

The Gospel of Mark – Good News of the Servant Messiah Mark 1:1-13 (Expanded Sermon Notes)



As we begin our teaching series through the Gospel of Mark, we will begin by meeting the central figure of the whole thing, Jesus. Mark's opening line might seem benign to us as modern readers, but as we will discover, it is anything but benign. Mark is convinced that there is no one like Jesus, and once we meet him, there is only one right response: to follow him in faith as a disciple. But what should motivate or move us to follow Jesus? Or, what is it about him that will cut through the clutter of our sin (rebellion), culture, and disordered desires? Simply, his character and nature. There is something distinctly different about Jesus, and even from Mark's opening words, we will come to see that. Mark will begin by telling us that to hear about Jesus is good news. In fact, **there is no greater news than that of the good news of Jesus.**

1. Mark – Author, Setting, Purpose

- a. Who is John Mark?
 - i. The Gospel which bears Mark's name is actually anonymous, but an unbroken tradition puts forth as its author John Mark, who would have been in Rome with Peter at the time of the crisis under Nero (cf. 1 Peter 5:13). He was a Jewish Christian whose mother Mary owned a home in Jerusalem where the nucleus of the original Christian community met; it was to this house that Peter came after his miraculous release from prison (Acts 12:12). When Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus returned to Antioch after a visit to Jerusalem on a mission of famine relief they added to their party "John, whose other name was Mark" (Acts 12:25). Since Barnabas was the cousin of Mark (Col. 4:10), it is probable that he persuaded the apostle to take along the younger man. Mark traveled to Cyprus with Barnabas and Paul on a preaching mission to the diaspora synagogues (Acts 13:4), but when they turned to go inland to Asia, Mark returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Paul evidently regarded his action as irresponsible, for he refused to take him along on a projected second journey. A bitter quarrel over this issue disrupted the relationship between the veteran missionaries. Barnabas and Mark returned to Cyprus to strengthen the young churches while Paul and Silas gave oversight to the churches in Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:36–41).¹
 - ii. **The tradition of the early church then affirms consistently that this gospel was written by Mark in Rome as a record of Peter's teaching, most probably while Peter was still alive and therefore not later than the early sixties of the first century.**²

¹ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 21–22.

² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 38.

b. Why did he write his gospel?

- i. **Simply, Mark wrote his Gospel account to help others see Jesus clearly and follow him accordingly.**
- ii. It is appropriate to label Mark a *witness document* that found its creative impulse in the early apostolic preaching of salvation through Jesus Christ. **It is intended to be neither a formal historical treatise nor a biography of Jesus, but proclamation.** The evangelist's intention is grasped when the opening line of the Gospel is paraphrased, "The beginning of the preaching of the joyful tidings." **What follows is an historical narrative oriented around a crisis—the death of Jesus the Messiah.** There are valid reasons for believing that the Gospel was written for people who themselves confronted a crisis not dissimilar to the one faced by Jesus.³
 1. Mark's Gospel has been described as "a passion-narrative with an extended introduction." **The reason that almost half of Mark's sixteen chapters describe the final period of Jesus' ministry** is that it is in his suffering, death and resurrection that the revelation of God in Christ is most clearly seen.⁴
- iii. **Mark's Gospel is a very common form of literature for the time and setting:** In terms of literary form, Mark's book (and those of Matthew, Luke and John) would have seemed to an educated reader in the first century to **fall into roughly the same category as the lives of famous men** pioneered by Cornelius Nepos and soon to reach their most famous expression in the 'Parallel Lives' of Plutarch.⁵

c. What does the word "gospel" mean?

- i. **Good news – to be proclaimed and to be heard.**
 1. This is a fairly unique word to us today that is limited to Christian circles. In Mark's day, and especially in the context of the city of Rome, it would have been a very common idea.
 2. **The term "gospel" or "evangel" was not a word first coined among the Christians.** On the contrary, the concept was significant both in pagan and Jewish culture. Among the Romans it meant "joyful tidings" and was associated with the cult of the emperor, whose birthday, attainment to majority and accession to power were celebrated as festival occasions for the whole world.⁶
- ii. εὐαγγέλιον (euangelion). n. neut. **good news, message of God's salvation. In the NT, refers specifically to the good news about Jesus.** This is easily the most common word in the NT for the saving message about Jesus. The Gospels identify the *euangelion* with Jesus' message about the coming kingdom of God (e.g., Matt 4:23; Mark 1:14–15). This message carries resonances of Isa 40–55—particularly Isa 52:7, which in the Septuagint uses the participle of the related verb εὐαγγελίζομαι (*euangelizomai*, "to proclaim good news"). These resonances imply that Jesus' life established the loving rule of Israel's God on earth as it is in heaven, and thus is the great return of Israel back from exile. The

³ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 1.

⁴ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 2.

⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 5.

⁶ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 42.

word *euangelion* itself is not used in the Septuagint to translate Hebrew בְּשׂוֹרָה (*běšōrā*, “good news”), but the related feminine noun εὐαγγελία (*euangelia*, “good news”) is.⁷

- iii. **Mark is giving us quite a bit to chew on in the opening verse of his Gospel account.** So we need to ask, why is this good news?
 - 1. **Chiefly, it is good news because of the one he tells us about, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**
 - 2. To help us understand the significance of Jesus, Mark will also introduce us to another profound person, John (the Baptist). John is a powerful and popular teacher with quite the ministry. But, Jesus, even in John’s own words, is far greater. **So, who is Jesus?**

2. Good News – Jesus the servant Messiah

- a. **Jesus is the Messiah** (Christ). (v.1)
 - i. Jesus, a common enough name both in its Hebrew form of Joshua, in Old Testament days, and in this Hellenized form, derived from the Aramaic *Jeshua*, in the New Testament world. Both by common etymology and by historic precedent, **the name meant ‘Yahweh is salvation’**, the name given to the divinely appointed leader, sent to save God’s people in their hour of need (Josh. 1:1–2). What Moses could not do, Joshua would accomplish: that would make the name ‘Jesus’ even more appropriate for the coming savior.⁸
 - ii. Apart from the name of Jesus, Mark emphasizes the reality of Jesus’ messianic nature with the title, Christ. → This word literally meaning messiah.
 - 1. χριστός (*christos*). n. masc. **Christ**. This noun refers to a person divinely anointed but more primarily to the Messiah. → In the Septuagint, the Hebrew word מָשִׁיחַ (*māšîaḥ*, “anointed one”) is translated by the Greek term *christos*, which also refers to an anointed individual. **The NT writings exclusively apply the term to Jesus of Nazareth.** The term *christos* can be used as an appellative to refer to Jesus’ role as the Messiah. For example, the chief priests and the scribes mockingly address Jesus while he is hanging on the cross as “the Messiah (*ho christos*), the Kings of Israel” (Mark 15:32). Similarly, in Acts 2:36 Peter declares that God has vindicated the crucified Jesus as both Lord and “Messiah” (*christos*; compare Mark 12:35; Luke 2:11; 1 John 2:22; Rev 12:10). **The early Christians regarded Jesus’ resurrection from the dead as God’s vindication of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel (e.g., Acts 2:36). As a result, Christians began to use *christos* as a proper name for Jesus, whether in an absolute sense (e.g., Rom 5:6; Gal 2:20; Heb 5:5) or, more commonly, together with the name “Jesus” (e.g., Matt 1:1; Acts 3:6; Rom 1:1; Phil 3:3; Heb 3:1).**⁹
 - iii. None of this is by accident in Mark’s view. In the same sentence that he introduces us to Jesus, he uses a word that full of creative power, **beginning**.

⁷ Chris Kugler, “Gospel,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁸ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 104.

⁹ Chris Kugler, “Messiah,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

1. “Beginning” thus identifies in the initial word of the Gospel the authority from whom the Gospel derives, God himself, the author and originator of all that is. Lohmeyer is correct in saying that “beginning” signals the “fulfillment of God’s everlasting word.”³ For Mark the introduction of Jesus is no less momentous than the creation of the world, for in Jesus a new creation is at hand.¹⁰
- b. **Jesus is the Son of God.** – Fully Divine (vv.1, 11)
- i. For us a modern readers, we might not immediately see the connections to the new creative act through Jesus’ incarnation or understand the significance of the title, Christ. But, we do not miss the phrase, “Son of God.”
 1. Son of God is a more complete title for Jesus’ person and mission than is Messiah, and is Mark’s blue-chip title for Jesus, the chief artery of the Gospel.¹¹
 2. From the outset Mark announces that the content of the gospel is the person of Jesus, who is the Christ and Son of God. It is a brief confession of faith, the meaning of which will unfold only as the reader follows Mark’s presentation of Jesus in the Gospel.¹²
 3. Considering the original Roman audience this title would have hit them as well. → Octavian (later known as Augustus), played a crucial role in shaping the narrative around Caesar’s legacy. The term “divi filius” or “son of a god” was associated with Augustus, emphasizing his connection to the deified Julius Caesar. → However, Mark is telling that Jesus isn’t just the son of a God, he is God himself.
 - ii. **Jesus is part of the Trinity.** (Voice of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as a dove.) (v. 11)
 1. **To no prophet had words been spoken such as the words to Jesus at the baptism.** Abraham was a friend of God (Isa 41:8), Moses a servant of God (Deut 34:5), Aaron a chosen one of God (Ps 105:26), David a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14), and Paul an apostle (Rom 1:1). Only Israel (Exod 4:23)—and the king as Israel’s leader (Ps 2:7)—had been called God’s Son before. But where Israel failed, Jesus takes its place. → The baptism is the keystone in the life and ministry of Jesus. The empowerment by the Spirit to be God’s Servant, and the declaration from heaven, “‘You are my Son,’ ” enable Jesus not only to speak and act *for* God but *as* God.¹³
- c. **Greater than John.** (v. 7)
- i. But in John’s case there was an urgency and imminence about the messianic preaching that had been lacking of old; God’s intervention, which all the prophets had promised and which was to result in the establishment of his rule upon earth, was now at the very doors. **All this was accompanied in John by an overwhelming consciousness of the relative unimportance of his own work and ministry, compared with that of the ‘Coming One’ of whom he spoke.**¹⁴

¹⁰ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 23.

¹¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 25.

¹² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 26.

¹³ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 38.

¹⁴ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 107.

- ii. In other words, John was fully aware that what Jesus would do for humanity is abundantly more significant than his own ministry (baptism by water vs baptism by the Spirit)
- d. **Jesus is fully human, but does not sin.** (v. 13)
 - i. This is the good news of Jesus' nature. → Great is the one who came to serve and not be served.
 - 1. Mark highlights the fact that Jesus was not acting independently but submissively and obediently, as the beloved Son who always obeys the Father. **He never went rogue—never.** The trinitarian picture present at the baptism continues now in the temptation. The Father planned it, the Spirit empowered Jesus in it, and Jesus submitted to it.¹⁵
 - 2. **The meaning is quite clear, especially from the narrative which follows: while Israel, God's child, had failed in the desert, Jesus, God's Son, triumphed.** That Mark knew the basic content of the temptations seems clear (8:33).¹⁶
 - 3. **Mark including the unusual phrase “with the wild beasts” in order to remind his Roman readers that Christ, too, was thrown to wild beasts,** and as the angels ministered to him, so, too, will they minister to Roman readers facing martyrdom.¹⁷
 - ii. This is a rebuke to much of our “leadership” culture.
 - 1. How? Well, Mark has already established for us who Jesus is, and he is not the lowly and impotent. Instead, he is the sovereign and all-powerful God of the universe. However, in his incarnation, he comes to us as a gentle and lowly servant. In fact, Jesus says this about himself, “I am gentle and lowly in heart...” (Matt. 11:29)
 - 2. Jesus who could have come rightfully demanding to be served, serves humanity. This is an upside down approach to how we are told to
 - iii. Application question – What is my posture towards serving?
 - 1. If Jesus as the servant messiah models the greatness of serving, do I see it the same way?
 - 2. The challenge here for so many of us as Americans, is that we are immersed in a culture that says, there is nothing more important than the individual. That flies in the face of what Jesus models for us. The one who is the most important of all, humbled himself and served. To serve is to elevate the one you are serving and thus to diminish the self.
 - a. We know the importance of this truth as we apply it in our normal lives. Parents serving kids. Spouses serving each other. Friends serving one another. The difference is that Jesus invites us not just to an occasional serving or a serving when we feel like it. But instead, as an operating principle of our lives.
 - b. **Caution** – Some will hear this call to serving as a disregard for boundaries. That is not it at all. We are not the savior and so we are not infinite. You have heard me say before, purposeful responsiveness is not meeting

¹⁵ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 22.

¹⁶ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 110.

¹⁷ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 41.

every possible need. Purposeful responsiveness is living within my God-given calling as an ambassador of reconciliation, considering how I might use my resources (time, talents, and treasure) for the glory of God and the good of others, and trusting the Holy Spirit to guide, prompt, and exhort towards righteous action.

- c. **What Jesus models for us with the greatness of serving, is a perspective that is to inform our response, interactions, and even the way we define a meaningful life.** → We see a clear example of this in the person of John the Baptist.

3. Good News – John the Baptist (servant proclaimer)

- a. Who is John (the Baptist)?
 - i. **John is the cousin of Jesus.** The son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. (cf. Lk. 1:5-17)
 - 1. ¹⁶ **And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”**
 - ii. **Foretold** (vv. 2-3) – The forerunner of Jesus.
 - 1. **Mark aims to show us that this was not an accident, but part of a long plan by God.**
 - 2. The Gospel of Mark was written for Roman Gentiles. Quite understandably, Mark makes sparing use of OT quotations, since proof texts from Hebrew prophecy would not carry the degree of authority with Gentile audiences that they would and did with Jewish audiences. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that Mark begins his story with a reference to the OT.¹⁸
 - 3. The quotation of 1:2–3 is identified as coming from the prophet Isaiah, although it is actually a tapestry of three OT passages. The reference to the sending of the messenger in v. 2 follows the first half of both Exod 23:20 and Mal 3:1, although there is no exact counterpart in the OT to the latter half of v. 2 (“who will prepare your way”). The greater part of the tapestry comes in v. 3, which reproduces Isa 40:3 nearly exactly. Isaiah 40:3 is quoted by all four Gospels with reference to John the Baptizer as the forerunner of Jesus (Matt 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 1:76; John 1:23). The Isaiah quotation in v. 3 was deemed the defining element of the tapestry of quotations. Thus, the whole is attributed to Isaiah, who was considered the greatest of the prophets, and whose authority in the early church superseded that of both Exodus and Malachi.¹⁹
 - iii. **Prophet / proclaimer** (v. 4) – Get ready, the Messiah is on the way!!!
 - 1. John’s purpose as a prophet (proclaimer) is to prepare people to receive Jesus.
 - a. One theologian puts it this way. “The challenge (John’s message of repentance) had a sharp edge to it. Someone was coming, coming very soon, and John was getting people ready. If someone came into your town and told you that the President, or the Princess, or some other

¹⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 26.

¹⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 26–27.

great person, was on their way to pay you a visit, you'd quickly rush around smartening things up."²⁰

2. Cf. John 1: 29-30 – John makes it clear exactly who Jesus is and who he is.
 - a. ²⁹**The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'**

iv. **Effective** (v. 5) – "All Jerusalem and Judea"

1. What is going to make John's message and humility so striking is that he was a generational success. → There had been no new prophetic activity for 400 years and then John arrives on the scene. His birth and his ministry is that of an amazing work of God!
2. Yes, John has a weird diet and some odd clothing choices. → But, those only signal to the people coming that he is the real deal.
 - a. John would be equivalent in our day to a pastor or theologian that has massive renown, everyone quotes, and their ministry success is unparalleled. → The kind of pastor every pastor wants to be and local church wishes they had.

v. **Humble** (v. 8) – He knows who Jesus is and he acts accordingly.

1. John's baptism was symbolic and provisional of a more permanent and powerful reality to come: "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." That is an extraordinary declaration, for in the OT the bestowal of the Spirit belongs exclusively to God.²¹
2. John realizes that he is a servant, and in fact, he takes great delight in that reality. Why? Because he is serving God and through his servicing making Jesus known to those around him.
 - a. John is not perfect, later in his life he will be put to death by Herod, and in that moment he will doubt and wonder if Jesus really is the one true Messiah. (cf. Lk. 7:18ff)
3. **A simple truth from John's example: John has a significant role in God's plan of redemptive history. But, he acknowledges that there is one greater than himself.**

b. **Application question – Do I know my gifting to be used as a servant?** (cf. Rom. 12:3-8)

- i. ⁴**For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.**
- ii. Paul will give the church in Rome a list of gifts that God gives believers for the strengthening and encouragement of the body. That is specifically, that we are to use as servants.
 1. Prophecy – Proclaiming the Word of God

²⁰ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 2.

²¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 33.

2. Acts of service – Seeing and meeting needs.
 3. Teaching – Helping to explain or clarify difficult concepts.
 4. Giving (generosity) – Energized by giving of money.
 5. Exhortation – Encouragement towards righteousness.
 6. Leadership
 7. Acts of mercy – Particularly in empathy (feeling what others feel)
- iii. When you look at this list, which one jumps out to you as something you are passionate about, naturally inclined towards, or others have affirmed in you?
 - iv. If you look at the list and wonder about your gifting, one of the best ways to identify that is to ask a mature believer in your life (who knows you), which one they see in you.
 1. We must remember, Paul tells the church in Rome that these gifts are part of a life that is a living sacrifice which is a spiritual act of worship. This is the same thing we see in the example of John the Baptist.
 2. We must also remember, Paul teaches that the gifts are not superior to one another, “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function...”
 - v. Again, let us ask, do I know my gifting, and am I convinced of the greatness of serving that Jesus, the servant Messiah, models for and offers me?