

“Follow: Jesus, the Son of God”

Mark 1:1-8

Happy New Year! It's 2021, and something tells me that there are a lot of people out there looking forward to a fresh start!

Is anyone ready for a fresh start?!

Who here knows the value of a fresh start? We can think about this from a technological perspective. Like it or not, I think most of us have upped our tech prowess over the past year. One of the great challenges of quarantine LIFE, especially for parents, has been mastering the art and science of remote education.

One morning Jordyn's teacher was breaking up and my immediate thought (can you identify?) was: there must be something wrong with Miss Minkin's connection, but then it dawned on me, as she seemed to continue teaching without skipping a beat, that it was our connection. I quickly remembered that not only did we have Parker on a laptop, Kesed on a laptop, and Jordyn on a laptop, we also had TITUS on the FIRE TV - lol. Not to mention my phone, Marsha's phone, my old phone, and 3 kindles connected. What was happening? There was too much data being streamed over our WIFI, so we needed to eliminate the clutter to clear the connection.

This is the same phenomenon I've discovered with RESTARTing my computer. Admittedly, most days I do not shut down my computer, so it simply goes into sleep mode. Then the next day I pick up where I left off, BUT when you do that for TOO MANY DAYS, your computer will have too much data in its RAM (Random Access Memory), which means it needs to be flushed out by a RESTART.

That's what so many of us need spiritually. We need a restart, and let me tell you something here today, our GOD specializes in RESTARTS!!

To do so we are going to begin a 44 week journey, spanning the length of 2021, in the Gospel of Mark!

Intro to the Gospel of Mark

- Mark is the shortest of the four gospels, and it moves at a rapid pace! The word “immediately,” which keeps the narrative moving” is used 41 times, [not always meaning “at once,”]. We should remember the book was primarily heard, not read, for centuries. It takes about an hour and half to read or listen to the book, but we will work carefully through these words across 44 weeks this year.
- **Author: John Mark (Acts 12:25; 1 Pet. 5:13)**
 - The early church and modern scholarship agree a man named John Mark penned these words. This is the same Mark spoken of in Acts 12:12, whose mother hosted a prayer meeting for Peter's release from prison.
 - Mark was also the cousin of Barnabas and joined him on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). That eventually led to a strategic separation between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41) because Mark returned home, but he was later reunited with Paul (2 Timothy 4:11).
 - Finally, the early church historian Papias tells us: “Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote down accurately, but not in order, all the he remembered of the things said and done by the Lord.” (Strauss). In other words, Peter sourced Mark's writing. This is pointed to in 1 Peter 5:13 where Peter says: “She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.” This statement also points to two other details for our attention.
- **Date: mid-60s A.D.**
 - Most modern scholars believe Mark was the first gospel recorded, dated in the mid-60s AD, though some believe it could have been as early as the late 40s!
 - Peter's comment about Babylon points to this writing taking place in Rome, addressing a primarily Gentile (or non-Jewish) audience.

- **Audience: Roman (primarily Gentile)**
 - Peter penned this good news about Jesus to encourage Gentile followers of Jesus, no doubt facing various forms of persecution, and to persuade those yet to believe.
 - His primary purpose is found in the opening words of the book...
- **Purpose: to present “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God.” (1:1)**
 - The importance of verse 1 cannot be overstated! Mark penned his gospel as a written form of the oral preaching and teaching of the early church.
 - The point this: Mark’s gospel is not primarily a historical biography of Jesus of Nazareth, but an announcement of good news meant to ignite an explosion of life and joy in the hearts of everyone who reads it, which highlights the secondary purpose of the writing.
 - It is a narrative call to discipleship, a summons for everyone to make the choice to FOLLOW Jesus as the supreme treasure of their life.
 - As we will see, the first half highlights the authority of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (1:1-8:21). The second half (8:22-16:8) shows us his power and victory comes through suffering and the Way of the Cross.

Read Mark 1:1-8

This passage serves as the prologue to Mark. In it, we find three key truths concerning the remarkably good news that set the tone for our journey with Jesus in 2021. First....

1. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (1:1).

Verse 1 provides the purpose statement of the entire book. That means every section and every story reveal Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That’s why Mark calls it “the gospel.”

GOSPEL

- The greek word is “*euangelion*,” which means good news. It refers to a joyful announcement, news that brings gladness and delight! The word was used in non-religious contexts to refer to “history-making, life-shaping news, as opposed to just daily news.” Tim Keller (*Jesus the King*)
- Mark borrows this word from its Old Testament origins. It is used in Isaiah (see 40:9, 52:7, and 61:1) to announce God’s coming salvation, first to the exiles in Babylonian and Assyrian captivity, but then ultimately to all of God’s people when Jesus returns to deliver our final salvation in the new heavens and new earth.
- This news was EXPLOSIVE! as if the world were eradicated of COVID by sunset, or if scientists discovered the cure for cancer, alleviating the suffering and cause of death of billions.

BUT THIS NEWS IS SO MUCH BIGGER. It announces eternal salvation, personal and cosmic! We see this in his name. It is the gospel “OF Jesus Christ” or “about Jesus Christ.”

JESUS

- Jesus (is the Greek version of the common Hebrew name, “Yehoshua,” meaning “Yahweh is salvation.” “God saves”).
- This book zeroes in on ONE PERSON. His name is Jesus. He is the...

CHRIST (MESSIAH)

- The word “Christ” means “Messiah.” It functions as both a title and a name.
- As title, it refers to the coming king, the anointed one who would restore the “Davidic monarchy” and reign forever as promised all throughout the Old Testament. (see Ps. 110:1; Isa. 7:14; 9:1–7; 11:1; Jer. 33:14–26; Ezek. 17:22–24; Mic. 5:1–4; Zech. 9:9–10).

- Yet... as Grant Osbourne insightfully points out: “The throne whereupon Jesus becomes Davidic Messiah is the cross.” - Grant Osbourne
- In other words, Jesus did not come to establish an earthly kingdom at his first coming. That will happen at his second coming, which explains one of the key features of Mark’s gospel, known as “the messianic secret.” Over and over again, Jesus tried to conceal or downplay his identity because he knew the people would try to make him an earthly king (see John 6:15).
- But “Christ” also became part of Jesus’ name and identity. Who is Jesus of Nazareth? He is the Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah of God!
- In 1:1 it functions primarily as a name (Stein), but the next six times it points to his title as the coming, anointed one (8:29 - Peter’s confession, 9:41, 12:35, 13:21-22, 14:61, AND 15:32)!
- But Jesus is not only the Christ. He is the...

SON OF GOD

- As the Son of God, he is defined by his unique sonship, with God as his Father. This will be highlighted for us immediately next week when we see Jesus baptized.
- In the Judaism of the day, God’s son was another title for the Messiah. - N.T. Wright

The rest of the book will show us disciples and crowds and religious leaders and even demons wrestling with the truths of verse 1, but there is something else.

- In the context of Roman imperialism, there is little doubt Mark loaded these words with a subversive punch.
- You say, “Tanner, what are you talking about?” In the Ancient Greek city of Priene, a stone inscription was discovered in 1868, hailing the birth of Augustus Caesar, which said: “the birthday of our god signaled the beginning of good news for the world.”
- It seems Mark is taking dead aim at the greatest claim in the Roman Empire, by saying there is a new King, the true Christ, the true Son of God with bigger and better news for the entire world! He has arrived in the person of Jesus Christ!

As Kim Huat Tan says in his commentary: “...right from the very start, the alert reader would perceive that a contrast—indeed, a contest—is being set up between Augustus Caesar and Jesus Christ, between Rome and the Christian Church.

T: #1 - Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. #2...

2. Jesus brings a better way (1:2-6).

Verse 2 begins by saying... “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet...” Mark highlights the continuity between Christianity and Judaism and argues that Jesus is the fulfillment of all God’s promises! Interestingly this is the only fulfillment passage in Mark’s gospel, in contrast to the 11 found in Matthew. However, the importance is seen by its placement. Everything we encounter for the next 16 chapters reveal Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s divine plan.

The quotation of Isaiah 40 in verses 2 & 3 is actually a collection of three related OT prophecies, a common practice in Mark’s day. They tell of a messenger (introduced in verse 4 as John the Baptist) and the Messiah who is the LORD (a clear statement of the divinity of Jesus in the first 2 sentences!). Let’s take them one by one.

Exodus 23:20

- The opening of the quotation comes from Exodus 23:20. “Behold, I send an angel (or messenger) before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.”).

- John the Baptist is the messenger sent by God who will go before Jesus to clear the path, just as God's presence went before Israel in the wilderness.
- This also likely points us to Jesus coming as the True Israel who will lead us on a greater exodus to a better promised land.
- Then we hear words echo from...

Malachi 3:1

- Also speaking of a messenger: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me."
- But then we have the key text, which is why Mark references Isaiah, from...

Isaiah 40:3

- Isaiah 40 begins with four key words: "Comfort, comfort my people." Why? Israel had been carried away in Babylonian captivity.
- The way of the LORD was a highway leading HOME from exile. That's why Isaiah 40:4 says, "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill made low."
- Every obstacle must be removed! Think about it.
 - The true and greater Exodus to the promised land will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
 - The true and greater return home from exile will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
 - These are massively important, tone setting words.
- John prepares this highway back by calling people to turn back to God! He was a voice crying: "Get your life right with God. Don't waste time. Stop messing around. Life is short and eternity is long. God made you for a relationship with himself!"

Mark is inviting us, you here TODAY, to the better way of Jesus, the way of life, the way of hope and peace.

John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins is a clear call to return to God in whole-hearted devotion. That's what repentance means (turning around from "a change of mind"). In other words, repentance is a rational choice, a willful decision to follow God's ways.

- Verses 4-5 say people were being baptized in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.
- There was a verbal confession and commitment. "God, I've wronged you. I've chased after other things I treated as more valuable. By the way I spent my time and my money, where I put my affection and allegiance, I worshiped other things rather than you! Forgive me for my pride, my lust, my greed, my selfishness, my unrighteousness, my idolatry."
- And their confession was depicted in dramatic and experiential form . . . Baptism was an act of total immersion in water, which represented cleansing forgiveness before God. This is also likely a visible allusion to the crossing of the Red Sea when the people of Israel came through the water where God delivered them into freedom from the Egyptians.

Notice that "*all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem*" were going out to John. It seems John's popularity could not be any greater. This Elijah-like figure, was a new prophet gaining an unprecedented reputation, which makes his statement in vv 7-8 all the more powerful.

T: *Read 7-8.* Not only is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. Not only does Jesus bring a better way. . . .

3. Jesus immerses his followers in the Spirit (1:7-8).

The key word here is "mightier." Some translations say "greater." (NLT, LEB) Some say "more powerful." (HCSB, NRSV) We know from the other gospels that people wondered if John the Baptist was the Messiah, but these two statements by John reveal Jesus' superiority.

How great is Jesus?

- John says, "He's so great, I'm not even worthy to perform one of the lowliest tasks in society by taking the sandals off his feet." I'm not worthy to be his servant.
- Let's not forget, Jesus said no woman had ever birthed someone greater than John.

How great is Jesus?

- John says, "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."
- John the Baptizer says there's another and greater Baptizer! He will baptize you, he will immerse you, and fill you with the Holy Spirit.
- What is he saying? Jesus will immerse you with God's very presence, God himself, when he sends the third person of the Trinity to dwell in you!
- Baptism of the Spirit was a mark of the messianic age as we see in Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 36:25-27, and Joel 2:28. But every Jew knew that only God would send his Spirit, marking the new covenant relationship between God and his people.
- These opening verses provide multiple implicit claims to the divinity of Christ.

T: In these two statements, John the Baptist reveals Jesus is superior in his identity and work. He is mightier. He is greater! And Mark wants us to wrestle with the same truths.

Conclusion:

Are you ready to journey with Jesus in 2021?

These opening verses call us to a crisis of decision. These words were not primarily subversive to Roman rule. They were and ARE subversive to every human heart. We want autonomy. We want to control our lives, but Jesus came to be King.

Have you recognized the superiority of Jesus? Have you confessed that he is the greatest in heaven and earth? the greatest in your life? Have you chosen to follow his better way?

As we begin our journey through Mark and as we begin this new year, here's my appeal to you (not matter where you are in the your spiritual journey).

The Point: Receive the astounding good news and follow Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

If you've never experienced the cleansing forgiveness that comes through Jesus and his sacrificial death on the cross... if you've never been immersed in the very presence of God, start that journey - NOW, TODAY!

If you have been journeying with Jesus, it's time to go deeper. It's time to walk closer with him. He is worthy. He brings the change our hearts long for. Today is an opportunity to renew your relationship with God through Jesus.

PRAYER