

“THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL”

Mark 1:1-8

Intro: On the second Sunday evening of 2005 I began a series on the Gospel of Mark. I continued that series until the second Sunday of May of this year during which time I covered the first five chapters of the Gospel of Mark. At that time I had the privilege with several other members of my family of attending Will Custis’ graduation from The Master’s Seminary in California. Right after that, at the invitation of our elders Will joined us in the ministry here at Trinity as our Associate Pastor, and I had asked him to speak each Sunday at our evening service. And so I discontinue my series on the Gospel of Mark.

At that time, on Sunday mornings, I was in a series on Men of the Bible, which I concluded last Sunday morning, at least for the present, and had decided to go back to the Gospel of Mark, which I am doing today.

Many of you have not attended our Sunday evening meetings, and so you did not get in on that series unless you got the tapes. And so I have decided to start the series over again. I hope that those of you who heard the beginning expositions on Mark’s Gospel, will profit from hearing those chapters expounded again – not the same messages, because I intend to do fresh study for each Sunday morning. And I trust also that those of you who did not get in on the previous series, will find this study profitable from the very beginning. So while I don’t preach to please people, it is my prayer that getting a fresh start in the Gospel of Mark again will prove to be profitable for all of us.

And I want to give those of you who have not been in the habit of coming to our Sunday evening meetings, to begin right away so that can enjoy with the rest of us the messages that Pastor Will has been bringing to us on Paul’s epistle to the Philippians. They have been very good. I have thoroughly enjoyed Will’s messages, and you will enjoy them too and find them very profitable in your own relationship with the Lord.

But, as you have already heard, tonight we want you to come as we install Will as our Associate Pastor. We have asked his Dad, whom you all know, Pastor Gary Custis, of our sister church, Hillcrest Chapel, to bring the message at our evening service tonight for this installation service. Hillcrest Chapel has been Will’s home church during his growing up years. His Dad has been his Pastor. And so we felt that Gary should

speak on this wonderful occasion, and that the people who have loved Will and prayed for him through his growing up years, should get in on the blessing tonight as we officially welcome into our church family. Then next Sunday night all of us can come to hear Will as he teaches Philippians. At Trinity and at Hillcrest it is our firm belief and strong conviction that the church is called by God to proclaim the Word of God. That has been our ministry from the beginning, and we expect to keep the teaching of the Word as the focal point of our ministry.

Now let's direct our attention to the Gospel of Mark.

It is the second book of the New Testament. It is grouped together with three other books which we call, the Gospels. They are the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Luke, and the Gospel of John. They all deal with the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. This fact alone is evidence of the supreme importance of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so it goes without saying that knowing the truth about Jesus Christ, His Person and His ministry on earth, needs to be the major purpose of anyone who reads the Bible. Everything in the Old Testament points ahead to Christ. The Gospels tell us about His time here on earth. And then beginning with the book of Acts and going through the rest of the New Testament we have Christ's work on earth explained, His present ministry in heaven described, leading up His coming again, first for His Church, and then with His Church, all of which will lead to the establishing of a new heaven and a new earth.

But a very reasonable question which may have already occurred to you, is, why are there four Gospels? Why not just one? There are two main answers to that question.

There are four books dealing with our Lord's life on earth because they deal with four aspects of our Lord's ministry:

- 1) The Gospel of Matthew presents our Lord as the King.
- 2) The Gospel of Mark presents the Lord Jesus as the God's Servant.
- 3) The Gospel of Luke presents our Savior as the Son of man.
- 4) The Gospel of John presents Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

This does not mean that you will only find the Deity of Christ mentioned in John's Gospel. We see His Deity in all four of the Gospels. The same is true of our Lord's humanity. It is given special emphasis in Luke's Gospel, but His true humanity is to be seen in all four of the Gospels. These four presentations of our Lord as King, as Servant, as Man, and as

God, speak of the emphasis in each Gospel, but all four are to be seen in each book.

The other reason for the four books is that they were written to four different groups. From early in the history of the New Testament it has been the conviction of Bible scholars that the Gospel of Matthew was written to the Jews; the Gospel of Mark, to the Romans, but in general for any Gentile; the Gospel of Luke was written to all Gentiles; and the Gospel of John to the Church, the Body of Christ.

All four Gospels do not give us what we could call a biography of our Lord's life on earth. In the last verse of the Gospel of John, the Apostle John said this about the works of our Lord on earth:

25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.

Amen (John 21:25).

This shows us that the writers of the four Gospel records wrote for different purposes, all about Christ, and yet even together did not tell us all that they could have told us, but they told us what the Spirit of God led them to write.

Now I know, or at least, I hope, that all of you are reading some chapters in the Bible every day. I hope that you are reading the Bible through at least once every year. I have told you many times that one of my seminary teachers, one of our visiting Bible lecturers, was Dr. Harry Ironside, who at the time was the Pastor of the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. I don't know how old he was when he was saved. I would guess that he was a young boy when he was saved. But when he started to read his Bible, he read to make up for the past years of his life, so that when I attended his Bible lectures, he was in his 70's, and he had read the Bible through once for every year of his life. So he had read his Bible through *over seventy times!* And when he taught, you could tell that his mind was really saturated with the Word of God.

The average time for reading the Gospel of Mark through at one sitting is two hours, more or less, depending upon how fast we can read. In these days when life is so full and so fast, it is not easy to find two hours when you can read anything. But by planning we could all do that at least once a month. Let me encourage you to read as much of the Gospel of Mark as you can at one sitting until the message of the book really begins to grip

your heart and your understanding. I know that Will would like for you to be reading Philippians through as often as you can. Read all of the Bible as much as you can, but, as the saying goes, you will have to “carve out” special time for Bible reading, or you will never get it done.

Although the Gospel of Mark is second among the four Gospels as they are arranged in our Bibles, it probably was written first of the four. The writer was actually John Mark, a Jew by the name of John with Mark as his Roman name. It is thought that he wrote for Romans because, as Charles Erdman of Princeton Seminary said,

This accounts for his use of Roman words, for his translation of Aramaic terms, for his care to explain Jewish customs, and for his infrequent references to the Old Testament except when quoting passages quoted by Christ (*The Gospel of Mark*, p. 9).

We first read of John Mark in Acts 13:5 when he accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. But when they got to Perga in Pamphylia, he left them, but we are not told why. Later (see Acts 15:36-41) when Paul and Barnabas were planning a second missionary journey, Barnabas was determined to take John Mark with them, but Paul was just as determined not to take him. So Paul and Barnabas parted company, Barnabas taking John Mark with him, and Paul taking Silas. However, in Paul’s last epistle, 2 Timothy, Paul wrote to Timothy to come to him in Rome, and he also told him to bring John Mark with him because, as Paul said, “he (referring to John Mark) is profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4.11).

But it seems that John Mark probably had the closest relationship with the Apostle Peter. In 1 Peter 5:13 Peter referred to Marcus, or John Mark, as “my son.” And there are other reasons for thinking that it was with information that John Mark received through his contact with the Apostle Peter that he wrote this Gospel. We don’t know exactly when this Gospel was written, but the year A.D. 50 is a very likely guess.

This is not the place to go into more of the background information about the Gospel of Mark because our main purpose is to get to the message of the Gospel. And so let us begin. We come first to what many believe is:

I. THE TITLE OF THIS GOSPEL (Mark 1:1).

I have spoken of four gospels, but that is in reference to the four books which speak specifically of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ here on earth.

But when we speak of the Gospel, there is only one Gospel. It is the message of salvation. It is the good news of salvation. It is the good news that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). It is that “Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: And that He was seen . . . (1 Cor. 15:3b-5a). The Gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ which John Mark was preparing to tell his readers. There are not even two Gospels: one for Jews, and another one for Gentiles. There is one Gospel for all people, and it has to do with “Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” John Mark did not write about himself. He does not even mention his name. He wrote about Jesus Christ, the Son of God Who became Man, but never did even for one moment cease to be Who He always had been, the Son of God.

But why did John Mark speak of his record of the life, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as “the beginning of the Gospel”? Isn’t the Gospel in the OT, even as far back as the Garden of Eden? Why, then, did he say, “the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”? In what sense was it the “beginning”?

He was saying that the coming of Jesus Christ into the world was “the beginning, “the active cause” (Thayer, p. 77), the fulfillment of that which had been promised throughout the OT Scriptures, but what would have remained to be just words if “Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” had not come to do what He did! The hope of all the ages became a glorious reality in the coming to earth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, validated all of the previous promises concerning salvation upon which the people of God through all previous times had placed their faith. If Jesus Christ had not come, there would have been no salvation for anyone. Abraham’s faith would have been in vain. David’s faith would have been in vain. The faith of all of the people of God in past days would have been in vain. But when Jesus Christ was born, it was evident that God was true to His Word, and that through His Son He had set in motion His promises for salvation for all who were ordained to salvation, for all who would believe.

But look at the second point which John Mark made. It had to do with:

II. THE CONFIRMATION OF ONE SPECIFIC OLD TESTAMENT PROMISE (Mark 1:2-3).

Here Mark quoted from Malachi 3:1. It was one of the last words of promise given by God to His Son concerning the one who would come preparing the way of the Lord. And from this point on to the end of verse 8 our text is very similar to that of Matthew in Matthew 3:1-12 and Luke in Luke 3:2-17. His name is not given; he is just called “a voice.” This is clearly a promise of the ministry of John the Baptist. See his response to the Jews when they came up to Jerusalem to find out what John said about himself. See John 1:19-23 where John the Baptist quoted from Isaiah 40:3. With all of the blessing that John the Baptist saw upon his ministry, he was so very careful not to attempt even to share the glory that belonged to the Lord.

So prophecy was fulfilled.

Then Mark described for us:

III. THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Mark 1:4-8).

It is important to note the main characteristics of the ministry of John the Baptist, remembering that he was preparing the way of the Lord.

A. The place of his ministry: the wilderness, or better, the desert (v. 4a).

It wasn't in the temple, nor even in Jerusalem, but in the desert. How amazing it is to see where the Lord works.

B. His method and his message (v. 4b).

His method was preaching; his message was repentance for sin. Obviously he was not attempting to please people, but his purpose was to please the Lord and to prepare people for His coming. The national disgrace of Israel in that day was sin. The only way for the blessing of the Lord to be upon them was true repentance.

C. The response he received (v. 5).

He did not go to the people; the people came to him. The response was overwhelming. People came in great numbers from all over Judea, and from Jerusalem itself, were baptizing confessing their sins. And this meant that they were turning away from their sins. None of these people

had ever seen anything like this, nor had John the Baptist ever anticipated such a work of God.

D. His modest dress and simple lifestyle (v. 6).

There is nothing to suggest here that John the Baptist was not clean, but how different it is today when we feel that we have to have the largest and most ornate buildings with all of the latest electronic equipment so that sinners will feel at home in the surroundings that they are used to. John the Baptist was not seeking to attract people to himself; he was preparing a people for the coming of the Lord. He did not pretend that he was the answer to their needs, but as they came he spoke to them, preached to them instead of dialoguing with them.

E. His humility (vv. 7-8).

Note how he exalted the Lord. John the Baptist spoke with great power, but even though his power was from God, yet he assured the people that he was nothing in comparison with the Lord. It would have been interesting to know how he spoke of sin, and how he preached repentance. But he pointed them to the coming of “the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

We often hear it said, and I have been known to say it myself, that the first mention of the church in the NT is in Matthew 16:18 where the Lord said to Peter,

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18).

But how do we get into the church? The answer is in 1 Corinthians 12:13:

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Here Peter spoke of people being baptized by the Spirit. That surely is a reference to the establishing of the people of God into the church, the body of Christ, where their lives would continue to be transformed by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, and where believers would not only be united to Christ, but also to each other as members of His body.

Concl: Speaking of men in the Bible, one of the richest studies in the NT

is the study of the life of John the Baptist. He was most unusual for the way he exalted the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the way the Lord used him, as well as for the brevity of his ministry. He was no a pleaser of men, but as he exalted the Lord, preparing people for the coming of the Lord, he was used to make people happy through preaching forgiveness of sins to them. People today would counsel John the Baptist not to preach about sin. But that is what brought the blessing of God upon his ministry, and why so many people were transformed by his preaching. The #1 problem in Israel is the days of John the Baptist, was sin. It had dominated the lives of the scribes and Pharisees and elders of the people. It is the #1 problem in the world today. And we in the church are doing very little about it.

May the Lord give us the boldness of John the Baptist, of the faithful prophets of the OT, and of the apostles and evangelists of the NT as we point people to Christ through the Gospel and the one and only salvation that there is. Jesus Christ is more than one way to God; He is the only way. If He had not come, there would be no Gospel. But thank God He did come. He died to save sinners from their sins.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).