

## **Jesus, the Promised Messiah**

### **Mark 1:1-13**

**Covenant Waterfall, 19 April 2020**

Read Scripture

Pray

#### **Introduction**

As some of you may know, I really enjoy history. One of the ways in which to really get a unique insight into a particular part of history is to focus on an important personality in that era who had a great impact on the world at that time – someone like Julius Caesar, or John Calvin, or Napoleon, or Jan Smuts, or Winston Churchill. Get a feel for their lives, how they grew up, understand what made them tick, try to understand who they were, what their mission in life was. Where do we go to get more knowledge on these things? Biographies – stories about these people's lives.

As Christians, we know that the most important person who has ever walked the face of the earth is Jesus Christ. It was by him that the universe was created. He is the centre of our faith. He's the One we worship. He's the One we pray to every morning. He's the One who will raise us up from the grave on the Last Day to glory everlasting.

So he is the One that our lives should be devoted to knowing, understanding and pursuing. How do we know our Saviour more? By reading his Word – all of it, OT and NT is all about him. But what if we want to zoom in and, like important figures in history, find out more about his identity and his life's mission? Where in his Word do we look? Like important figures in history, we must look at his biography first and foremost. Now obviously, as we know, all Scripture reveals Christ. Yet it's only in the four Gospel accounts (we've got four biographies of Jesus!) do we find historical narrative accounts of Jesus life – his birth, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension. It's in the Gospels that we get a clear picture of Jesus' identity and his life's mission. This is why I want us to spend the coming months going through Mark's Gospel.

Why Mark in particular? Ultimately in the life of our church I hope to be able to preach through all four at one stage or another. But let's start with Mark first, as it's very fast moving. It gets to the point. It's the shortest of the four Gospels.

It's also one of the earliest Gospels to be written. Most scholars estimate around 64 AD. That's just 30 years after Jesus ascended to heaven! Traditionally, it's been seen as the second Gospel account to be written, after the Gospel of Matthew.

So who was Mark, the author of this Gospel? Well his full name was John Mark. He was Jewish, a native of Jerusalem. We read about him in Acts 12:25 where he joins Paul and Barnabas on a mission. For some reason he and Paul had a fall out, but it seems that they were eventually restored, as we find in Paul's letters (2 Tim 4:11).

While Mark wasn't one of the Twelve, he was closely linked to the apostles. He was very close to the Apostle Peter, who calls him his "son" in the faith in 1 Peter 5:13. It is believed that Mark's account of Jesus' life in his Gospel is the account that Peter himself gave him.

What we're going to see in these introductory verses of Mark's Gospel is some vital biographical information about Jesus. We're going to understand more of his identity, and we're going to see his life's mission – what was the reason he came to earth. Ultimately we're going to see that because Jesus was God's promised Messiah, he came to die for our sins. Truth of this has to continually transform our lives. Unlike any other figure from history – Jesus changes us today. See this in three ways:

- God's Ancient Promises Fulfilled, vv.1-3
- God's Messenger Appeared, vv.4-8
- God's Messiah Revealed, vv.9-13

#### **A. God's Ancient Promises Fulfilled, vv.1-3**

The Gospel of Mark gets to the point in the very first verse, **"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."** Immediately we can see two things: the nature of the gospel and the identity of Jesus. So firstly, what does it tell us about the gospel? Well, that it is the "gospel of Jesus Christ." The gospel is not stuff we need to do. It's not advice on how to live. It's not about doing miracles, or living a moral life, or even helping the poor. No, the gospel

is an announcement – it's good news (that's what gospel means in Greek, *euangelion*). Good news about Jesus Christ. The gospel is all about him – who he is and what he's done. Secondly, we're told right here who Jesus is – his identity. He is the Son of God, the divine, eternally begotten Son of God the Father. He's not just a good man, or a prophet or a spiritual guru – no he is God himself. As we go through this Gospel, we will see both these points fleshed out.

Now it would be a mistake to think that the story of Jesus and the gospel begins here, at the start of the NT, in the Gospels, and everything before this –  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the Bible is unconnected to what is about to unfold in the Gospels. Here in these opening verses, Mark makes connections back to the OT, showing us that Jesus has not just arrived out of the blue. No, his arrival has been anticipated for thousands of years in the OT.

We need to go back to the first few pages of Scripture in Genesis, where Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. Because Adam disobeyed God and fell for the temptation of the serpent, him and all mankind after him were plunged into sin and a cursed existence. In Genesis 3:15, God promised that he would not leave mankind in this state, but would send a descendant of Eve, seed of the woman, to crush the head of the serpent – to destroy sin, death, the curse and Satan – to reverse the results of the Fall.

The rest of the OT anticipates the coming of this promised seed, the Messiah. The promise of his coming is told to the OT patriarchs, it's repeated by the OT prophets, that one day a Saviour, a Redeemer will come. The whole OT prophesies his birth, his character, his life, death and resurrection and even his forerunner.

So when Mark (and the other Gospel writers) start their Gospels in the NT, they are not starting a new story. No, they are announcing to Israel and the world that those promises of God in the OT, made over a period of thousands of years, are now being fulfilled. That promised seed of the woman is now here and his name is Jesus Christ! This is why even Jesus himself tells us in Luke 24:44 that the whole OT – the Law of Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets are all about him. It's also why the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:2-3, that, **“the gospel of God, which he promised *beforehand through his prophets* in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son...”**

This is why Mark quotes from the OT in verses 2 and 3. He's connecting us to those OT promises:

**"As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"**

We read here that this quote is from Isaiah, but it's actually a blend of three OT texts, the bulk of which is from Isaiah. The first part of this quote, "Behold, I send my messenger..." is from Exodus 23:20 which is repeated in Malachi 3:1. This is prophesying the messenger who will prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah – an Elijah-like figure – a prophet "before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes" as Malachi 4:5 goes on to say.

The second part of the quote is from Isaiah 40:3, "Prepare the way of the Lord..." This is also predicting the coming of this prophet who will prepare the way of the Lord and prepare for the glory of the Lord to be revealed, as Isaiah goes on to say in verse 5.

So we see here in this quote that OT promises are now being fulfilled: the promised messenger, a prophet like Elijah, who will prepare the way for the Messiah is now here – John the Baptist. And he will prepare the way for the glory of the Lord – Jesus Christ – to be revealed. Let's now turn to John the Baptist.

#### **B. God's Messenger Appeared, vv.4-8**

Verses 4-8 continue, **"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

John the Baptist now appears on the scene, directly following those OT quotes which prophesy his coming. Who was he? What was he doing? In Matthew 11:11-14, Jesus tells us

that he was the last of the OT prophets, an Elijah-like figure. In verse 6 of Mark's description of him, he is even wearing exactly the same clothes Elijah wore and eating what he ate – camel's hair, leather belt, eating locusts and honey – as 2 Kings 1:8 says of Elijah. Like the OT prophets, he is calling the nation of Israel to repent of their sins in order to prepare to receive the promised Messiah. He was preparing them to trust in the One who would die for sins, taking upon himself the sins of all God's people.

John the Baptist called Israel to repent and then baptised them in the Jordan river. There was no such thing as a baptism before this point. The closest thing to it was a purification ritual which Gentile converts to Judaism had to go through. So John is telling the Jews that they had to be purified. He was basically telling them that they were as unclean and sinful as Gentiles. In verse 5 we see that all the country of Judea and Jerusalem went to be baptised – many Jews heeded his call to repentance.

So was John's baptism the same baptism as Jesus was later to institute as a sacrament, our Christian baptism? While John's baptism prepared people to receive Jesus, the two baptisms are not the same. We see this in Acts 19:1-7 where Paul comes across people in Ephesus who had been baptised into John's baptism, but were not yet Christians. So they were then baptised into the name of Jesus and they then received Christ and his Spirit.

John's function was to point to Jesus, as verse 7 says – "After me comes one who is mightier than I..." He and his baptism were never an end in themselves. He reinforced this point in the next verse, verse 8, where he says that "I have baptised with water, he (Jesus) will baptise you with the Holy Spirit." Here he is pointing to the superior New Covenant ministry of Jesus, that would come to its fulfilment later in Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all believers in Christ.

### **C. God's Messiah Revealed, vv.9-13**

In verse 9 we read of the arrival of Jesus, **"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan."** He travelled all the way down from his hometown Nazareth in the Galilee in northern Israel, south, to the spot on the Jordan river where John the Baptist is baptising people. How come? Jesus is going to get baptised. Isn't

that incredible? Just think about that for a moment. Here we have the perfect, eternally divine Son of God, God's promised Messiah, coming to earth. Not in power, or wielding his authority as God to lord it over his people. No, he submits himself to baptism – a baptism meant for sinners. Jesus, completely sinless, chooses to identify with sinful people. In doing this, he points us to the reason why he came to earth in the first place – to die for the sins of sinners like you and me, on the cross.

Verse 10 describes what happened at his baptism: **“And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.”** The Holy Spirit anoints Jesus right here at the beginning of his public ministry. Why? It is the Holy Spirit who will empower him for what his Father has sent him to earth to do – carry out his mission as God's Messiah. Messiah is the Hebrew word for “anointed one” – Greek word is Christos, where we get Christ.

Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ is anointed by the Holy Spirit to carry out his ministry. As the Messiah, Jesus came to initiate a new covenant with the people of God. An important part of this new covenant was that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all of God's people – all of us in Christ. This was unlike the old covenant, under which only certain prophets, priests and kings received the Spirit. Now in the new covenant that the anointed Jesus is initiating, the Spirit is going to be poured out on all, empowering us to live lives that glorify God, writing his law in our hearts. That's exactly what happens down the line at Pentecost.

As the Holy Spirit is descending on Jesus, a voice from heaven, God the Father speaks these words, **“And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”** Just note that we have here all the three Persons of the Trinity acting together as one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So, not only is Jesus anointed by the Spirit, but his own Father speaks words of approval over him. He affirms Jesus' identity as his own beloved Son and that he is well pleased with Jesus. These words are actually a combination of two OT texts, one from Psalm 2, which declares that the Son is God's anointed (Messiah in Hebrew) king. The other is from Isaiah 42:1, which prophesies the Messiah as the Suffering Servant. Here in God the Father's affirmation of Jesus, we have summed up the reason for his coming: Jesus is the Son of God,

the promised Messianic King, beloved of the Father, who is coming to serve us his people by suffering for our sins on the cross.

These last two verses continue, vv. 12-13, **“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.”**

The same Spirit that descended on Jesus and anointed him for his ministry, now drives him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. What’s going on here? We saw earlier that the first Adam was tempted in the Garden of Eden, fell for those temptations of Satan, disobeyed God and plunged all of mankind into sin.

Now Jesus, who is also called the second Adam (Rom 5, 1 Cor 15:45) is no longer in a lush garden, exercising dominion over animals and plants like the first Adam was. No, the second Adam is in the wilderness, surrounded by wild animals (v.13). Everywhere around him are the ravages of the curse of sin that has worked its way around the whole world. But as the second Adam, the promised seed of the woman, he’s come to crush the head of the serpent and break the curse of sin and restore a sinful people to their God in a new Eden, a new Promised Land. And instead of falling for Satan’s temptations like the first Adam, the second Adam resists them and obeys God.

The Apostle Paul, reflecting on Jesus’ ministry, in Romans 5:19, says, **“For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.”** This sums up precisely what Jesus came to do, the heart of the gospel – to redeem us from our sins, clothe us in his righteousness, no longer standing condemned before God, but instead able to stand before him with confidence as his beloved sons. It is this gospel that we will see unfold in Mark in the weeks to come.

## **Conclusion**

As we look around us now, like Jesus we find ourselves in the wilderness. The evidence of the curse is all too real around us. The corona virus is ravaging the world, people we know are getting sick, others are dying, we are seeing brokenness around us, suffering, hunger, the rise of tyranny ruling over us, leaders abusing their power.

Closer to home – curse in our own lives – our own sin – apathy for the things of God, our wandering hearts and minds, being captivated by the things of this world instead of being satisfied in God – our bent toward idolatry. How we treat others – harshness, selfishness, our gracelessness – all reveals our hard and stony hearts.

We're all Adam's offspring, all prone to wander and never able to completely obey and love our God. Yet thank God we haven't been left in our mess. The second Adam has succeeded where the first Adam failed. Our promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, the beloved Son of the Father, has obeyed where we have sinned. He came down to earth to seek us out, to identify with us in our humanity, to serve us, and to humble himself to death on a cross that we all deserved because of our sin.

And because he was raised to life on the third day, that curse is now broken. Our sins are forgiven, his righteousness is covered over our mess, our Father calls us his own sons. And we have the assurance of being restored to a new Eden, a new heavens and earth where there will be no more tears, death, crying nor pain – where God will be our God and we will be his people forever.

Trust in Jesus Christ, believe in him! Cling to God's promised Messiah, his one, true eternal, beloved Son. Receive his gift of grace freely poured out to sinners. Find true rest, peace and shelter in him alone.

Amen