

Prepare The Way
Mark 1:1-3
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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 before your face, who will prepare your way, ³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,""

"God does not have problems. Only plans," said Corrie ten Boom when a clerk's error allowed her to be released from a Nazi concentration camp in 1944, just one week before all women prisoners her age were executed. Her sister was killed.

After Corrie's release and after the war, she helped people who had survived the concentration camps. And in the following 33 years she had also traveled to more than 60 countries for the spread of the Gospel.

The Gospel is the *lifeline* of the church. We never get tired of the gospel. The Gospel is what gets us going.

So today, we are excited to start a new series in the Gospel of Mark.

The Gospel of Mark is the second book in the New Testament along with Matthew, Luke and John. Scholars say that the Gospel of Mark is the earliest written document on the life of Jesus. Others claim that the Gospel of Matthew was written before Mark's Gospel.

Who wrote this Gospel?

Strictly speaking the actual authorship remains uncertain because you will not see an introduction saying "I Mark am writing this Gospel". The authorship was added in the late first or second century. The early church father Papias talks about Mark's authorship. So, Mark is the attributed author. Several letters in the New Testament mention a man called Mark. Mark is a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). Mark was a partner in the Gospel with the Apostle Peter and Paul. Mark is called "John Mark" in Acts 12:12, 25 and 15:37-39. In 1 Peter 5:13 Peter calls Mark "my son".

It is said that Mark took notes from Peter and wrote this Gospel.

In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul commends Mark to Timothy saying, "*Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry*". In Philemon 2:4, Paul says Mark is his

fellow worker in the Gospel.

When was this Gospel written?

Most scholars conclude that this Gospel was written sometime in the 50's or early 60's of the first century.

Who was this Gospel written to?

Mark's writes to a Greek speaking audience unlike Matthew who wrote to a Jewish audience.

The Gospel of Mark is an action-packed account of the ministry, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus appears quickly on the scene as the great and authoritative Messiah and Son of God. Jesus teaches with great authority, drives out demons, heals the sick, and even raises the dead. Jesus calms the sea with a word and feeds thousands with a few loaves and fish. However, in Mark chapter eight, the story takes a sudden and startling turn as Jesus predicts that he will be rejected and will suffer and die a terrible death in Jerusalem. Yet this future is no tragedy or accident of fate. All along it was part of God's purpose and will for Jesus to suffer and die as a ransom payment for sins, bringing salvation to his people and to the whole world.

One feature of Mark's Gospel is the use of word "immediately". The word "immediately" is used 41 times indicating a sense of urgency. The Gospel of Mark is a call for believers to take up their cross and follow Jesus.

As we launch into this Gospel, my prayer is that Mark's Gospel will draw you into the first century world, lead you to a deeper faith in Jesus as the Christ the Son of God, and motivate you to greater discipleship.

Let's begin at verse one.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Why does Mark say "the beginning of the gospel?"

It could mean an introduction about Jesus before he arrives in Galilee. It could be the beginning of the Jesus' ministry. Given the next two verses, it's very likely the "beginning" is about the fulfillment of prophecy through the ministry of John the Baptist.

Gospel means “good news” or “good tidings”. In the first century Greco-Roman world, the term “gospel” was used in the announcement of a celebration like the birthday of a king, coronation, or a victory in battle. An inscription found in Turkey said this about Caesar Augustus - *“the birthday of Augustus has been for the whole world the beginning of the gospel concerning him”*. Augustus was called *“Divi Fili”* - meaning “son of god”.

Jesus is from the Greek form of the Hebrew form “Yeshua” or “Yehoshua” meaning “Yahweh Saves”. Christ means “Anointed One”.

So, when Mark says the “beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”, it was a message that defied and challenged the power of Rome.

If the power of Rome was to overcome and dominate through the use of force, the power of Jesus Christ is not external first but internal. God’s power is revealed through conquered hearts and minds by faith in Jesus Christ.

And this Gospel was not a random plan of God. Centuries prior to the writing of this Gospel, God revealed his plan to prophets.

How did that plan look like?

Verses two and three:

² *As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,*
“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,
³ *the voice of one crying in the wilderness:*
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”

I. The Prophecy

Mark quotes from the Old Testament. He says the prophet Isaiah wrote. However, verse two is not from Isaiah. It’s from Malachi 3:1. Why does Mark quote from Isaiah? Because the quote from Isaiah is the main point that Mark wants to make. Malachi simply introduces the theme that Mark wants to point out. It is the Old Testament theme of a forerunner to the Messiah.

The prophet Malachi brings up the theme of the forerunner. God is going to send a messenger who will arrive before the Messiah. Here is what says Malachi said: *“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.”*

Malachi says the Lord God himself is coming, but before He comes, He will send His messenger. This messenger will be a forerunner for the Lord, and a sign of the Lord’s coming.

This forerunner is more than just a sign of the coming of the Lord. This forerunner has a specific task. So Mark, the Gospel writer, quoting from Isaiah 40:3 in verse three, tells us that this forerunner will prepare the way for the Lord. Mark writes, *“the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”* This prophecy about the prep work of the forerunner is the main theme of verse 2 and 3. Mark uses an interesting analogy from Isaiah to bring this point out.

I saw this growing up – whenever a dignitary, a head of state was visiting town, they would clear out the roads, paint the sidewalks, put new trees. Everything would look clean and bright.

Two specific things to notice in verses two and three. First, the messenger is not preparing the way for just any king. Mark says the forerunner is preparing the way for God (Yahweh):

The second thing that you notice is that the forerunner was to come and prepare the way spiritually. Back in Malachi this forerunner is compared to Elijah (Malachi. 4:5).

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes”. Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament and he is already gone. He lived during the time of king Ahab.

What does Malachi mean that God will send Elijah?

Elijah is symbolic of a future messenger or a forerunner to prepare the way. The forerunner is John the Baptist.

And John the Baptist will come to clear out any spiritual obstacles.

Mark ends with verse three in Isaiah 40. However, in the Gospel of Luke, Luke ends with verse four from Isaiah 40.

Verse four gives us a vision of what will happen when the Lord arrives.

*Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low; Isaiah 40:4*

Every soul that is oppressed, cast down, persecuted, abandoned, lonely, in despair, in sorrow. When such a soul comes to the Lord Jesus Christ. He or she will receive mercy and will be lifted up. There will be newness of life, a new purpose. The old will be forgotten. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

When the Lord Jesus Christ comes, all hardness of heart will be dealt with and removed. Any pride will be dealt with.

Any form of wickedness, any vileness, any sickness, any resistance to His purpose will be removed.

The Gospel will be unstoppable. God will accomplish His purpose by winning people to Himself – through his messenger and his message.

The purpose of the messenger is point to the message of the King. The messenger John the Baptist, here, is only to preach and prepare the people for the coming of the Savior.

Next week, Lord willing, we will see how Mark describes John's ministry to show us exactly how John accomplished his God-given task.

God wants to prepare our hearts to whatever is coming in our lives.

Are your hearts prepared?

Peter writes "*always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*" 1 Peter 3:15

Perhaps you are going through a valley experience, Jesus has come to lift you up. Call upon Him.

Perhaps you need clarity in whatever is going on in your life.

Perhaps you don't see a resolution to your ongoing battle against sin. He will make it level and plain.

And in verse five, we see that "*the glory of the Lord shall be revealed*".

As I conclude, I want to end with a quote from Corrie ten Boom – "*You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have.*"

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Mission: Prepare the Way. Mark 1:1-3

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What is the meaning of the term Gospel? How does Mark use this term? What do you see in the unfolding of God's plan from the writings of the prophets (Malachi and Isaiah)? Malachi 3:1, 4:5-6, Isaiah 40:2-5

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. In what way do you see the need to be prepared for receiving Christ daily and for his future return? Matthew 26:41, Hebrews 11:6
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What will you change to make disciples of Christ?