Him in the form of an actual dove. It descended like a dove. How does a dove descend? Doves aren't aggressive birds, and

they are fairly common, related to what are also known as pigeons. **Why was the Spirit compared to a dove in His descent upon Jesus? I'm not really sure. Do you have any ideas?**

v. 11 – A voice from heaven came with the Spirit, expressing the Father's pleasure with the Son. I wonder who heard the voice. Did John? The people around him? At one other time, the same voice spoke, yet some people mistook it for something else:

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him (John 12:28-29).

Just because God speaks to you doesn't mean that everyone else in your life will hear it, or understand what happened. God spoke to Jesus and it didn't seem to have much affect on others, who thought it was an angel or thunder. That's why it's important to determine for yourself whether God is speaking and what He is saying to you. He wants you to know, so He will help you, if your heart is to obey His voice. **Are you willing to obey? If so, good! So what is God saying to you at this point in your life? Not what do you think He's saying, but what is He saying?**

vs. 12&13 – Notice that the Spirit was the one that drove Jesus into the wilderness, where He fasted, was tempted by the devil and also attended by angels. Who set that scenario up? It was the Spirit! Not everything that is unpleasant is the result of your own sin or the devil. At times, God Himself will lead you into tough times. This is perfectly consistent with biblical principles:

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you (Deuteronomy 8:2-5).

Are you in tough times, but thinking that something or someone other than the Lord is the cause? If so, you need to reconsider, for it may be the Lord who is doing something else in your life to prove the work that He has already done in you is real. Is that possible? If it is, then how should you respond to these tough times?

Day Four

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" 16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 "Come, follow

me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 18 *At once* they left their nets and followed him.

v. 14 – Mark didn't waste any time with details. In one verse, John was speaking. In the next, John was in prison and Mark doesn't tell us how it happened. But true to his prediction, John did become less so Jesus could have center stage, so to speak. While John was in prison, however, he had one last mission and that was to speak to Herod, trying to turn that renegade king to God. We know that John wasn't successful and later, when Jesus was before Herod, Jesus didn't say a word to Herod. I doubt if John or Herod knew it was Herod's last chance to turn from his wicked ways when John was before him. Instead of turning, Herod had John beheaded. We know those facts from other gospel accounts, however, for Mark was eager to describe what Jesus did and said. Let's move on with him.

v. 15 – What is the gospel or good news? It's that the kingdom of God is near. What are the requirements to enter this Kingdom? They are repentance and faith. When you repent and put your trust in Jesus, then God's rule is established in your life. Take John for example. God sent him to jail to speak to Herod; that is a perfect example of God's kingdom. That was God's will and John carried it out without complaint or hesitation. My travels to Africa are part of God's kingdom in my life. He directs me to go and I go, for no other reason than it is His will and command for my life. **How is God's kingdom evident in your life? What is the King's will for you?**

v. 16 – Jesus saw Andrew and Peter fishing in the Sea of Galilee, which isn't a sea but rather a large lake. At any rate, they were working for their family business when Jesus intervened. Isn't it interesting that Jesus didn't call the religious leaders of the day, even those who would eventually be favorable to His message? Instead He chose two fishermen. That is how the kingdom of God works. God does what He wants and who can question His decisions. He is Lord and King and came to establish His rule in each and every person's life.

v. 17 – Jesus brought the brothers face to face with their life's purpose—to be fishers of men. It is of note that they were already doing something that was related to their ultimate purpose. The same may be true for you. Oftentimes we gravitate to related activities before we are even aware of what our purpose is. My theory is that Saul was evangelizing Gentiles to Judaism before his Damascus road experience. I was creating order out of chaos even as a child. **What have you been doing that may provide clues to your purpose?**

The other notable thing about their purpose is that they never had to work to make it happen. Their relationship with Jesus brought them to the crowds among which they would "fish." They never had to work to find crowds, the crowds found them. **What finds you that would indicate you are functioning in your purpose?**

v. 18 – It is also of note that the brothers left their nets *at once* to follow Jesus. The sense of urgency in Mark’s gospel is notable. I think we will start an “immediately count”—let’s keep track of how many times a sense of urgency was given in Mark’s gospel.

When you think of it, that is how *everyone* should respond in the kingdom of God to God’s command and call—at once. So this is *immediate 1*. **Are you procrastinating concerning anything that Jesus is calling you to do? Does there need to be more sense of urgency for you to do the will of God?**

Day Five

19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 *Without delay* he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. 21 They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.

v. 19 – Jesus had a busy day, for after He called Peter and Andrew, he moved on to another family business to enlist two more brothers. Jesus did not ask permission of either family, nor did He discuss terms with them. I have regularly pointed out that Jesus never called anyone to a paid position with benefits. The “benefits” are serving God, who promises to meet all needs. Jesus called the brothers away from paid positions to a life of faith. That is also an expression of the Kingdom. Our lives are not our own, and we respond to God’ will with enthusiasm and speed.

v. 20 – Here we have an *immediate 2*. John and James left what they were doing on the fishing boat to be with Jesus, and they did so without delay. It is interesting that the first thing Jesus did when He began His ministry was to recruit a team. If Jesus didn’t want to function alone, then no one else should either. **Who is on your team? On whose team are you on?**

Jesus just didn’t have a team; He equipped His team members to carry on the work after He was gone. This is one of the main weaknesses I see in major ministries and churches today. **Who is part of Bishop Jakes’ ministry team? Benny Hinn’s? Name the number two for any ministry you see on television. How about your own church? Is there a succession plan for leadership continuity? Do you know of any examples of team ministry in your world? Why do you think that teams aren’t more prevalent today? When you can name the “number two,” all too often it’s a family member.**

If Jesus is our model for ministry, then why don’t we see more teams? Am I being too judgmental? Too harsh? Are my expectations too high?

v. 21 – I have visited Capernaum on seven occasions and I always understand why Jesus chose that city for His ministry base. Jerusalem was and is a hard city in which to minister. The legalism there was and is stifling. Capernaum, on the other hand, is a

beautiful area, which is still peaceful and scenic. Jesus handpicked that city and avoided Jerusalem unless He had no choice but to go there.

I think it's important to live someplace that stimulates your ability to serve God. **Are you happy where you are? If not, why not relocate? What is preventing you? Where would you live if you had your choice? My first choice is Florida and I will be back there some day. At this point, however, I travel so much that I wouldn't be there much. My other choice would be New York City. I hope one day to have a residence in both areas. For now, I am content to visit them both as often as possible.**

Day Six

22 The people were *amazed* at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. 23 Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 24 "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God!"

v. 22 – Here we see another distinguishing characteristic of Mark's gospel: the people and disciples were in a constant state of upheaval. They were always amazed, fearful or astonished as they beheld Jesus' deeds and heard His words. So we will do another "watch" like we have done with the word *immediate*. This time we will use the word "wow" to represent a significant encounter with Jesus. Here we have a *wow I*, for the people were amazed by Jesus' teaching.

Why were they amazed? They were amazed because Jesus was different than their other leaders. The other leaders were teaching what they had memorized, what someone else had said or written. Jesus was teaching what He knew firsthand and it set Him apart from the others. Since the word Christ means anointed One, it is safe to say that Jesus was anointed and that was what set Him apart—God's presence in what He did and said.

I want this kind of certainty and distinction when I do God's will. I don't want to be a professional clergyman, I want to be a servant. I don't want to be a hireling, doing what I do for money. I want to do it for the love of God and trust Him for the money. I think those attitudes and values give you credibility, which are perhaps synonymous for authority.

v. 23 – I have been impressed lately with the interactive nature of the synagogue. People asked questions, came forward for healing, visiting rabbis were asked to address the people, and the synagogue leader would respond to the teaching. This is a far cry from our current church atmosphere, where the people don't participate much, unless they sing in the choir or come forward for prayer at some point. If the following verses are true, and of course they are, then what are we missing by not involving the people the way the synagogue did:

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church (1 Corinthians 14:26-27).

Churches today are weak at least in part because the body of Christ isn't free to offer what it has to build up the Church. **Do you agree? Do you release what is in you for the good of the church you are in? How can you do that more effectively?**

v. 24 – Jesus always confronted the kingdom of darkness by His presence. I am afraid that today's church doesn't do that very effectively. Even the evil spirits were free to speak in the synagogue setting. If that happened today, the ushers would simply escort the person out and the person would retain the evil presence that caused the outburst.

The same thing happened when Peter and Paul ministered. Why doesn't it happen when I show up? What am I lacking that doesn't cause the evil spirits to manifest their bad behavior? Why isn't the church asking the same questions? Remember, Jesus had authority and even the demons acknowledged it. So does that mean that I and most of the Church today lack this kind of authority? I suppose it does! What can we do to recapture this kind of presence?

Day Seven

25 "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" 26 The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. 27 The people were all so *amazed* that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching — and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." 28 News about him spread *quickly* over the whole region of Galilee.

v. 25 – The evil spirits knew who Jesus was (and is) but the Jewish leaders did not. Jesus had discernment and knew who was speaking to Him, and immediately began to cast the evil spirit out of the man. Jesus was always helping people, leaving them in better spiritual condition than when He first met them. That should be our goal as well. Jesus commanded the evil spirit to come out. He did not try to counsel the man, nor did Jesus reason with the demon or tell the man to be quiet. He simply commanded the spirit to come out of the man.

I'm not sure why some would believe that this scenario no longer exists—evil spirits invading and inhabiting someone's being. What has changed that would make this impossible? I know there is a debate whether an evil spirit can live in a Christian, but there should be *no* doubt that one can inhabit and influence a non-believer. The behavior of some evil people would alone make that point credible.

What do you do when you encounter evil? Do you confront it and use the authority that Jesus gave you to deal with it? If not, why not?

v. 26 – The evil spirit had no choice but to leave, for the Son of God had commanded it to depart. Notice the physical manifestations as it left—shrieking and shaking. In my limited experience with the kingdom of darkness, those signs are still common to the departure of an evil spirit. When you confront the kingdom of darkness, it can be messy and noisy. I have found that evil is good at intimidating and threatening. Of course, evil can also deliver on its threats as history proves. If you give in to the threats or intimidation, however, you have no chance of victory.

What’s more, Jesus promised that you would confront and defeat evil, so you must walk in that truth and not the intimidating power of evil that you may be confronting. More on that later.

v. 27 – Here we have a **wow 2**. Jesus confronted the evil spirit publicly, so the people were watching what took place. They were amazed, of course, and found it hard to believe that someone in their midst could set one of their own free from evil. Their teachers had no such authority, so the people had to languish from the affects of evil. Where is there power in the Church today to do the same thing, or is this something unique to Jesus’ earthly ministry? I hope it wasn’t unique, for we need this power and authority today more than ever.

v. 28 – Then we have an **immediate 3**, for the news about Jesus spread quickly. Why? Because He helped people and set them free. He had authority and didn’t just talk about God as their teachers did. He had power to help people and was willing to do so.

I don’t have a large ministry, but I don’t do any advertising. My reputation has spread that if someone is looking for their purpose then I can help them. Most of what I do is by word of mouth. I am not against advertising, but I have found that effectiveness is a great vehicle to market and promote. If you can help people, they will tell their friends and growth will take care of itself.

Don’t worry about spreading the word of what you do. Just do it and do it well, with God’s help and power, and you will have no problems with ministry or work opportunities.