

SERMON NOTES

Preacher: Andy deHoog

Date: April 28, 2024

Text: Mark 1:1-8

Title: John the Baptist Prepares the Way

Big Idea: The gospel is prepared, proclaimed, and perfected in Jesus.



Efficient and concise, Mark's gospel account is the shortest and most likely the earliest of the written gospels. The first verse reads much like a title and yet is theologically rich. Jewish and non-Jewish audiences alike would have detected a certain *sharpness* to the words and phrases used by Mark in this title. It is as if Mark's opening sentence is saying something to this effect:

Let me tell you about the new beginning, the new creation in which God begins to re-order the chaos resulting from sin. It's the account of the good news, the true story of a great victory, much greater than any Roman military endeavour you've ever heard of. Believe it or not, it centres around a particular person, one who was crucified yet lives: Jesus Christ, Yehoshua Mashiach, a conqueror, a saviour like, but much greater than Joshua; an anointed one like, but much greater than David. He is in fact, the Son of God but not in the way that Augustus Caesar is purported to be a son of a god. No, this Jesus Christ is truly the Son of the one true God.

Mark's notion of this gospel (Greek: "*euangelion*", a compound word meaning "good message") is that it is embodied in the *person* of Jesus Christ. As such, we can make at least three observations about this personified gospel from Mark's opening section:

I. The Gospel Prepared (vv 2-3)

- God promised through the prophets that he would send a "messenger" to "prepare the way of the Lord". After 400 years of prophetic 'silence', God *literally* 'shows up' and he sends this messenger as a forerunner to *clear the ground*.
- Of course, from before the beginning of time, God had already been making preparations since "*Jesus is not an afterthought of God, as though an earlier plan of salvation had gone awry*" (Edwards). It's us who need to be prepared!

II. The Gospel Proclaimed (vv 4-6)

- John came "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" and his ministry proved to be incredibly popular as "all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him".
- Whole life transformation and freedom from wrong-doing, guilt, and shame are at the heart of the gospel message. We continue to proclaim this same message 2000 years later!

III. The Gospel Perfected (vv 7-8)

- As essential as baptism in water is, John recognized the limitations of his ministry, pointing to One "who is mightier" and will "baptise...with the Holy Spirit."
- "In Mark's understanding, therefore, the gospel is more than a set of truths, or even a set of beliefs. It is a person..."(Edwards) and on this person (i.e. Jesus) we can rely and have a life-changing relationship with!

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

To be used for personal reflection and/or sermon-based small group discussion.

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Carefully read through the passage. What stands out to you? Is there anything you don't understand? What words, phrases, or verses might you want to study further?

In your view, what is the gospel? When you use that word, what do you think you mean?

How would you define and explain the gospel to someone who has never heard that word before?

How is God at work in your life right now? How is he trying to get your attention?

Is your heart prepared for God's work in your life? How might the spiritual ground of your heart need to be cleared to make way for God? Are there high areas (e.g. various distractions) that need to be brought down? Are there low areas (e.g. lack of spiritual disciplines) that need to be raised up (see Isaiah 40:4)?

Why do you think John the Baptist was so popular? What was it about a message of "repentance for the forgiveness of sins" that drew people in? How is our context different and/or similar to John's? How can we talk about the concept of *sin* in our culture?

What books have you read that have helped you better understand the gospel? What criteria have you used in discerning if a book is "good" or not?

How's your relationship with Jesus, the personification of the gospel? What do you need right now, spiritually speaking? What's the next step you need to take in your spiritual journey?

Pray:

- For a deeper and fuller understanding of the gospel, the "good message" embodied in the person of Jesus Christ.
- For courage to embrace the work of God in your life.
- For renewed passion for Jesus.
- For increased knowledge, wisdom, and boldness to engage the culture and proclaim the life-transforming message of the gospel to those whom God places in your life.