

The Gospel of Mark

Walking with the Servant Savior

Lesson 1 Mark 1:1-20

Book profile:

Mark is the shortest of the four gospels and the first to be written. It was penned around the late A.D. 50's to early 60's, and is sometimes referred to as the *Gospel on the go!* It is a clear, fast paced, action-packed account of the life of Christ. Mark wastes no time in telling the reader that his account is the “*beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*” Because he is addressing a Roman audience, he passes over the birth and early years of Jesus' life, beginning his record with the events that surround the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry—His baptism by John and His temptation in the wilderness. There is little narrative commentary throughout, as Mark's emphasis is not so much on the *words*, but rather on the *works* of Jesus. He keeps the story moving, repeatedly using the word *immediately* (over 40 times) to convey a no nonsense kind of urgency in the action being played out before our eyes. There are eighteen miracles in this short book that portray the compassion and the power of Christ. Mark's purpose in writing is to convey to a Gentile church in Rome that all believers can pattern their words and actions after the example of Jesus Christ.

Interesting Facts:

Key theme: *Servanthood*—depicting Jesus as the perfect example of the true servant.

Key verse: *Mark 10:45*—“*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*”

Key chapter: *chapter 8*—there is change of emphasis in Jesus' ministry that takes place with Peter's confession, “*You are the Christ.*” That statement is the turning point; from there Jesus begins to prepare His disciples for His suffering and death, demonstrating the full extent of His servanthood.

Key people:

- **Jesus**—the Servant Savior who offered Himself as the sacrifice for sin.
- **The twelve disciples**—*brothers Simon Peter and Andrew; James and John; also Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon, Judas Iscariot*—chosen by Jesus to accompany Him and partner with Him in His ministry on earth.
- **John the Baptist**—sent to prepare the way for the coming Messiah.
- **Jewish religious leaders**—*Pharisees and Sadducees*—who joined together in their hatred and efforts against Jesus.
- **Pilate**—*the Roman governor*—who delivered Jesus to be crucified.
- **The two Marys**—*Magdalene and the mother of James*—who were the first to appear at the Tomb and to announce the good news that Christ had risen.

Author Profile:

Most of us could name at least one individual whose life has greatly impacted ours, leaving a lifelong impression. Mark was accustomed to being around many other Christians; growing up his mother Mary opened their home as a meeting place for the believers in Jerusalem. Spending time with the likes of his cousin Barnabas and the Apostle Paul certainly would have benefited him, but perhaps the greatest impact was left upon this impressionable young man by Peter. He may have led Mark to faith in Christ, since he referred to him as “my son” (1 Peter 5:13). We can only imagine the wonderful action stories Mark heard being told in those early days. He was probably an eyewitness when the servant girl in his home recognized Peter’s voice at the door when he was released from Prison (Acts 12:13-16).

Barnabas and Saul took Mark (then known as John-Mark) along with them on their first missionary journey, but early on, Mark turned back and went home, leaving a less than favorable impression on Paul. When Barnabas approached Paul about bringing Mark along on the second journey, Paul’s refusal resulted in a heated separation. Barnabas took Mark with him, while Paul took along Silas (Acts 15:36-41). There was a reconciliation sometime later and, at the end of Paul’s life, he even sent for Mark, saying, “he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11).

Perhaps Mark related to Peter’s own failure, or maybe Peter saw in Mark the potential for success; but in any case, Peter came alongside Mark and mentored him in the faith. It was through their relationship that Peter became Mark’s primary source of information for his gospel, and it was their closeness that gave authority to Mark’s writing.

Who wouldn’t appreciate being given a second chance? Who hasn’t known the pains of making a bad decision or displaying a lack of maturity and wished they could try again? Mark’s life is an example to us that God uses everything in our lives—the good and the bad—to teach us that without Him we can do nothing, but that with Him all things are possible! Not only is He the God of the second chance, He is the God of the third, the fourth, the fifth, and so on. Those who have received the Lord’s forgiveness and restoration are the quickest to give compassion and encouragement to others who need it. Mark was no stranger to failure or suffering and was ready to reach out to the believers in Rome who needed to hear about the Savior. What Jesus did for the likes of Peter and for Mark, He could also do for them.

Selah . . . (Pause and think about it.)

First impressions are often lasting impressions. Take a few minutes now to pray for God to open your eyes as you read through chapter one of Mark’s gospel. See for yourself how action packed it is. Then hit the pause button, recording your first impressions of the book below.

- What stood out to you from your initial reading?

- What is your first impression about *Jesus* in this chapter?

- What do you hope to gain from your study in the Gospel of Mark this year?

Day One:

Preparing the Way

Lesson one will cover the first half of chapter one; and today we will concentrate on verses 1-8. Try to put yourself in the picture, perched somewhere on that dusty, desert terrain, listening to the powerful message being preached. The words and the tone of the voice are unlike anything you have ever heard before. The figure standing before you is unlike any man you have ever seen.

It had been approximately four hundred years since the people had received a word from God. Here in the opening verses of Mark's gospel, he quotes the Old Testament prophets Malachi (3:1) and Isaiah (40:3) to prove that Christ's coming was foretold long ago. No doubt the prophets' words comforted the people who looked forward to the Messiah. They spoke of a messenger, sent to prepare the way of the Lord. Mark understood that John had fulfilled these prophecies.

1. According to Mark, who was this messenger? vv. 4 and 6
 - a. The title we know him by came about from the message he preached. What was his message?
 - b. Describe his appearance.
 - c. From your reading about John, was he a conventional or unconventional kind of guy for his day? Can you speculate as to why he separated himself, making the wilderness his home?

The Old Testament expression Isaiah used, *prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight*, refers to the custom of sending a messenger on ahead to remove the rubble and make the road smoother for the journey of the king. John was that messenger, a *voice crying* out—or with great feeling—to the people in Israel. His voice was full of emotion because the message he proclaimed was directly from God.

2. How many people went out to listen to the words of this messenger and be baptized by him? v. 5

It's possible that as many as three hundred thousand people from Judea and Jerusalem could have come to be baptized by John at the Jordan River.

3. John preached a *baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*. From a practical standpoint, *how* were the people to prepare for the Lord's coming?

Getting a workout . . . (Word study)

Research the word *repent* using the resources you have on hand (i.e., dictionary, Bible dictionary, additional Bible translations, concordance, etc.). Write a summary definition in your own words in the space below.

The people needed to clear away the *spiritual debris*—the sin—in their lives by repenting and making a public declaration of their change of heart by being baptized. John spoke his words as commands that were to be obeyed immediately. Those who *received* his words humbled themselves and prepared their hearts to respond.

4. How does John compare himself to the coming Messiah? v. 7
 - a. What do John's words reveal to you about the heart of a servant?
 - b. In John 3:22-30, the apostle reveals an even clearer picture of John's heart. Read the passage and note the important phrase in verse 30. This must be the attitude every true servant of Christ.

John's baptism with water demonstrated *repentance*—a willingness to turn from sin, but baptism alone does not save a person. The act of being baptized is an *outward* indication that an *inward* transformation of the heart has taken place, resulting in a changed life.

5. With what did John indicate that the one coming after Him would baptize? v. 8
6. The coming of the Holy Spirit had been foretold in the Old Testament. According to those scriptures, what did God provide through the Holy Spirit?
 - a. Jeremiah 31:31-34
 - b. Ezekiel 36:26-27
 - c. Joel 2:28-29

God's people looked ahead to the day when they would be transformed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus had come to offer both the forgiveness for repentance and the power to live for Him! Have *you* repented and accepted His offer of forgiveness? Do *you* have the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling your life as a result?

Heartbeat . . . (This week's memory verse—begin memorizing it today.) "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.*" Mark 1:15

What to look for:

If John's baptism was indeed for repentance of sin, then why did Jesus need to be baptized since He was sinless? It was to fulfill God's greater plan and to give us an example to follow.

Read Mark 1:4-13

Though born in Bethlehem, Jesus was raised in Nazareth, which was a small town in Galilee. The people of Nazareth were despised by the Jews because they had a reputation for doing their own thing in their own way. But the city was a cultural crossroads that exposed Jesus to people of other nationalities. At the time of John's ministry, Jesus was approximately thirty years of age when He made the long walk from Nazareth to Judea, all the way to the Jordan River where John was baptizing. Jesus came to John for the specific purpose of being baptized, but John tried to prevent him, saying, "*I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to Me?*" (Matthew 3:13-14) Jesus replied to him, "*Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*" (verse 15). Jesus was sinless, but in His baptism He associated himself with sinners—not for His salvation but for ours.

1. Immediately coming up from the water, what two significant things did Jesus see?
v.10

Not only did Jesus see this great sight, John also witnessed the Spirit descending upon Him in the form of a dove. It was at this point that the Holy Spirit publicly descended upon Jesus to empower Him for His ministry.

2. Read John's own words in the gospel account in John 1:29-34.
 - a. When did John first recognize *who* Jesus was? What title did he use? v. 29
 - b. What had God already told John to look for? v. 33

The act of the heavens opening and the Spirit descending was a sign to John the Baptist that Jesus truly was the anticipated Messiah, and John gave witness to this fact.

3. In your own words, how did Jesus identify himself shortly after this as He began His ministry? See Luke 4:16-22
 - Where was Jesus when He made this announcement? From what did He quote?
v.16-17
 - Who bore witness to Him at this time? v. 22
 - Who bore Him witness in Mark 1:11 and what did He say about Him?

4. What significant event *immediately* took place next? vv.12-13

Take a moment to read through the other two gospel accounts that give greater detail—Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. The word *drove* in Mark 1:13 is a strong one in the Greek, meaning *thrown out* or *cast out*. Empowered by the Spirit, Jesus felt *compelled* to go into the wilderness to face His enemy, Satan.

Luke's account tells us that Jesus was in the desert for forty days *being tempted* by Satan, meaning that the action was continuous.

5. Using the Luke 4 account, write down the ways in which Jesus was tempted, and His response to each one.
- 1st temptation (vv. 1-3):
 - Jesus' response (v. 4):

 - 2nd temptation (vv. 5-7):
 - Jesus' response (v. 8):

 - 3rd temptation (vv. 9-11):
 - Jesus' response (v. 12):

Jesus and Satan both used God's Word in their dialogue with one another. The difference was that Satan twisted the Scripture and the truth to suit his own evil purposes, while Jesus effectively used the Word of God as an offensive weapon against His enemy to thwart his mission. As His followers, we must learn to do the same!

6. Mark 1:13 presents a beautiful picture of how this significant period ended. Contrast where Jesus was and what He endured with who took care of Him.

We need to remember that to be tempted is not a sin. The word *tempted* actually means *to put to the test to see what good or evil—strengths or weaknesses—exist in a person*. What Satan intends for evil, God intends for good. Satan will *tempt* us but God will use that as a *test* to strengthen our inner character and teach us how to depend on Him. We too will face *wilderness* times in our lives when our faith will be tested. Our goal is to strike a blow to the enemy by taking up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Visit God's promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13 and then thank Him for it!

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three:

Proclaiming the Good News

What to look for:

There is an approximate one year time span that takes place between 1:13 and 1:14. Mark now mentions the imprisonment of John to signal the end of the Baptist's ministry and the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus had moved his home base from Nazareth to Capernaum, located in the northern region of Galilee. It was there that He would now choose the twelve who would accompany Him and partner with Him in proclaiming the message of salvation.

"The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). The *time* that John the Baptist had preached about had now come to pass; the *man* the scriptures had prophesied about was now in their midst. Jesus' coming placed him at the center of God's revealed plan for the redemption of mankind.

1. Verse 15 is a summary of the gospel message and allows us insight into what God has done on our behalf and how He allows us to respond. From your understanding of the gospel, briefly jot down what each of the following means:

God's part—

- *The time is fulfilled:*

- *The kingdom of God is at hand:*

Our part—

- *Repent:*

 - *Believe:*
2. Why are these words of Jesus such *good news* to us?

 3. What is God's *good word* to you on this day?

God has fulfilled the time, bringing the kingdom near to His people. In order for us to participate we must repent and believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son—that He came to earth and died for our sins and was raised from the dead. There is no other name under heaven by which men might be saved.

"Wake up, for the coming of our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."

Romans 13:11 NLT

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four:

Possessing the Servant's Heart

Have you ever stepped out of your comfort zone to take a risk for Jesus' sake? Have you ever reached beyond yourself with the challenge to become something or someone you have never been? Here in Mark 1, with the call of the first disciples, we get a glimpse of what Jesus is looking for in servants. The initial four called were not sitting on their hands daydreaming, waiting to be noticed or for that big break to come along. They were busy—occupied with their professions, going about business as usual. They got up each morning, put on their clothes and sandals, ate breakfast, and walked down to the sea shore to get to work. But one of those ordinary mornings would turn out quite extraordinary.

You might be interested to know that once Jesus calls individuals to repentance and belief, He then calls them to discipleship and service. You might also like to know that what He cares about in terms of your resume is not what you've accomplished or how much you know; the only thing He looks closely at is your heart attitude. Today, as then, Jesus issues to every believer the same invitation found in verse 17: "*Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.*"

Come closer... **Read Mark 1:16-20 for review.**

A closer look at the words of Jesus in verse 17 reveals that the invitation is actually in the form of a command with a promise attached to it. Reread the verse again and answer the following:

- What does Jesus mean by the words, "*Follow Me?*"

- Whose responsibility is it for what *you* become? How does this encourage you?

- What does it mean to be a *fisher of men*?

The disciples knew how to catch fish, but *catching men alive* would be far more difficult and require specialized training by Jesus. And the call was not for a season but for a lifetime!

1. In several other instances in Mark's Gospel, Jesus used the words, "*Follow Me.*" Look up these references and write down what it would cost in terms of sacrifice to follow Jesus.
 - a. Mark 8:34-35
 - b. Mark 10:21
 - c. Mark 10:43-45
 - d. *Personal!* Name something you sacrificed in order to follow Jesus.

Walking on the beach one day, Jesus saw Simon and Andrew, a pair of brothers who were fishermen. Their first introduction to Him came in an earlier encounter (John 1:35-42), but on this particular day they heard His command to follow Him into *service* and they left everything familiar behind.

2. When Jesus called them, how quickly did they respond? v. 18

3. Going a little further, Jesus also saw James and John who were also fishermen. What task were they performing that was different from that of Andrew and Simon Peter? v. 19
 - b. *Immediately* He called them—how quickly did they respond? v. 20

 - c. In the aftermath, whose lives were affected by their decision? v. 20

Jesus wanted the disciples to fish for men as eagerly as they had fished for food, only this time the net they would use to pull people in would be the Gospel message. As disciples they would not only be casting forth the Gospel, saving *souls*, they would also be *mending lives*—restoring, healing, putting people back together again as they were meant to be.

Perhaps you've heard about Jesus, or maybe you've already been introduced to Him, but now He is asking you to *step out into* the plan He has for your life—the purpose for which He created you. You have been saved to serve Him!

Selah . . . (Pause and think about it.)

Have *you* responded to His words: "*Follow Me?*" Jesus wants to take you somewhere you have never been and turn you into someone you could not in your wildest dreams ever imagine yourself to be. Will you respond today—*immediately*—to His call? You may do so in two ways. Please note your decision and date it for future reference.

- ❖ You can respond to His call to **salvation**: by repenting of your sin, confessing your need for Him as Savior and Lord, and asking Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit.

- ❖ You can respond to His call to **service**: by realizing that you were saved to serve and that God has a specific plan for your life that will bring Him glory and others blessing. Not everyone is called to preach the Gospel message, but **all** are called to *proclaim it!*

- ❖ In the coming weeks, we'll continue to pursue the qualities God looks for in His servants. Name some of the qualities you would expect to see in God's servant.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five:

Praying God's Purpose

It's time to do some *prayer walking*—not in the literal, but the *spiritual* sense. The Holy Spirit will lead you today as you consider three points from your lesson, write them in the form of a prayer, and lift them to the Lord. If practicing the presence of God is new to you—be patient—it will come, and you will be blessed!

"... We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Romans 8:26-27 NLT

A prayer for Spirit-filled service . . .

Have you tried your best to serve God on your own terms, with the abilities He's given you, but at the same time you seem to lack power in your witness? Will you put yourself in His hands and let Him prepare you for effective service? Tell Him so.

A prayer for victory over temptation . . .

If you are having difficulty with an area of temptation in your life, ask God for the help to overcome it and the willingness to learn how to depend on Him through it.

A prayer for proclaiming the Good News . . .

The disciples immediately let go of all and followed Christ. Is there something you need to let go of in order to follow Him? Ask Him for boldness as you speak out on His behalf.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes