



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The First and Last Word of the Gospel (Mark 1)

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Welcome to the first Bible study of the 90th General Assembly, legislative session. The plan this session is to hold weekly pizza nights each Monday evening while covering a chapter from the gospel of Mark. Pastors from around the Great State of Arkansas have been invited to help me bring these messages, and together we will team teach through the Gospel of Mark until the end of the legislative session. Today I will cover a very brief overview of the Gospel of Mark, as well as cover an important short section of the first chapter, which emphasizes the gospel (which is the good news) of the Lord Jesus Christ. I trust that God will use His great and powerful Word to accomplish every purpose He desires.

Title

Mark, for whom the gospel is named is/was/had:

- A cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10);
- Accompanied Paul and Barnabus on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:5);
- Infamous for his desertion of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:13) during their 1st missionary journey;
- A source of friction and separation when Barnabas wanted Paul to take John Mark on their 2nd missionary journey (Acts 15: 38 – 40);
- A close companion of the Apostle Peter as is evident in Peter's description of him as "my son Mark" (1 Peter 5:13). Remember Peter was no stranger to failure and his influence on the younger man was no

doubt instrumental in helping him out of the instability of his youth and into the strength and maturity he would need for the work to which God called him.

Eventually John Mark grew useful to the Apostle Paul, as Paul instructed the Colosians to welcome him (Col.4:10), and even referred to Mark as a fellow worker (Phm 24), and later told Timothy to "Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service (2 Tim. 4:11).¹

Author and Date

Unlike the Epistles, the Gospels do not name their authors. The early church fathers, however, unanimously affirm that Mark wrote the second gospel. Justin Martyr, writing around A.D. 150, referred to the Gospel of Mark as the "Memoirs of Peter," and suggested that Mark committed his gospel to writing while in Italy. This agrees with the uniform voice of early tradition, which regarded this gospel as having been written in Rome, for the benefit of the Roman Christians.

Evangelical scholars have suggested dates for the writing of Mark's gospel ranging from A.D. 50 to 70. A date before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70 is required by the comment of Jesus in 13:2. Luke's Gospel was written before Acts (1:1 – 3). It is therefore likely though not certain, that Mark was written at an early date, probably sometime in the 50's.²

Background and Setting

Whereas Matthew was written to a Jewish audience, Mark seems to have targeted Roman

Arkansas

The First and Last Word of the Gospel (Mark 1)

believers, particularly Gentiles. When employing Aramaic terms, Mark translated them for his readers (3:17; 5:41; 7:11,34; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22,34). On the other hand, in some places he used Latin expressions instead of their Greek equivalents (5:9; 6:27; 12:15,42; 15:16,39). He also reckoned time according to the Roman system (6:48; 13:35 and carefully explained Jewish customs (7:3,4; 14:12; 15:42). Mark also omitted Jewish elements, such as the genealogies found in Matthew and Luke. This gospel makes few references to the OT, and includes less material that would be of particular interest to Jewish readers—such as that which is critical of the Pharisees and Saducees (Saducees are mentioned only once, in 12:18). When mentioning Simon of Cyrene (15:21), Mark identifies him as father Rufus, a prominent member of the church at Rome (Rom16:13). All of this supports the traditional view that Mark was written for a Gentile audience initially at Rome.³

Historical and Theological Themes

Mark represents Jesus as the Suffering servant of the Lord (10:45). His focus is on the deeds of Jesus more than His teaching, particularly emphasizing service and sacrifice. Mark omits the lengthy discourses found in other gospels, often relating only brief excerpts to give the gist of Jesus' teaching. Mark also omits any account of Jesus' ancestry and birth, beginning where Jesus' public ministry began, with His baptism by John in the wilderness.

Mark demonstrated the humanity of Christ more clearly than any other evangelists, emphasizing Christ's human emotions (1:41; 3:5; 6:34; 8:12; 9:36), His human limitation (4:38; 11:12; 13:32), and other small details that highlight the human

side of the Son of God (eg., 7:33,34; 8:12; 9:36;10:13-16).⁴

This concludes our coverage of introductory matters, of course we could have explored several other introductory related matters, but it might not be of interest to most people. There are some interesting debates regarding interpretive problems and issues relating to the synoptic problem, and whether Mark or Matthew were prior etc. But due to the very limited time we have together, it seems best to this writer to move on to the text itself.

Mark Chapter 1

Typically a swath of Scripture this large would be broken up into several messages. As an ambassador of Christ and His kingdom, I want to make his message to the nations as clear as possible. Therefore, I will not attempt to focus on secondary or tertiary issues. Though they are not unimportant, our time together will best be used by focusing on primary issues.

Therefore I will focus most of our time together understanding Christ's message rather than John the Baptist's message. Since there are other points of interest within our context, I will mainly show how they may be understood in context and support in most cases to be the main point of the section. In this section (namely chapter 1) we ought to focus on Christ's message of the gospel, because everything prior to it will prove to be prior preparation. While the preparation is important in its own right, the main thing is that Christ, the Son of God, the servant of God, has arrived, and He has something very important to communicate. Everything after this main point serves to validate both the Son and His message, that is

Arkansas

The First and Last Word of the Gospel (Mark 1)

the message He is proclaiming, and the message faithful ambassadors of Christ must both embrace and proclaim until the Son returns.

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
AHEAD OF YOU,

WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY;

3 THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE
WILDERNESS,

‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD,
MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.’ ”

4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness ^apreaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

5 And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

6 John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey.

7 And he was preaching, and saying, “After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals.

8 “I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The Baptism of Jesus

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

10 Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him;

11 and a voice came out of the heavens: “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”

12 Immediately the Spirit *impelled Him to go out into the wilderness.

13 And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.

Jesus Preaches in Galilee

14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, ^bpreaching 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.”¹

Notice the unifying theme of repentance between John the Baptists message and the Lord Jesus Christ’s message. John the Baptist’s ministry in the wilderness existed to prepare people to behold the coming of the King of kings, and the King of the the kingdom of God. So great is this king that John rightly understood that He is so great that that John declares his unfitness to even “stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals” (Mark 1:7). **In view of John’s rightful conclusion about his own unfitness, to serve the Lord, how would it**

¹ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update.* (1995). (Mk 1:1–45). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Arkansas

The First and Last Word of the Gospel (Mark 1)

bear for others, if John the prophet was not even fit? How again did his great concern for his people work itself to his message to them. Remember God had not spoken for 400 years, and now John had the task of preparing a people who were not ready to behold their long awaited King and Savior. Therefore John rightly sought to prepare a people who were not ready to be led by God, by first calling them to repentance.

John the Baptist might seem like some sort of a strange religious phanatic both by his clothing and appearance and diet and for remaining in the wilderness and for calling a whole nation including its religious leaders to repentance. However something miraculaous happened that should have diswaded anyone wounding about this, and it was something utterly profound. Look at Mark 1:11, starting in verse 9, we read:

Mark 1: 9-11 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; 11 and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

What is unavoidable, and quite the conundrum for the critics of John the Baptist, is the fact God publically pronounced His great love and pleasure in His Son. It is reminiscent of Isaiah 42.

Isaiah 42:1-4 4 "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice

to the nations. 2 "He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. 3 "A bruised reed He will not break, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 "He will not be disheartened or crushed, Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law."

Christ's baptism included a heavenly declaration that should have called everyone to now listen to Jesus.

Considering the travesty of our sin against an infinitely Holy God, the ONLY way God the Father, who hates sin, can look upon forgiven sinners with delight, is because we have been united by God's grace to His beloved Son, in whom He is infinitely and profoundly and completely pleased.

If you watch the news, you can easily lose heart that anything good can happen in this life. But take heart God the Father delights in His Son. This is good news, and if you have placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ God the Father also delights in you. That is great news! God is sovereign and as bad as this world is, and as bad as it will get, God is still in control. We need to continually adjust our vision to see clearly as we ought, and the only way this happens is when we look to God as our ultimate reference point.

Sometimes people ask me how come I am not depressed when the world seems to be getting darker. My answer is that I would be depressed if it was not for God Who alone gives me hope. As darkness abounds, I remember Christ is coming soon. As sin abounds, Gods grace abounds all

Arkansas

The First and Last Word of the Gospel (Mark 1)

the more, is anything too great for God? No, and never! We are not called to be so heavenly minded that we become no earthly good, and we are not not called to be so earthly minded that we become no heavenly good. I am called, and God is calling all believers to be so heavenly minded that we are of earthly good. In fact only with God as my ultimate reference point can I begin to see and understand all things as they actually are, with God as the Creator, and Sustainer, and me and we, as existing in God's environment. That is where I find real purpose, real stability, real worth and significance as person created in the image of God, and as a child before the greatest Father ever who completely delights in me beyond my own spiritual fitness. In Adam and in John the Baptist and in my own standing I too am completely unfit to even untie God's only begotten Son's sandal. However, because I am united to Christ, God the Father also delights in me, and I am made adequate in Christ to not only untie His sandals, but even to dine with Him at His table, and to be His friend. Somebody pinch me because that is too incredible to fathom. But it is true.

Now the text does not end. In Mark 1:12-13 we read very briefly that the Holy Spirit impelled Christ to go out into the wilderness where He was tempted by Satan for forty days. Mark does not go into much detail but moves on to the main message of Christ, and so will I. If you want to read more on this it will be found in Matthew and Luke.

The main point of this section is that Christ came preaching the gospel. Christ did not simply come to earth to be some sort of a do gooder. He always did right, and was without sin. But He came to seek and save the lost. He came to

proclaimed the good news about the kingdom of God, and he did so by preaching a powerful life message of repentance, and forgiveness of sins.

The gospel is a matter of life and death, not like the kind you find in the hospital when someone is merely dying a physical death. But eternity is what is in the balance. It is eternal life or eternal death that is in view. God teaches that all have sinned and fall short of His glory, and the wages of sin is death. It is eternal death that is in view, just as the gift of God is eternal life.

Richard Owen Roberts wrote a book entitled *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel*. In it he writes: referring to Matthew 4:17 where God's Word states: "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.""

Roberts wrote:

The first word of the gospel is not "love," it is not even "grace." The first word of the gospel is "repent." From Matthew through the Revelation, repentance is an urgent and indispensable theme that is kept, at the very forefront of the gospel message.⁵

The presentation of the gospel not only calls people to make a decision concerning it, that is to believe it, but the gospel also calls for all people everywhere to respond appropriately

Arkansas

The First and Last Word of the Gospel (Mark 1)

to their sin, which is a clear and noticeable call unto repentance.

John who was a prophet preached a message of repentance, and so did the Lord Jesus Christ, and so did the Apostles. Look again at Mark 1:15 Christ preaching the gospel was saying "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

So Roberts is correct that the first word of the gospel is repent. Roberts also concludes that repentance is the last word of the gospel, he references the end of the Gospel of Luke 24:45-48

Luke 24:45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day;⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ "You are witnesses of these things.

Roberts wrote:

Not only was repentance the first word of Christ's ministry it was also his last. Anyone called by God as a follower of Jesus Christ who fails to stress this message of repentance does so in express violation of a final command that Christ gave.⁶

Again, we could likewise consider Christ's final words in the Gospel of Matthew, what we so often refer to as the Great Commission:

Matthew 28:18 – 20 20 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Key to making disciples is training others to observe all that Christ commanded. Teaching, not just for knowledge sake but to observe, requires much effort and training to not only turn away from sin, but to pleasing the Lord. In this way the power of the gospel and God's amazing grace are on display.

The Apostles Faithfully Call all People to Repentance

The Apostle Paul preached a gospel message that included a message of repentance:

Acts 20:20-21 20 I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,²¹ solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Arkansas

The First and Last Word of the Gospel (Mark 1)

And again:

Acts 17:30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent,

Of repentance Roberts wrote:

Repentance makes the path straight between the Lord and the repenting person.

Repentance is like clearing a highway of holiness to and from God⁷...In repentance we clear our path to God; in granting repentance, God clears His path to us.⁸

The Apostle Peter concluded his message on the day of Pentecost with these words:

Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins

Later in 2 Peter He wrote:

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

When standing before King Agrippa (Cf. Acts 26) the Apostle Paul similarly combined the same dual biblical themes as Christ did, thus

combining forgiveness of sins with the dual message of faith and repentance.

When we get to the book of Revelation, God called 5 out of the 7 churches in Asia Minor, which is in modern day Turkey to repentance.

Why should you and I not only consider deeply biblical theme of repentance, but also embrace it personally, as well as consider it vital to whatever teaching ministry God might allow us to have? I think the answer is simple, repentance brings pleasure to the heart of God, and even the heavenly angels.

Jesus said that the angels of heaven rejoice over every single person on earth who comes to true repentance, and thus true saving faith (Cf. Luke 15:10).

Luke 15: 7 "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

I can testify to you that I have experienced some of the most productive ministry with believers when the subject of repentance came up, and was explored, and then pursued. I have seen people grow up in the church and somehow be both very knowledgeable and utterly unproductive. It is like Satan had them convinced that they were sinning failures and therefore unworthy to serve God. I saw that when people learned more about what repentance looks like personally and practically they began getting very excited again in their faith, and often began taking courageous leadership roles. It is exciting what God can do when His people repent of sin, and believe, trusting God to rule their life and then

Arkansas

The First and Last Word of the Gospel (Mark 1)

experience transforming grace realizing that they have been forgiven of their sins.

So how can understanding repentance impact us this session?

I say let us be steadfast this session in serving God above men, and let us serve all people in a way that is truly pleasing to God. Let us be bold with regards to doing what we know is right before God. Let us not dare to ever be ashamed of the gospel of God. Because God is faithful. Eternity is at stake. Those who deny the Son before men will be denied Christ's Father, but those who acknowledge Christ before men, will be granted access to God the Father through the Son.

Let us personally strive to preserve what are clearly and necessarily main things just as the early church faithfully did. They rightly emphasized repentance and forgiveness for sins, they emphasized faith in Christ and became obedient to God, they strove together to become of one mind, they continually devoted themselves to prayer, and they became mentally prepared to advance the gospel, and carry out God's will for them. Yes they experienced pain as a result of their commitment to God, even betrayal from those close to them, but God rewarded them 30, 60 and 100 fold, and he will do so for you and for me if we are faithful.

Where else can you get that kind of return day in and day out? The answer is nowhere, it is unheard of, but because it is true you therefore can believe it.

Can you imagine how great our country could become again if all our state Capitols decided that they were going to do things God's way? Imagine if when legislators were asked how they

could find the courage to to what they know is right, they responded like the apostles did in Acts 5: 29:

Acts 5: 29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Can you answer like Peter and the Apostles did? We ought to obey God rather than men.

Not every legislative decision will be all about obeying or disobeying God, right? But there might be some that will be. I pray that God will give you the wisdom and courage to obey Him when it count, rather than men if that is the only option. I do not know what God's plans are for this country, but I pray that he turns our nation and our leaders back to Him in a huge way.

Thank you for being here. I believe God is doing something significant in Arkansas, and that you are a part of God's historic plans.

¹ These bulleted points were designed from information found in *The MacArthur Study Bible* (hereafter *TMSB*), (p. 1420).

² The "Author and Date" section was taken from selected portions of the the same section in *TMSB*, *Ibid.* (P. 1420).

³ The "Background and Setting" was taken from *TMSB*, *Ibid.* (Pp. 1420-1421).

⁴ The "Historical and Theological Themes" was taken from *TMSB*, *Ibid.* (P. 1421).

⁵ Richard Owen Roberts, *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2002), p. 23.

⁶ *Ibid*, Richard Owen Roberts, p. 31.

⁷ *Ibid*, Roberts, p. 24.

⁸ *Ibid*, Roberts, p.25.