

The Gospel according to Mark Introduction.

Congregation: Psalm 105:1-6

Isaiah 40: 1-8

Luke 3:1-9

So here we are starting up another new book. It seems not that long ago we were going through Galatians and now here we are having gone through Galatians, James, 1st John, and Philippians. So today what I want to do is set up the introduction to this book so we can understand exactly who Mark was, and his purpose behind writing this book. Then we will look at the first few verses in detail going into the ministry of John the Baptist.

So I guess the first question we should answer since this is the Gospel according to Mark, is who is Mark? It is widely believed by scholars that Mark himself never saw or heard the teachings of Jesus personally, but rather was the Apostle Peter's interpreter. It is believed that Mark wrote this book after Peter's death recalling all that he has been taught about Jesus' ministry. Which is more than likely one reason why some of the things that happen in this book may seem a little out of order compared to the other Gospel accounts, scholars believe that the structure we see written here in Mark's account of the gospel is like that of the teaching and preaching of Peter, to quote one scholar who says, "Mark's gospel lacks 'order,' reflecting the occasional nature of Peter's preaching."

There are quite a few mentions of Mark in other places of scripture, Acts 12, verse 11-12 "And when Peter had come to himself, he said, Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people. So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying." While Peter was imprisoned, an angel came and set him free and he went to the house of Mary, who was John Mark's mother. Then in verse 25 of the same chapter, it says that Mark joined Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey and was with them for a time until he returned back to Jerusalem and Paul and Barnabas continued on to Asia which we see recorded in Acts 13 verse 5 "And when they arrived in Salamis they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant.

Then in verse 13, it records when he departed and says, "Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos they came to Perga in Pamphylia and John, departing from them returned to Jerusalem." Then later we see recorded in Acts 15, that Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them again on their second journey but Paul refused to take him because he had left them on their previous journey. Verse 36-41. "Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing. Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.'"

I don't know about you, but I find this stuff rather interesting, it helps to breath life into these people that we are familiar with their writings but maybe not so much about them personally. Later we see that Paul later reconciles with Mark and we learn that Mark is actually the the cousin of Barnabas. In Colossians chapter 4, verse 10 we see that Mark and Paul are traveling together. Starting in verse 7. “Tychicus a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here. Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions if he comes to you, welcome him)”

Then in 2nd Timothy we see that Paul instructs Timothy to send Mark to him during his last imprisonment. Chapter 4, starting in verse 9. “Be diligent to come to me quickly, for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica, Crescens for Galatia, and Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me, Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.” And finally we see Mark is with Peter in the closing verses of 1st Peter. “she who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you, and so does Mark my son.”

Peter considers Mark here his spiritual son, which shows the closeness that they had. Mark was his interpreter, and his understudy, and obviously someone that Peter cared deeply for. There is much debate over the actual date of the writing of this Gospel but the majority of Scholars fall out that it was sometime in the mid to late AD 50, to the early 60s and was written while in Rome to the Roman Gentile Christians. One thing we will notice as we go through this book is that Mark does not spend a lot of time with extensive teaching on Jesus and his ministry, but rather is a rather fast paced action oriented book.

This book of Mark is also considered to be one of the first of the gospels written, but it is also one of the shortest. Because of its easy to understand language, and its sort of summary faster paced structure it is often times one of the first gospels to be translated into other languages. Marks writing can be split into 6 sections recording Jesus ministry. In the first chapter, we have Mark setting up the arrival of Jesus and the beginning of his ministry. Chapter 2 and 3, sets up the first part of the Galilean Ministry. 3-5 is the Second Part, 6-8 is the conclusion of the Galilean ministry. Then in 8-10 focuses on the Glory and suffering of Christ. Chapter 11-13 is the Jesus final ministry to Jerusalem, then 15-16 is the account of the cross and his resurrection.

So we are going to start out today looking at the first 13 verses, which is the account of John the Baptist's ministry as he prepares the way for the ministry of Christ (Read 1-13) So we see that Mark is starting out here with John the Baptist, who he quotes the prophets saying that he is the one messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord. He does not start with the birth of Christ as the other gospels do, but rather focus at the beginning of Christs ministry. Mark calls this in verse 1, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As John Gill points out in his commentary, this is not really the beginning of the gospel but rather the gospel has been taught throughout all of the old testament, and we see here Marks quotes from the prophets who prophesied the coming of the messiah.

Another thing that I think that absolutely must be pointed out here in chapter 1 is who exactly Mark believes and says that Jesus is. Aaron posted on Facebook this week the results of a survey done of confessing Christians. One of the questions was simple, it asked. “Was Jesus the greatest, and first created being.” Sadly the response was 80% replied yes, Jesus was the greatest and first created being. But that is not what we see here from Mark, and it is definitely not what the bible teaches!

Right here in verse 1, “ the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is sad that we live in a day and age that even something so simple, and so central to the Christian faith has to be defended and taught.

What we are seeing here in this survey is just proof of the state of our churches today, of the level of teaching or the focus of the teaching is rather on living a good life then on the gospel itself leaving many ignorant of a simple biblical truth. To Quote Gill here on this verse, “The Son of God, equal to his Father, of the same nature as him, possessed of the same perfections, and enjoying the same glory, and which is the grand article of the gospel.

And without such he could not be an able savior, or the true messiah. Matthew begins his account of the gospel focusing on the humanity of Christ calling him the Son of David, Mark focuses on the deity calling him the Son of God. Christ is the Son of David according to human nature, and the Son of God according to his divine nature, so a testimony is bore to the truth of both of his natures which are united in one person.

This is who Christ was, both the son of man, and the son of God. This is apparently something that is not being taught as often as it needs to be and is an important thing I think we should remember when we are sharing the Gospel with unbelievers. Christ was not just a mere created being sent by God to die, he was the Son of God, having the divine nature of his father, and the human nature of his father David so that he could become the atoning sacrifice for mankind. It is interesting to think about it here, as Mark is recalling this, The ministry of Christ, is Christ who is both the teacher, and the substance of the gospel, the gospel that John is preparing the way for.

So a couple of things to note here about Johns ministry is first his message of repentance. As Isaiah prophesied about him calling him the Voice crying in the wilderness preparing the way of the lord. We see John, who lives off of the land, dressed in camels hair eating locusts and honey, calling all those around him to repent for the Lord is coming, now is the time repent, be baptized and follow Christ. We also see the effect of his witness, it was wide spread as we see in verse 5, all the land of Judea and those from Jerusalem went out to him. This of course does not mean every single person, but it shows the effect, and spread of his ministry.

Johns message was one of warning, and one of prophesy that was going to shortly be fulfilled. Verse 7” And he preached, saying there comes one after me who is mightier then I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” So here we have the beginning of Christ ministry, the last prophet if you will exclaiming the arrival of the messiah whose practice of baptism is symbolic of the upcoming baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Note in the way that John was practicing this symbolic baptism. I was preaching repentance and remission of sins, and then baptizing those who confessed. This was not a baby dedication, or some other such custom that has arisen in the churches. It was not a baptism to remove sins, or to wash away sins, but rather that all should repent their sins and believe upon Christ, the one who was coming after him. And it was on Christ the coming messiah that that their faith and hope should rest. The baptism served the purpose of identifying with one who had been cleansed, one who had been washed of such sins. And also it was a symbol of being baptized in the Holy Spirit which will one day come.

If we go over to Matthew chapter 3, we can read exactly what it was John was preaching. And this passage also shows that not everyone who came out and heard his word believed. Starting in verse 1 to verse 12. John was not preaching a very uplifting and positive message as far as the natural mind would be concerned, in fact he turned away those who were considered to be the most religious men of that day calling them Brood of vipers who the ax is laid to the root of the trees to be thrown into the fire. John's message was one of judgment, calling for repentance, warning of the coming messiah who was God incarnate who is both the Savior, and the judge of this world.

So we can see here that John's practice of baptism was not one that many observe today, it was only for those who confessed Christ was the messiah, who repented and turned from their sins. It was not a dedication, it did not have special healing powers, it did not cleanse the soul of sin. It was prophetic, symbolic, and holy.

Verse 7 John says that one is coming that he is not even worthy to kneel before and remove his shoes. To put this into context we need to remember what was actually happening here. The word got out about this crazy man who eats locust and honey dressed in camels hair calling for repentance and immersing people in water to the point that it spread through Judea and Jerusalem and people came from all over to see and hear him. Needless to say, John must have been quite popular, having a rather large following and constantly drawing a crowd around him, even to the point of the religious elite traveled out to see what he was all about. It is in this context that John says this, he isn't mighty, he isn't powerful, he is just the messenger preparing the way for the one to come who he is not even worthy to remove his sandals.

It was with this understanding that John directs the attention away from himself and onto Christ in the next verse. "I indeed baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" This was an important distinction to be made for there was more than likely those who would see John as a prophet and would follow him instead of Christ who he was preparing the way for. Far too often I think preachers can get this confused, and often times it becomes about them and their message and not about the gospel and the message of the coming messiah. Much in the same way that John was warning the people of his day to repent, and be baptized because the Kingdom of God is at hand is not much different than our calling today. John was preparing the way for Christ's ministry on earth, and in the same way we should be going about preaching the gospel, and calling for repentance preparing the earth for Christ's second coming.

Continuing on this theme of Christ's preeminence and John an unworthy messenger we see here the culmination of John's message. Think of what the scene must have looked like, a large crowd of people gathered by the river, John in his camel hair ragged clothing standing there preaching of the one who is coming, and there out from the crowd steps Jesus himself to be baptized. What a scene. It isn't recorded here in Mark because as we said earlier Mark is a quick fast paced journey through the life and ministry of Christ, but in Matthew 3:13 we see it in greater detail. "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him saying, I need to be baptized by you, and you are coming to me? But Jesus answered and said to him, Permit it to be so, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he allowed Him.

Then it says in Mark verse 10, And immediately, coming up from the water, he saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. All of this is about Christ, the promised messiah, the son of David, the son of God who has come to do the will of his father, and in whom his father is well pleased. It is interesting that here we see a representation of the trinity in 3 separate persons.

The voice of God the father coming from heaven, the Holy Spirit descending like a dove upon the Son of God. Both God the father, and the Holy Spirit gives testimony that this Jesus of Nazareth is the promised messiah. Then Mark records in verse 12. "Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness, and he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts and the angels ministered to him."

I think the great significance of the this temptation of Christ by Satan is that fact that he was tempted in all that we are tempted by, and he overcame and was victorious over Satan. Another important thing to note is that it is mentioned in the other gospels record that Christ used the written word, scripture to rebuttal and defeat Satan's temptations. He used the very same tool that we have been given to ward off Satan's temptations. It was through the use of scripture, and through prayer.

The implications of this is that we have been given exactly what we need to keep Satan at bay, to fight against and avoid the temptations that may come before us. We should remember Christ's example, and be encouraged by this. Christ has come, he has defeated Satan, not just here in the wilderness, but once and for all at the cross as he came to do. Rejoice in our savior who left his throne above, came as a man, took on flesh with all of our needs, and flaws, underwent all of the temptations that we are tempted by, he died and suffered all of this for us, so that we may be reconciled to God. Let us be like John, going about the ministry of the gospel, preaching, baptizing and making disciples preparing the way for the 2nd coming of Christ.