



mark: chapter 1

the beginning

Part title, and part prologue, Mark wants to take us back to where the story of Jesus begins. It is, of course, a different beginning place than the other three Gospels.

the gospel

“Gospel” literally means “Good News” or “Good Tidings.” It didn’t have a strict religious tone to it. It could be any news that was particularly “good.”

Jesus Christ

It’s a common mistake to assume that “Christ” is just Jesus’ last name. Of course, it isn’t. It’s a title. It literally means “the anointed one,” or “messiah.” It is the one who God anoints to save the people. Interestingly, this title was ascribed to King Cyrus of Persia, who liberated the Jewish people after their seventy year captivity in Babylon. For saving the people, he was called “anointed.” But, in the New Testament it is a title which is held only for Jesus.

Son of God

This is the second title given to Jesus in this opening verse. It foreshadows the faithful cry of the centurion at the conclusion of the Gospel.

as it is written

This is a bit of a glaring mistake, as the first quotation, while attributed to Isaiah, is actually from Malachi 3:1. Oops. In Malachi’s context “Behold, I send my messenger before you,” was something of a threat. The Temple priesthood during Malachi’s day was a mess, as was the religious life of Israel. God was saying that a “messenger” or “angel” would be coming - not to throw a party, but to clean the place up.

prepare the way

This is the first instance of “the way” in Mark, and it’s a quotation from Isaiah 40:3. “The way” figures prominently in the later part of Isaiah as the “way” back from captivity in Babylon. God was going to save his people, and they could return home, following the way that God had given them.

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repentance

Repentance means to “turn toward” God, while “turning away” from those things which lead us away from God. In the New Testament it has the specific connotation of turning away from sin, however in the Hebrew Bible it is the language of exile. It’s God bidding his people to return home to him.

and all the country

Mark has a fondness for sweeping statements which include everyone. He really believes that the Good Tidings of Jesus is for everyone, not a holy elite. This was at odds with many of his contemporaries.

baptize with the Holy Spirit

In Isaiah 44:3 we read: For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.”

The point John seems to be making here is about how Jesus’ baptism would be greater than his own. But, he also seems to be borrowing from Isaiah’s linking of true cleansing with the Spirit of God.

immediately

Here is the first instance of “immediately” in Mark’s Gospel. It shows a certain urgency that drives Jesus from the moment of his baptism to begin his ministry.

in the wilderness

But, before his ministry can commence, Jesus first spends forty days in the wilderness - similarly to Israel’s forty years in the wilderness. Mark does not give us the details of this scene that we are familiar with from other Gospels, which tell of the specific temptations Jesus faces, and how he refuses them.

proclaiming the gospel

Jesus doesn’t go to Jerusalem to begin his ministry, but to Galilee. It’s there that he begins proclaiming the “gospel of God.” But, we aren’t yet let in on the substance of this Good News.

kingdom

“Kingdom” was a thoroughly political term in those days. Herod had a Kingdom in Judaea. The Emperor had his Kingdom. But, Jesus is declaring a totally new Kingdom which quite

obviously is meant to usurp any earthly kingdoms and kings. And, what we know about earthly kings is that they never appreciate being usurped.

repent and believe

Here we have a first crack at a nascent creed; a formula for what constitutes a disciple of Jesus - a follower of The Way. Followers of Jesus' Way repent and believe. But, where do they turn when they repent, and what exactly do they believe?

fishing for people

Jesus really gets things moving when he starts to gather his disciples. In this first call scene Jesus gets four followers right off the bat, who each "immediately" leave their jobs, their families, and any local responsibilities they may have, and they begin to follow Jesus.

in the synagogue

Jesus enters the synagogue in Capernaum - which very well may have been his home town house of worship, where he would have known everyone and everyone would have known him - and during their service of worship a

man with a demonic spirit interrupts the worship service. Of all the places to find a manifestation of evil! Not some back alley. Not in the basement of some wicked man. But, in a house of worship!

And, we are still very early in this Gospel. Right off the bat Mark wants us to see the real lay of the land. There is a battle of good verses evil, and it's bubbling up everywhere, even in the holy places.

the mother-in-law

Jesus "immediately" leaves the synagogue, and goes to Simon Peter's house with the other three disciples, and there they find Simon's Mother-in-Law sick. Jesus heals her, and feeling much better, she provides hospitality for her guests, and her healer.

Later that evening there is a huge crowd gathered around the house of people who are sick, people who are possessed by demons, and probably people who are trying to get a peek at this new local superstar. Again, Mark wants us to see a very disordered world, where disease and the demonic are pervasive.

desolate place

Jesus takes time to pray. He could

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probably have spent this time healing more people, or casting out other demons. But, solitude, silence, and prayer are a priority for him. Interestingly when Jesus is found and told that everyone is looking for him in the town, instead of staying and taking care of their needs, he tells the four disciples that it's time to go somewhere else. So he travels around to other towns, and other synagogues "preaching" and "casting out demons."

cleaning up

Leprosy was not only a serious medical condition, but it was also treated as a serious spiritual one as well. The Book of Leviticus says that people with skin conditions must be completely separated from the community, live outside the walls of a town, come in contact with no one, and yell "unclean, unclean" wherever they go. It was regarded as kind of a walking death, and like many other diseases was seen to be the result of sin.

Jesus encounters a man with leprosy who asks Jesus to make him clean. Most translations say that Jesus is "moved with compassion" or "pity." But, some ancient copies of Mark say that Jesus was "angry." Later manuscripts

seem to be wary of showing a Jesus that is angry, and so they often change it to show a more gentle Jesus. Though, if Jesus was angry, who was he angry with? The leper? Or the fact that a child of God was treated as if he were dead by society.

say nothing

Jesus heals the leper and commands him not to tell anyone. In fact in the Greek it's such a strong command that Jesus uses a double negative, basically saying, "say no-thing to no-one."

This is an example of the "Messianic Secret" that we find throughout Mark. Apparently Jesus does not want to be known as a wonder-worker, for Jesus can't truly be known apart from his suffering and death. There is where his identity as "Christ" and "Son of God" will be made plain for all to see.

PREPARED BY FR. RICK MORLEY

St Mark's Episcopal Church
Basking Ridge, NJ