

2015.12.13

A Savior on Mission (Mark 1:1-15, ESV)

INTRO:

If you were here last week, you'll remember we noted that first impressions are incredibly important. So important that if you have a bad initial impression of someone and later learn you were wrong, odds are you'll still be swayed by what you believed at first. We struggle to undue first impressions. That's why when we're meeting someone for the first time we go out of our way to make a good impression. Well, in the Bible, we have four books that tell us about the life of Jesus which means in a sense we have four first impressions of him. And each one gives us a unique glimpse into his life and mission. So we're spending the month of December looking at how all four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—welcome Jesus and seeing what that teaches us about the meaning of Christmas.

TRANSITION:

We began last week with Matthew, who opens his Gospel by taking us through, of all things, Jesus' family tree. We learn from Matthew 1 that Jesus is used to having broken, messy people in his family. Let that encourage someone this morning. If life feels messy right now and difficult there's hope. Jesus has room in his family for your mess and mine. That's the Gospel. Jesus may not be the king we expect, but he is the King we need. This week we're going to look at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark. Mark is the only Gospel that doesn't tell us about Christ's birth and we want to figure out why.

TEXT:

*1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" 4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 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. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 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. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

*9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 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. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." 12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 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.*

*14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Matthew 1:1-15, ESV).*

### TRANSITION:

I want you to notice we're only fifteen verses into Mark and a grown-up Jesus is already preaching his first sermon. No mention of Mary. No mention of Joseph. No animals. No shepherds. No star. No wise men. Mark bypasses the whole Christmas story. That doesn't mean Mark doesn't believe Jesus is the Son of God. Look back at v. 1—*1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* Mark knows exactly who Jesus is. But he skips the Christmas story because he wants to get to Jesus' mission as quickly as possible. He's less concerned with *how* Jesus came and more concerned with *why* he came. We're going to use the following outline from these first fifteen verses to consider why Christ came that first Christmas. Here's the outline:

**Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of his ministry.**

**Jesus' ministry marks the beginning of his suffering.**

**Jesus' suffering marks the arrival of his Kingdom.**

### APPLICATION:

**Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of his ministry.**

*1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" 4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 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. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 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. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

- \* We read about this John in both the New Testament and another first century writer named Josephus.<sup>1</sup> John came from a family of priests, but he didn't live like the typical priest. He lived not in a temple, but in the wilderness. He wore camel's hair and a leather belt, the traditional outfit of a prophet not a priest. He ate locusts and wild honey, which sounds gross. Maybe you dip the locust in the honey, perhaps that helps. It's confusing until you realize locusts and honey would have been two of the only "clean" food available in the wilderness according to OT regulations. And John wants to be obedient to God's Law. Most importantly, he began a practice of performing baptisms in the Jordan River, which is why he's more commonly known as John the Baptist.
- \* Baptist is not his denomination it's his emphasis. You have to realize ritual washings, like baptism, were common at the time. But before John came, you baptized or washed yourself. Typically it happened by walking down steps into a large bath called a *mikvah* (picture). John is doing something new. *Come out to me*, he says, *and I will baptize you for the forgiveness of sins*. He's initiating a new form of purity. Before John, baptism was designed to cleanse the body. He's saying now, in some way, it cleanses the soul. If you put it in the broader context of Israel, his baptisms are accomplishing what the sacrificial system was supposed to do. All throughout the Old Testament, God's people sacrificed animals for the temporary forgiveness of sins. Baptism is John's way of saying, *"The sacrifices are no longer serving their purpose. They're defunct. They're corrupt. God is preparing a new sacrifice. Prepare your hearts now through baptism for what is to come."* That's what the Bible means when it says John came to **"prepare the way."**
- \* But this begs the question why was Jesus baptized? He didn't need forgiveness, right? Well, John the Baptist asked the same question. Matthew and Luke tell us that when Jesus came to John to be baptized, John said, *"Whoa, time out, I shouldn't baptize you. You should be baptizing me."* But Jesus told him this needed to happen. Verse 9 tells us why, *9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.*

---

<sup>1</sup> See New Testament and *Jewish Antiquities* 18.5.1-2; cf. Thatcher's *2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism* notes and Worksheet #5.

*10 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. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*

- \* Jesus' baptism was the moment his identity was confirmed—a voice came from heaven, "This is My Son, whom I love." It served as his public confirmation. It was the moment his identity was confirmed. The way had been prepared. Jesus was now taking over. His baptism marked the beginning of his ministry, which brings us to point #2.

### **Jesus' ministry marks the beginning of his suffering.**

*12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 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 (Mark 1:12-13, ESV).*

- \* These verses fascinate me. When a baptism happens here family and friends often come to watch. They'll take the person to lunch afterwards or dinner if it happens on a Saturday night. It kind of become your day—baptism day. But not with Jesus. Jesus comes out of the water immediately he's thrown into the wilderness (why)—I don't want you to miss this—to *be tempted by Satan*. Happy baptism day, Jesus.
- \* Now before we go too far down this path, realize temptation itself is not a sin. Sin comes when we follow through on temptation. Someone needs to hear this this morning because when temptation comes in your life you become discouraged and beat down and so you cave in without a fight. When temptation comes, stand and fight. When tempted, Jesus never sinned. But don't think it must have been easy for him to resist simply because "he's Jesus." The Bible tells us the opposite – *18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted... 4:14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. (Hebrews 2:18; 4:14-15, NIV '11)*. Jesus suffered through his temptation. C.S. Lewis adds even more insight in his famous book *Mere Christianity*. He writes, *"A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is... A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like*

*an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means.”<sup>2</sup>*

- ✓ Do you understand what Lewis is saying? To be tempted means to be tested; testing requires the possibility of failure. Jesus’ temptation was infinitely more difficult than any temptation you or I face because he is infinitely more holy than you and I are. There’s genuine potential here for Jesus to be disobedient to his Father. As soon as Jesus went public with his ministry temptation came in full force. That’s why I said **Christ’s ministry marks the beginning of his suffering**. But it was only the beginning. A little later in the Mark, Jesus makes a statement that’s often considered his personal mission. Jesus says, *45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45, ESV).*
- ✓ He says he came to **serve** (that’s the same word the Bible uses for **ministry**). His **ministry** takes the form of **suffering** (he gave his life on the cross). This **suffering** is described as a **ransom** (meaning his suffering purchases our access into God’s **Kingdom**). His ministry marks the beginning of his suffering and his suffering marks the arrival of his Kingdom.

### **Jesus’ suffering marks the arrival of his Kingdom.**

*14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15, ESV).*

- \* Jesus’ first public words are about the Kingdom of God. We tend to think of a “Kingdom” as a place you visit—Buckingham Palace. Or the ruins of the great Egyptian Kings. Or the “Magic Kingdom” at Disney. But Jesus tells us God’s Kingdom is different. He says it’s now “at hand.” It has become tangible and present through Christ. In Luke Jesus takes it one step further, *Luke 17:20 Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,*

---

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 142.

**21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20-21, ESV).**

### TRANSITION:

Here's what the Bible is telling us: **Jesus came not simply to take you to some new place in the future after you die; he came to birth something new in you today.**

His Kingdom will last for eternity, yes; but it is available to you today.

### CONCLUSION:

Here's the challenge of Mark's Gospel—don't let all the stuff that surrounds Christmas overshadow the meaning of Christmas. If you find that happening, go back to Mark 1. Mark skips the Christmas story. He's not concerned with how Christ came; he's concerned with why he came. He came to fulfill his ministry. He came to suffer. He came to bring you into His Kingdom through the sacrifice of himself.

Jesus said to enter this Kingdom you need only to "repent." To repent means to leave your old way of life and from this point forward base everything on the remarkable new opportunity Jesus offers. As Mark would tell you, "*This is the meaning of Christmas.*" The baby who born in a manger grew into a man who gave his life for you and me → Communion.