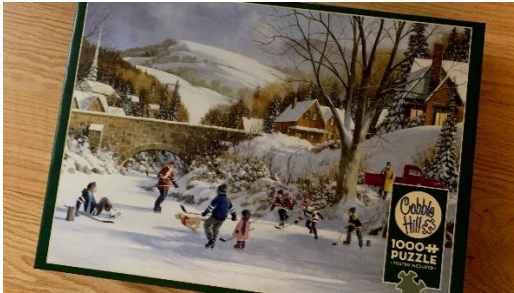




Mark 1:1-8 - “Making of a Messenger - January 10, 2021

OPEN

The days between Christmas and New Years can be puzzling! Do you like working on puzzles during the holidays? Here is a photo of one.



Is it just a nice winter scene? Or is there is more to it? If you notice the jerseys they represent the NHL “original six” – from L to R: New York, Montreal, Toronto, Chicago, Detroit, Boston.

Today we launch a series on the book of Mark. At first glance, Mark seems simple, perhaps even a terse retelling of the story of Jesus. But there is much to unpack! During Advent I was prompted to preach on Jesus life and work. In December, the Church year focuses on **anticipation** – we studied **waiting** upon God. Logically, the liturgical calendar follows Jesus birth with His earthly ministry. In the Gospels the **incarnation** is at work: Jesus “explained” God (see John 1:18). Our response must be one of **following** after Jesus.

Why Mark? This book immediately immerses us in Jesus’ story. Mark 1:1 offers both title and contents. It is not completely chronological. It is brief, blunt, and to the point. Mark emphasized action, appropriate for Roman readers. We will explore much of it in the twelve weeks leading up to Easter (April 4). In April we will circle back to passages about the post-resurrection activity of Jesus.

- **Who is Mark?** Mark had Peter as his apostolic source. We also know Mark from his failed attempt to accompany his cousin Barnabas and Paul on their missionary journey. Over time, he was restored to Paul (in Rome) so that Paul wrote, “*he is helpful to me in my ministry*” (II Timothy 4:11). Mark’s purpose was proclaim the mission and message of Jesus, not to be His biographer.

DIG

Writing to establish believers who were in a pagan, Roman context, Mark presented Jesus as the true God-Man, the ultimate Servant, and the **Son of God** (see v. 1). Jesus, as we will learn from Mark, must be rejected or followed! There can be no passive response to Jesus – He is either Lord of all or not Lord at all in someone’s life.

Please read through **Mark 1:1-8**. You will see in this passage that Mark opened his Gospel bluntly. He did not record genealogies, angelic visitations, nor the nativity as in Matthew and Luke. Verse 1 functions as a title (and content) – “the **Gospel** of Jesus Christ”. The term “beginning” (Arch) mirrors Genesis 1:1. Further, it points to the fact that the Gospel era was launched by the work of John the Baptist. From Mark’s description of John the Baptizer we find a **four-fold picture** of following Jesus

1. Compelling call – vv. 2-3

John’s call began hundreds of years earlier. He embodied the spirit of Elijah as the one who would prepare and proclaim the arrival of the Messiah. Each Gospel writer highlights John’s ministry (Mtt 3; Lk 3; Jn 1). We know that the Holy Spirit was involved in John’s life even as he was in the womb (Lk 1:41)!

- **Verse 1 – “my messenger”** (Malachi 3:1) – the rebuke through Malachi was to a people who pictured themselves pious but were morally and spiritually bankrupt. John’s job was to awaken and alert the very religious and self-righteous to their need for Jesus.
- **Verse 2 – “make straight paths”** (Isaiah 40:3) – the message of Isaiah was about God’s coming judgement (Babylonian exile). Chapter 40 launched a message of restoration. For this to be experienced, however the people would need to return – repent – which was John’s message also.

Yes, John’s call is unique. But it also speaks to the way God calls every believer to proclaim Christ to this world.

2. Radical realignment – vv. 4-5

Mark's inclusion of John the Baptist reflects Peter's influence. Peter also taught that the Gospel was launched by John's ministry (see Acts 10:37). In Mark's account we can see that John was wired to preach and proclaim. John offered the baptism of repentance. He knew that he had a very specific duty to call people out of their **mis-alignment** with the Kingdom of God. He did so through a common Jewish purification ritual - a simple act of immersion. And those who were baptized did so as proof of confessing sins (exomologoumenoi, v. 5). These people had thought themselves well aligned with God.

Consider what Rex Murphy wrote about the prayer offered in the US Congress:

A pious congressman, the Rev. Emanuel Cleaver, who was called upon to deliver the prayer for the opening of the 117th Congress, concluded his two-minute invocation with the time-and-liturgically hallowed "Amen." But because — as Justin Trudeau might be mindful to remind us — this is 2021, and with every passing year the progressive escalator rises to more giddy heights, the Rev. Mr. Cleaver thought it appropriate to add to his "Amen" an "Awoman"....This comment from Twitter captures the general perplexity: "Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, the pastor who offered a prayer to "the monotheistic god," then cited Brahma, one of many Hindu gods, and said "Amen and Awoman"...is an ordained United Methodist clergyman. Clergy person. Whatever." (read [more](#))

And many people today fancy themselves "spiritually woke" and perhaps even doing what is right in God's eyes. Sadly, like the illustration above, they have lost sight of the glory of God and the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, so they are in need of radical realignment.

3. Deliberately different – v. 6

True followers of Jesus stick out in the crowd. When it came to being man of God, John the Baptist certainly stuck out. He lived in the "rugged tradition of Elijah and the other desert prophets" (*TNTC: Mark*, R. Alan Cole, IVP, 1961, 57) which included camel's hair clothing (see II Kings 1:8) and a diet of locusts and wild honey. His ministry center was the desert!

But the question facing us is how we should "stick out" today. There are many "testimonies of escapism" – both **cultural** and **cultish**. These are groups who run away from the needs of the world. But God has not called us to escape but to **engage** – see Jesus' own words in 1:38, 2:17.

Consider the man called "the prophet of the poor" who said at his conversion, "God shall have all there is of William Booth." Called to the "squalid labyrinth" of East London in the 1860s William realized, "Where can you go and find such heathen as these, and where is there so great a need for your labors?"

By 1878, Booth's ministry gave his ministry the title we know today: "Salvation Army" – read [more](#). We must take deliberate steps to live distinctly for Jesus, prepared for the opposition which He promised (see John 15:18-25).

4. Christ centered – vv. 7-8

Mark records little of John's message, whereas Matthew and Luke captured John's dialogue (see Matthew 3:7-10; Luke 3:10-14). What Mark captured was the way John displayed two critical leadership qualities in tandem: **authority + humility**. How did John do this? He made Jesus Christ central.

Yes, he preached against the sin of his nation. But in doing so he submitted to the superiority of Christ. He also recognized his own weakness to serve Christ. John was passionate about seeing Jesus in the spotlight. His cry was "behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29-30). Instead of being **threatened** by Christ, John was **thrilled** to feature Jesus.

REFLECT

Are you a follower of Jesus? Like the book of Mark, at first it seems so simple to follow Jesus. Yet the implications are huge!

In the song "[Follow Me](#)" the group *Casting Crowns* captures the simple invitation of Jesus that asks everything of us. Take some time to listen to this song and hear Jesus inviting you to follow Him fully.

Here is a YouVersion [reading plan for Mark](#). Perhaps this could be your devotional reading for the next weeks?