

Mark 1:1-11

From Wilderness to Revelation

Good morning, it is so wonderful to be here with you all today...

We are going to begin an action-packed Gospel this morning, the Gospel of Mark.

Please make your way there...

It is the second Gospel record in your Bible...

The four Gospels were all written with different approaches and different audiences in mind.

3 of them are more similar, called the synoptic Gospels, because they display some degree of similarity in their content, language, and even the arrangement of the story told.

John stands alone and is not grouped with the other three. He wrote with all of humanity in mind, focusing on the Deity of Jesus and presenting Him as the Creator, Sustainer, and Savior of the World.

We usually tell a new believer to start in John.

Matthew wrote his work for the Jewish reader, and his focus was to present Jesus as their Messiah, the fulfillment of their Old Testament prophecies.

Luke actually wrote his work for the Greek reader... and focused on Jesus's humanity, and presented Him as the Perfect Man and Savior.

When you read through the Four Gospels, you get a look at Jesus from many different angles.

Mark is pretty neat here; he is writing with the Romans in mind.

He may even have written this while in Rome.

They were action-oriented, really type-A people, and quick, and they placed a lot of value on performance.

Mark will focus on the life and ministry of Jesus, and this will be somewhat of a Gospel of Deeds...

There is very little dialogue compared to the other records.

Mark only records five parables from Jesus's teachings.

Yet he records 19 miracles...

Jesus is seen as busy, moving from one ministry to another.

Mark uses the word "immediately" 36 times, and it appears 8 times here in Chapter 1.

The key verse for this Gospel is

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

We will see Jesus as a Servant in this Gospel...

Now, the authorship is the last thing we talk about before getting into our verses.

John Mark, the author, was Barnabas's cousin...

Acts 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

We saw him as we ended Colossians...

Col 4:10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him),

Now, this is pretty important: there was a significant split between Paul and Barnabas when they set out on their second missionary journey.

Paul refused to go with Mark, who was not able to cut it earlier in the ministry... Barnabas the encourager thought they should show some Grace and give him a chance...

So Paul went off with Silas, and Barnabas with Mark.

At the end of Paul's life, we see that reconciliation had taken place...

2 Tim 4:11 Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.

Now, many scholars believe Peter was the one who dictated much of this record to Mark.

Mark was a son in the faith to Peter... as recorded in 1 Peter 5:13...

This was also most likely the first Gospel, written around AD 50...

Mark was not a disciple, but a teenager when Jesus ministered...

Many believe that since Mark is the only one with this vague reference in his record, it must be him...

Mark 14:51-52 Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around *his* naked *body*. And the young men laid hold of him, **52** and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

It is so obscure and strange that it is as though Mark was putting his own little part into the story.

So, that is our introduction into the Gospel...

Let's pray... and we will look at the first eleven verses.

In ancient times, when a royal visitor came into a city, he did not come unannounced.

Messengers would be sent ahead of him, sometimes days or weeks ahead.

Of course, their job was simple, but urgent:

“The king is coming!”

The roads then would be cleared.

The potholes would be filled in.

Crooked paths would be made straight.

All the trash and debris were removed.

Why? Because you do not welcome a king in your city with neglect, you need to prepare for his arrival.

There would be entire communities that would stop what they were doing to get ready.

The condition of the road said something about how much they valued the king.

This is exactly the picture we step into here in the opening of Mark's Gospel.

Before we ever see Jesus preach a sermon, before we see Him perform a miracle, before the cross is even hinted at, there is a voice.

It comes from a wild man in the wilderness.

He is wearing camel's hair and has a strange diet: locusts and wild honey.

He was not creating a following, building a platform, or seeking attention; he was preparing the people's hearts.

Like those ancient messengers, John the Baptist is crying out, "Get the road ready. The King is coming."

But the road he is talking about is not dirt and stone.

It is the human heart.

And we will be left with this question this morning.

If Jesus were to walk into our lives today, would the road be ready?

Are there places that are still crooked, filled with trash, and left neglected?

Mark does not just ease us into the story; he brings us right into the action.

The King has come, heaven is opened, and the Father speaks.

The text will challenge us today to search within ourselves to know whether we are prepared to receive Him.

Look now at verse 1...

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

(Matt 3:1-12; Luke 3:1-20; John 1:19-28)

1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Right from the start, Mark looks at the Son of God, whereas the other two synoptic Gospels, Luke and Matthew, begin with a Genealogy of Jesus.

Mark sees the Servant, Jesus, and does not see a need for a long list of names to establish a pedigree.

No one cared where a servant was from, who their mother or father was; they were there to serve.

Mark claims here that this message is the Gospel, which is Good News, the Good News about Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.

Now, if you are not a follower of Jesus today, this should cause you to perk up a little here, Mark is addressing you.

He is saying this is the beginning of the Good News, something he wants to share with someone who needs to hear it.

Jesus is the Author of Salvation. His story, the Life, Ministry, Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus, is the source of this Good News...

This is the beginning of the Gospel...

Next Mark writes... in verse 2...

2 As it is written in the Prophets:

*"Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You."*

3 *'The voice of one crying in the wilderness:*

*'Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make His paths straight.'"*

Mark starts his Gospel message with the Word of God...

He looks to the Old Testament, which would have been his Bible at that time, and there the prophet Malachi had foretold...

Mal 3:1 *"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me.*

Also... Isaiah said in...

Isa 40:3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the
desert A highway for our God.

Mark knew these prophecies were fulfilled in
someone special...

Look at verse 4 now...

4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and
preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission
of sins. **5** 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.

Seemingly, out of nowhere, John bursts on the
scene...

It is interesting in our Western thinking, in our
Western commentaries on this mysterious man, John
is hard to figure out...

But when you are in Israel, it is not so difficult...

My wife just told me, “Babe, we have not all been to Israel, and maybe talking like we have is not so beneficial.”

Her constructive criticism is typically well received, and it was only this week she told me that one, so, just this once, since it is so fresh, I need you all to go there with one more time... then... I will take her note to heart...

When you are in the wilderness of Judea, and we go to the place where John the Baptist was baptizing, it is about a 30-minute camel ride and a couple of hours' walk from the Qumran Caves...

They are line of sight... and this is important... because I believe it tells us John the Baptist didn't just come out of nowhere...

The Qumran Community would have been thriving at that time, a group of disgruntled priestly Jews who created an ascetic way of life.

They have dug up the ruins of this community... When they found the Dead Sea Scrolls, they also

discovered the ruins of this community, and this is perhaps why our modern scholarship doesn't speak to this man's origins; the ruins were only excavated in 1949...

This is a more recent discovery...

And they have baptismals for ritual washings throughout the ruins.

They have found scrolls containing their writings, such as the Rule of Community, and much of John the Baptist's lifestyle is found in that Rule and way of life.

The clothes he wore, the foods he ate were all part of their way.

The Rule of the Community 5:16 states they are not to receive any food or clothing from outside the group.

John preached the same apocalyptic message that was found in the Qumran community. They both spoke of the end of the present age.

Interesting that even then, people were watching the geopolitical movements and thinking, “This has to be the end.”

And this is the connecting piece for me: many members were priests associated with the Temple, and where did John’s father receive his vision? While serving in the Temple, in the Gospel of Luke.

Remember, Zacharias and Elizabeth were very old in age when she conceived... so they would have died when their child was young, as life expectancy was very young in the first century. Roughly 50 years old...

So, handing John off to this community makes sense, especially after their own encounter with God, and perhaps disillusionment with the established religion at the Temple.

Of course, God separates John for a unique calling at some point; he is not using the Qumran baptismal for his ministry, but the Jordan River, and his message becomes unique to his ministry of heralding in the Messiah.

But the Qumranites did call the Temple priests "Brood of Vipers" as well; the difference is that John felt compelled to reach people for God, whereas the Community was isolationist.

When I teach this, even while standing there in the Judean wilderness, people get upset with me because they did not read it in MacArthur's commentary, or because they have never seen it before...

And I will tell them, consider where you are standing... and they will say, "Israel."

So you are standing in the place where this all happened... I will point to the ruins... when were those dated? "Well, the first century, when Jesus walked this earth."

So that community was thriving and active until Rome destroyed it around AD 70? "Yes."

Where did we get baptized yesterday? And they will look down the Judean Desert toward the Jordan River, not too far down the way, and point, "right there where John baptized Jesus."

So, in this small place, you are telling me that with all those connections I made with John and this community, John did not have a connection with them because it is not mentioned in our American literature?

This is the pride of American thinking... we think our scholarship is greater than obvious facts sitting right before your eyes.

Mark says John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins... Which was something the Qumranites did as well...

John was not alone out there in the wilderness, but he did separate from them at some point... but there was a community out there with him...

Baptism was not his only ministry; he also preached a message of repentance...

Matthew records John preaching, **Matthew 3:2**
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

Luke records John calling the religious leaders “the brood of vipers ” or “ the sons of Satan, and calling them to show fruits worthy of repentance.

John was special from birth, being filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb.

Now, the Word of God had come upon him, and his powerful ministry had begun.

He was leveling the ground for the coming King Jesus...

Preparing the hearts by preaching repentance from sin.

I imagine John the Baptist would have had a hard time finding a pulpit to preach in today... he was not very sensitive to people’s feelings at all.

He believed the message of sin and repentance to be from God, so much so that the first words recorded from his ministry were to repent.

What does this word mean?

It is more than feeling bad inside about doing something wrong.

Anyone can feel bad, guilty, or even remorseful after doing something terrible, without repentance involved.

Feelings have nothing to do with repentance...

When a person repents, it means they turn completely in the other direction.

We turn to God from our sin, and we walk with Him.

John's message of repentance leveled the ground of the human heart... all have sinned... and that is the starting place of the Gospel message.

Rom. 3:10 "There is none righteous, no, not one;"

Rom. 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Rom. 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Because of this reality in all of us, there is a need for repentance, no matter what your background.

All of humanity comes to the cross on level ground, and repentance must happen.

This is an action; true repentance is a change in direction...

John, filled with the Holy Spirit, had this amazing anointing upon his preaching and ministry.

Jesus made an incredible statement about him.

Matt 11:11a “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist;”

John was the greatest, and people journeyed from miles and miles in those days.

They knew something was special about him...

He spoke with such clarity and authority.

Jesus reminded them that John was God’s chosen ambassador... he was not a man-pleaser, and would

never bow to the pressures of what the culture put on him.

He served as a prophet, being the Messiah's forerunner, and because of this, he was the greatest of the prophets.

The amazing thing is that Jesus would continue to say...

Matthew 11:11b but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

As great as John was, he was not born again under this New Covenant that you and I are privileged to be under.

John would die before Jesus completed the work we celebrated last week, the work of redemption completed on the cross and in the empty tomb.

And what we can access in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, being Born Again today, is an even more powerful ministry.

God has anointed us, His Church, to work in this world, to draw others to His Son Jesus Christ.

It was awesome to see what He did through the outreaches last week, and who He drew into this place last Sunday...

God is using you all pretty amazingly... today we will meet with the team going to Ukraine...

I see throughout the week, the ministry happening to the community through this place... more and more... this Church is looking like a mission more than a Church building...

You all are being used so powerfully by the Spirit of God for His incredible working of reaching the lost...

We have our own wilderness ministry here in the Mojave Desert...

So, the response for John was great from the people all around Judea and Jerusalem, they were coming to be baptized in the muddy Jordan River.

Look at verse 6...

6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

Listen, I love John... He is a man who did not care what the established religion was doing.

He was a PK, a pastor's kid... and the ministry standards would not be his...

What John did was for the Lord, and Him alone...

He did nothing to draw the crowds...

He did not try to dress like the culture to fit into it.

And this is more than just a man dressing casually to preach...

There were Old Testament prophecies foretelling that Elijah would come before Jesus's ministry began.

Elijah is described as in **2 Kings 1:8 "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist."**

John is the fulfillment of the prophetic forerunner.

Now, something I love about John's ministry is that he will not be content with allowing people to be focused on him and his ministry.

This is a great model for anyone and any ministry...
get people looking as quickly as possible to Jesus...
never to us...

Verse 7...

7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. **8** I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In ancient Israel, a disciple of a teacher would serve their rabbi by handling the menial tasks.

But one thing those students would not do is lose the sandals from their teacher's feet... nope... that was the lowest job, reserved for the lowest slave in the room.

In relation to Jesus, John saw himself as the lowest, not even worthy to unbuckle His sandal.

What an incredible heart to have in ministry.

The minister is actually getting out of the way so that people can see Jesus.

That is something to think about in the church climate we have among us today.

Goodness, we want to be seen... look over here... look at me, my ministry... why are people going to them... oh, it just is not right...

John the Baptist would even be tested in this... Jesus's ministry would eventually take off... and his disciples would bring this concern to him...

John 3:26 “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified – behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”

John's ministry had been successful, growing; his baptisms were many.

John has this loyal following, and they are attentive to what is happening.

It is exciting to be a part of it all as people's lives are being changed and touched by God... seeing these sinners repent was amazing.

This happens when the ministry starts jamming, things get exciting, people start adding, energy starts building... Some people will jump on only when it is like that...

They like the attention; they want attention, so they will go where attention is...

Rarely do people do it backward... I trip out on that kind of thing... We have pastors here with their wives jumped into this work with Jess and me from bigger works, and they came to smaller...

Believing they heard the Lord... and to me, that speaks volumes about motive in the ministry...

Most are drawn to something bigger and better, where they will get greater notoriety.

John's disciples see Jesus's ministry, He is doing the miracles, and a different kind of authority is being

shown in His teachings, greater authority, and more crowds are being drawn to Him...

John's faithful friends are concerned about his reputation.

And we can learn a lot from John's response in **John 3:27-30** "A man can receive nothing unless it is given to him from heaven. You yourself bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him,' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

John does not mind getting out of the way...

John's whole purpose and reason for ministering was to prepare for the One who would come after him.

The One with the Greater Ministry.

The One who would baptize with the power of the Holy Spirit.

The main ministry of the Holy Spirit is to draw us to our need for Jesus.

Think about that: if the Holy Spirit's purpose is to draw people to Jesus, when we are under His Power and influence, shouldn't we be concerned about drawing people to Him, not drawing attention to ourselves?

John had this understanding, and God used him powerfully.

He was willing to decrease, and the Bible teaches that if you

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Listen, we can never fall into the trap that it is because of us that wonderful things are happening in the Church.

He must increase, we must decrease all the more.

So, let's close with these verses, 9-11...

John Baptizes Jesus

(Matt 3:13-17; Luke 3:21,22; John 1:29-34)

9 It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. **11** Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

John was pointing them to Jesus, who ultimately came to be baptized by him.

John was reluctant... why would a sinless Man need to be baptized... Baptism is this outward sign of an inward transformation...

But Jesus did not need to repent of sins, no transformation needed...

His baptism was one of identification... He came to identify with us, with humanity, and He is modeling for all who would believe, the importance of Baptism, yet also showing it is not water that saves you.

It is by Grace, and through Faith alone...

We are told here, “Immediately coming up from the water, the Father speaks, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

God the Father centers all attention on Jesus. He reveals the Son, and as we will see next time, His ministry will begin here on earth.

Notice, too, that all three members of the Godhead are present at the baptism of Jesus.

The Father speaks to the Son – Jesus, the Son is being baptized – and the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove.

We worship a Triune God, and as all three members of the Godhead were present at the baptism of Christ, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all part of your salvation as well.

You believe in Jesus as your Savior, as He did all that was necessary for us to find salvation through His death on the Cross, and through His burial and Resurrection.

Yet, it was the Father's Love for you and me that sent Him.

Jesus testified to this in **John 3:16,17** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Then, before He left this world, Jesus gave this wonderful promise...

John 16:7-8 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. **8** And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

They all three work actively in bringing us salvation.

The Father directs us to His Son, and the Spirit highlights Jesus so that none of us is without revelation.

Now, at the beginning of Mark, everything started quickly... but we cannot miss what happened.

The wild man in the wilderness has spoken.

He gave a call to repentance.

And then suddenly... Jesus steps into the water.

No warning or announcement from men.

There was no fanfare or groupies...

Just simple obedience.

And as He comes up out of the Jordan, heaven is torn wide open.

The Spirit descends, the Father speaks...

“You are my beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.”

The King has come... the Son has been declared... His mission here on earth has begun...

The question is not about John anymore; really, it is about us.

John prepared the way then, but what are we doing with Him today?

The preparation is done through repentance...

Turning from... this morning in our Daily Manna, we read the story of the Prodigal Son, and it reminded me of a story I heard a while ago.

It is in the book *The Father Heart of God* by Floyd McClung...

I love this story. I used to keep a short version of it in my Bible at all times to be reminded of the Heart of God.

The story is about a young man from Thailand named Sawat.

The story begins...

Sawat had disgraced his family and dishonored his father's name. He had come to Bangkok to escape the

dullness of village life. He found excitement, and while he prospered in his sordid lifestyle, he found popularity.

When he first arrived, he had visited a hotel unlike any he had ever seen. Every room had a window facing into the hallway, and in every room sat a girl....

That visit began Sawat's venture into Bangkok's world of prostitution. It began innocently enough, but he was quickly caught like a small piece of wood in a raging river. Its force was too powerful and swift for him, the current too strong.

Soon, he was selling opium to customers and propositioning tourists in the hotels.

Then the bottom dropped out of his world: He hit a string of bad luck. He was robbed, and while trying to climb back to the top, he was arrested. The word went out in the underworld that he was a police spy. He finally ended up living in a shanty by the city trash pile.

Sitting in his little shack, he thought about his family – especially his father, a simple Christian man from a

small southern village near the Malaysian border. He remembered his dad's parting words: "I am waiting for you."

He wondered whether his father would still be waiting for him after all he had done to dishonor the family name. Would he be welcome in his home? Word of Sawat's lifestyle had long ago filtered back into the village.

Finally, he devised a plan.

"Dear father," he wrote, "I want to come home, but I don't know if you will receive me after all that I have done. I have sinned greatly, Father. Please forgive me. On Saturday night, I will be on the train that goes through our village. If you are still waiting for me, will you tie a piece of cloth on the po tree in front of our house? Sawat"

On that train ride, he reflected on his life over the past few months and knew that his father had every right to deny him. As the train finally neared the village, he

churned in anxiety. What would he do if there was no cloth on the po tree?

Sitting opposite him was a kind stranger who noticed how nervous his fellow passenger had become. Finally, Sawat could no longer stand the pressure. He blurted out his story in a torrent of words. As they entered the village, Sawat said, “Oh, sir, I cannot bear to look. Can you watch for me? What if my father will not receive me back?”

Sawat buried his face between his knees. “Do you see it, sir? It’s the house with a po tree.”

“Young man, your father did not hang just one piece of cloth. Look! He covered the whole tree with cloth!”

Sawat could hardly believe his eyes. The branches were laden with tiny white squares. In the front yard, his old father jumped up and down, joyously waving a white cloth, then ran in halting steps beside the train.

When it stopped at the little station, he threw his arms around his son, embracing him with tears of joy.

“I’ve been waiting for you!” He exclaimed.

Listen, God has been waiting for some of you; there is no doubt about it.

You have been lost in a whirlwind of bad choices, and God gave you the free will to choose that path.

But this morning, you have the choice to come back to Him.

He knows you. He knows everything about you.

He has seen every tear that has fallen from your face,

This is God's heart for the sinner.

All you need to do is repent, turn from your sin, and enter the loving arms of your Savior... He has been waiting.

Don't reject, don't harden your heart, don't push away that witness...

Embrace Him...

Will you believe in God's Son, Trust God's Son, come to God's Son, Jesus, the Messiah?

Let's pray...