

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Mark 1:1-11 “Four Witnesses for Jesus”

Intro. This morning I begin a series of messages from the Gospel of Mark. Whenever we study one of the gospels, it is common to compare the four gospel accounts. Each gospel presents different aspects of the life & ministry of Jesus. Matthew, who wrote primarily for the Jews, had to prove to his readers that Jesus Christ is indeed the rightful heir to David's throne. He presents Jesus as King. Luke emphasized Christ's humanity, and presents Him as the Son of Man. John wrote to prove to the whole world that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the Son of God (John 20:31). He is the eternal Word manifested in human flesh (John 1:1-14). Where does Mark's Gospel fit in? Mark wrote for the Romans, and his theme is Jesus Christ the Servant. In the case of a servant, you are more interested in what a servant can do, not so much in what he says. So the emphasis in this Gospel is on activity. One reason Mark is the shortest of the gospel accounts is due to the fact that it contains less of the teaching of Jesus. Since Mark's gospel focuses more on the activity of Jesus, one of his favorite words is “straightway” (KJV) or “immediately”. He uses it forty-one times. Mark is like a motion picture of the life of Jesus.

Notice how Mark begins his gospel, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark begins with a grand announcement that he has good news to share, and it is good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. I don't know about you, but I've heard enough bad news the last few years. I would like to hear some good news. Well we are going to read & hear the good news as proclaimed by Mark, one of the Gospel writers.

And in this opening section Mark records the testimonies of several dependable witnesses to back up his opening assertion about Jesus. Notice first of all:

I. THE WITNESS OF MARK HIMSELF

Mark does not identify himself as the author of this gospel, but it is clear from historical evidence that he is the author. It is likely that Mark was an eyewitness of some of the events that he wrote about, probably when he was an older teenager. He lived in Jerusalem with his mother, Mary. Their home later became a meeting place for believers in the city (Acts 12:1-19). Several scholars believe that Mark was the young man described in Mark 14:51-52. Since the apostle Peter called Mark “my son” (1 Peter 5:13), it is probable that it was Peter who led Mark to faith in Jesus Christ. Church tradition states that the Gospel of Mark reflects the sermons of Simon Peter. If that's the case, then this gospel also contains the eyewitness account of Peter.

So what was the witness of Mark?

A. That Jesus is the Messiah - Note the exalted title given to the Savior here in v.1. Jesus is called “Christ,” which means the anointed one, hence, ordained, set apart (or commissioned) and qualified. He was ordained & anointed as Prophet, Priest, and King, in order to carry out the task of saving His people to the glory of God. He is the Messiah, the Savior, that God promised long ago. We're going to see what Jesus did to save us from our sins a little later.

Furthermore, Mark states boldly in the opening verse of his gospel:

B. That Jesus is the Son of God.¹ – What dignity he ascribes to Jesus! The assertion that Jesus is the Son of God is in harmony with the fact that throughout his book Mark is constantly ascribes divine qualities and activities to Jesus. He is the One who calms the storm, heals the sick, and causes the lame to walk. Surely He is the Son of God!

Let believers cling to this doctrine. With it, we stand on a rock. Without it, we have nothing solid beneath their feet. Our hearts are weak. Our sins are many. We need a Redeemer who is able to save completely, and set us free from the wrath to come. We have such a Redeemer in Jesus Christ. As the prophet Isaiah foretold, He is “Mighty God” (Isaiah 9:6).

So Mark is writing his gospel to show that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

II. THE WITNESS OF THE PROPHETS

There was nothing unforeseen and suddenly contrived in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. From Genesis to Malachi we have hundreds of prophecies relating to the coming of the Messiah. So we should not be surprised that Mark quickly makes reference to the prophecies of Scripture. He says in v.2, “As it is written in the Prophets...” Then in v.2 he quotes Mal. 3:1, and in v.3 he quotes from Isa. 40:3.

In these two prophecies we see:

A. The Sign of Messiah’s Coming – Today we are looking for signs of the Second Coming of Christ. But prior to the first coming of Jesus, the Jews were looking for signs of the coming of Messiah. One of those signs is given by both Malachi and Isaiah. Both indicated that God would send a messenger to prepare for Messiah’s coming. In v.2 we read, “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.” Mark pictures Christ as an active, energetic, swiftly moving, mighty King. In ancient times, before a king visited any part of his realm, a messenger was sent before him to prepare the way. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mark’s Gospel starts out by picturing the herald, so that from the very outset the student of this writing may be impressed with the exalted character of the One who is being heralded or proclaimed.

So we see that already, Mark is proving his assertion that Jesus is the Son of God, the King of kings.

B. The Fulfillment of this Sign - We can know the identity of this messenger from several of the details about him:

1. He Will Cry Out in the Wilderness – In v.3 Mark says, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness...” That is not exactly the place where one would draw a crowd. It was contrary to expectation, except for the prophecy itself.

2. He Will Preach Repentance – What is the message he would preach? In the last of v.3 we see that he would preach, “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.” In the final analysis the forerunner functions in a spiritual sense. His task is to prepare the hearts of the people for the reception of their Messiah. This implies that they must make straight His paths, meaning that they must provide the Lord with a ready access into their hearts and lives. They must make straight whatever was crooked, not in line with God’s holy will. As long as you hold on to sin, you are putting up a barrier between you and God.

¹ This phrase is also found in 3:11 & 15:39 of his gospel.

So the prophets said that someone would come just before the Messiah, who would preach in the wilderness a message of repentance. Has that prophecy been fulfilled? Indeed it has. This prophecy of the Old Testament was fulfilled in our third witness. Beginning in v.4 we read about:

III. THE WITNESS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Mark identifies John the Baptist as the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Messiah's herald. Likewise, as we see from John's gospel (John 1:23), John the Baptist acknowledged that he was the forerunner of the Messiah, by saying, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the LORD'". So does Jesus Himself in Matt. 11:10.

Is there any evidence that John the Baptist was indeed the forerunner of the Messiah? Yes indeed, for:

A. He Fulfilled the Prophecy of the Messenger

1. He Appeared in the Wilderness – Mark says in v.4, "John came baptizing in the wilderness..." He fit one aspect of the prophecy by ministering in the wilderness. One might expect that John would have gone to the population centers, to the cities, to preach. Instead, he preached in the wilderness, in fulfillment of this prophecy. He must have been some preacher to get people to walk or ride for miles & miles through a wilderness to hear him preach. I can't seem to get more than 300 people to ride in an air conditioned car, and sit on padded pews in air conditioned comfort to hear me preach!

2. He Prepared the People by Preaching a Baptism of Repentance – In the last of v.4 we see that he was "preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." The task assigned to him from the days of his infancy (Luke 1:76-77), yes even earlier (Luke 1:17; Mal. 3:1), was exactly this, namely, to be Messiah's herald or way preparer. He must not only announce Christ's approach and presence but also urge the people to prepare the way of the Lord. John's message and baptism were preparation so that the people would be ready to meet and trust the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This required repentance on their part, that is, by God's grace and power to effect a complete change of mind and heart leading to a complete turnabout of life. Many people are going the wrong way in life. They are going down the path of sin. They need to repent, and change direction.

By the way, the truest way to create in men a longing for Jesus is to evoke the penitent consciousness of sin. The preacher of guilt and repentance is the herald of the bringer of pardon and purity. When men are roused to believe in judgment, and to realize their own evil, they are ready to listen to the blessed news of a Savior from sin and its curse. The Christ whom John heralds is the Christ that men need.

Now what was new and startling was not that he baptized, for the people were already acquainted with the baptism of proselytes, but rather that this rite, being the sign and seal of a fundamental transformation of mind, heart, and life, was required even of the children of Abraham. Even they needed to repent. The stepping down into the Jordan and later stepping up out of it reminded them that the old sinful self must be buried & left behind so that those baptized may rise to newness of life.

John proclaimed that such repentance could lead to the forgiveness of sin that the Messiah would bring. John preached repentance and baptized unto (Gk. *eis*) remission for sins, not for remission of sins. The word "forgiveness" means sending away. It is a very comforting expression, reminding one of such passages as Lev.16, where Israel was instructed to take two

goats, one was slain for the sins of the people, and on the head of the other, they were to confess their sins, and send it away into the wilderness. This also reminds us of Ps. 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us." That removal of sin necessitated the shedding of the blood of the Lamb was taught by John the Baptist himself (John 1:29).

Another reason why we believe John fulfilled the prophecy is because:

3. He Was Successful - In v.5 we read, "Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins." It is clear that John's preaching arrested the attention of the whole Jewish people, and created an excitement all over Palestine. As a result, multitudes went out to see and hear John. The Baptist welcomed multitudes, not only men, but also women (Matt. 21:31, 32). There must have been thousands upon thousands of people, one crowd replacing another, and then still another, and another, etc. There was a longing in the people for the Messiah, and they sensed that John could well be the forerunner of the Messiah.

By the way, this just goes to prove that you don't have to have a good location to have a growing church. What is most important is that God is at work! If you have someone preaching the Word of God like John the Baptist did, you will have people come from miles around to hear such preaching!

4. He Fit the Image of a Prophet – In v.6 we read, "Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist..." In his dress, manner of life, and message of repentance, John identified with Elijah. After all, God promised in Mal. 4:5 that he would send Elijah. Such rugged apparel may be regarded as symbolic of the Prophetic office (Zech 13:4; cf. 1 Sam. 28:14). Jesus makes special mention of the fact that John did not wear fine clothes (Matt. 11:8).

John's food was as simple as was his clothing. Since he preached in a wilderness, there wasn't an abundance of food, so he lived off the land. So what did he eat? The last of v.6 says "he ate locusts and wild honey." It is entirely possible that one shudders to think of actually eating them. Yet it was not as bad as it seems. He probably pulled off their heads, legs, and wings, and roasted or baked their bodies, and added a little salt. Nevertheless, it is clear from Lev.11:22 that the Lord permitted or even encouraged the Israelites to eat four kinds of insects. Even today certain Arabian tribes relish them. I'm sure the locusts tasted better with another staple of his diet: honey. It is, however, not necessary to conclude that v.6 gives us a complete summary of the Baptist's diet. The main point is that by means of his simple mode of life, evident with respect to both food and clothing, he was a living protest against all selfishness and self-indulgence.

To me, the evidence is overwhelming that John the Baptist was indeed the forerunner of the Messiah. Why would he do what he did, & live as he did, & preach as he did unless God gave him such a special mission? That means 2 things: First, since he was a prophet of God, we should listen to him. Secondly, that means that the Messiah came within his lifetime, or certainly shortly after he preached & baptized. That in turn gives strong evidence that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah that God promised to send!

B. His Witness Concerning Jesus – This great prophet that God raised up, what did He say about Jesus?

1. He Is Far Greater Than Himself – As we see from v.7, John preached, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose." John was a great preacher. He feared no one in his preaching. He was indeed strong. Yet

John says that the One coming after him was far greater. In order to emphasize this contrast between himself and his Superior, John uses an illustration borrowed from the custom prevailing at the time, namely, that when, weary of travel and with dusty sandals, a master would return home, his menial servant or slave would try in every way to make him comfortable. He would of course render this same service to his master's honored guests. One item of service rendered, namely, that of untying or unlacing the honored person's dusty sandals and removing them. It was necessary for John to draw this contrast between himself and his Master, for soon the people were wondering whether perhaps the Baptist might not himself be the Christ (Luke 3:15; cf. John 1:19,20; 3:25-36).

Just as John understood his place in reference to Jesus, even so we should humbly serve Jesus, and obey His every command.

2. He Has a Greater Baptism – In v.8 he preached, “I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” John was able to perform only the outward rite of baptism with water. But Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Jesus fulfilled this prophecy when He sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, shortly after His ascension to heaven. As we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and filled by the Holy Spirit, we are filled with a new power for living right. We have a new power to serve the Lord.

Is there any evidence in your life that you have had this baptism of the Spirit?

IV. THE WITNESS OF THE GODHEAD

Gloriously the Trinity here is revealed. We see here God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Notice the testimony of each person of the Godhead:

A. Jesus Witness Concerning His Saving Work – In v.9 we read, “It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.” The question may be asked, “Since Jesus was sinless, and the water of baptism symbolized the necessity of the removal of sin, how then was it possible for the Sinless One to submit to baptism?” The simplest answer may very well be the best. In baptism we identify with Jesus. We acknowledge that we are followers of Jesus. Even so in baptism, Jesus identified with us in every way, even to the point of taking upon Himself our sin. He was willing to fulfill the prophecy of Isa. 53:6, “All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” John the Baptist knew that was the mission of Jesus. He said of Jesus in John 1:29, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” It would appear, therefore, that the demand of Jesus to be baptized by John signified his solemn resolution to take upon himself the guilt of those for whom he was going to die.

B. The Holy Spirit's Witness – In v.10 we read, “And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.” This could be translated “coming up from the water.” As John raised him up out of the water, Jesus saw heavens suddenly split open, and from that opening Jesus saw the Spirit descend upon him. Thus, the Holy Spirit was bearing witness that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior God promised to send.

Notice that the Spirit descended upon Him “like a dove.” Why was this third person of the Trinity represented by a dove? Probably to indicate the purity, gentleness, peacefulness, and graciousness which characteristically mark the Holy Spirit.

The symbol of the dove may also be regarded as a prophecy of the gentleness of the Son. Jesus came to conquer by meekness, and reign by the omnipotence of love. He did not come the

first time to be a conquering King, but a gentle, loving Savior. While that Spirit's descent was partly for Jesus' sake, it was for others too; for John himself tells us in John 1 that the sign had been told him beforehand, and that it was his sight of the descending dove which heightened his thoughts and gave a new turn to his testimony, leading him to know and to show "that this is the Son of God."

Besides adding a witness to Jesus, the anointing of the Spirit had another purpose. The divine Son at His Incarnation adopted the human nature, which is in need of, and capable of being strengthened. Thus qualified He, as divine and human Mediator, was enabled to function in his threefold office as Prophet, Priest, and King.

If Jesus needed strengthening, how much more do we need the Holy Spirit!

C. The Father's Witness – In v.11 we read, "Then a voice came from heaven, 'You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" In the quiet recess of eternity the Son was the object of the Father's inexhaustible delight. The Son's reaffirmation, by means of Baptism, of His purpose to shed His blood for a world lost in sin did nothing to diminish that love. In fact, the Father delighted in the Son's obedience. These words proclaimed the Father's full and complete approval of Christ's mission to seek and save the lost. No doubt the Father's voice heightened our Lord's own consciousness of His divinity and His mission. The Father's announcement from heaven reminds us of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1.

How filled with comfort this paragraph, for it not only indicates that the Son loves His followers enough to suffer the pangs of hell in their stead, but that also the Spirit fully cooperates by strengthening Him for this very task, and that the Father, instead of frowning upon the One who undertakes it, is so very pleased with him that he must needs rend asunder the very heavens, that His voice of delightful approval may be heard on earth. All three are equally interested in our salvation, and the three are One.

Conclusion: So as Mark opens his gospel, we see 4 witnesses to the fact that Jesus is the Savior. We have Mark's testimony. We have the testimony of Scripture. We have the testimony of John the Baptist. And we have the 3-fold testimony of the Godhead. God said long ago that at the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses everything shall be established. Well we have 4 witnesses confirming that Jesus is the Son of God, and Savior of mankind.

What do you think of Jesus? Do you believe that He is the Savior who died for our sins? Do you believe that He is the Son of God? If so, have you repented of your sin and placed your faith in Jesus as Savior? Is there any evidence that you have received the Holy Spirit? If not, I call upon you to repent, and believe in Jesus today. Then you need to follow the Lord in baptism. He was baptized for you, not only in water, but in death itself. Surely you should be willing to follow Him in baptism.

Those of us who are Christians need to follow Mark's example, and share the good news about Jesus with others. Will you do that?

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); Alexander Maclaren (not including sermon on 1:1), *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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