

The Gospel According to Mark

Mark 1:1

The Voice Crying in the Wilderness

Mark 1:2-8

The Beginning of Jesus' Public Ministry

Mark 1:9-13

The Messiah Comes Preaching

Mark 1:14, 15

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Reformed Witness Hour

(www.reformedwitnesshour.org)

Station Listings

Station	Location	Frequency	Time/day
KARI	Blaine, WA.....	550AM.....	8:00 P.M./Sunday
WPGF	Carlisle, PA.....	91.3FM.....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WYLL	Chicago, IL.....	1160AM.....	4:00 P.M./Sunday
KLTT	Denver, CO.....	670AM.....	1:30 P.M./Sunday
WFDL	Fond Du Lac, WI.....	1170AM.....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI.....	92.9FM/1570AM.....	4:00 P.M./Sunday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI.....	92.9FM/1570AM.....	8:00 P.M./Wednesday
WCNP	Baraboo, WI.....	89.5FM.....	1:00 P.M./Sunday
KGCE-LP	Modesto, CA.....	107.9FM.....	6:30 A.M./Sunday
KFIO	Dishman, WA.....	97.7FM.....	5:30 P.M./Sunday
KTBI	Moses Lake, WA.....	106.1FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KLOH	Pipestone, MN.....	1050AM.....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WORD	Pittsburgh, PA.....	101.5FM.....	10:00 A.M./Sunday
KPRZ	San Diego, CA.....	1210AM/106.1FM.....	9:30 P.M./Saturday
KDCR	Sioux Center, IA.....	88.5FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KTW	Spokane, WA.....	630AM/96.5FM.....	9:30 A.M./Sunday
KSPO	Spokane, WA.....	106.5FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KGDN	Tri-Cities Walla Walla, OR.....	101.3FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KTBI	Wenatchee/Moses Lake, WA.....	810AM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KYAK	Yakima, WA.....	930AM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
UK			
GOSPEL	Northern Ireland.....	846AM.....	8:30 A.M./Sunday
Canada			
CKNX	Wingham, ON.....	920AM.....	7:00 A.M./Sunday

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR*February 7, 2021
No. 4075**The Gospel According to Mark
Rev. Rodney Kleyn*

Dear Radio Friends,

It is good to be back on the air with you. Today, and in the coming months, we are going to be studying the first chapters of the gospel according to Mark, beginning today with an introduction to this gospel account. It is my prayer that these messages from God's Word will be edifying and fruitful for you.

There is nothing in all the Scriptures so rich as the gospel itself. In fact, this is what the Bible is all about, the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, Mark opens his account, in chapter 1:1, with the words, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

I want you to hear those words, as they were perhaps heard the first time that they were read publicly. So, imagine yourself to be Gentile Christians in first century. You live in Rome. Nero is the emperor. He hates the Christians and he is blaming them for the recent fire in Rome which destroyed 80% of the city. His military are active, rounding up Christians, who are given no fair trial, but with cruelty are clothed in animals' skins and attacked by wild dogs, or are dipped in tar and tied to posts and set on fire to give light in Nero's gardens, or

are brought into the Colosseum and fed to the lions as half-time entertainment.

On a Sunday morning, you gather for worship, not in a church or even in a member's home, but as a very small group in the catacombs, something like the sewer system under the city of Rome, a place where the dead are brought. And today, as you gather for worship, you notice that this person is missing because he has been arrested, and we hear that another has been executed. And now on this Sunday morning, the pastor stands up and says, "I have a new manuscript to read, from brother Mark." You are about to hear the Word of God in the first reading of this gospel account.

That is very likely the setting for the first audience of this book. Mark wrote this account for the Christians in Rome, to teach them what Jesus had endured for them, to teach them especially about His suffering and sacrifice in the cause of the gospel. So that they would know their salvation and be encouraged in their faith.

However, the audience intended by God is much larger. And the good news of Jesus Christ, on the pages of this book, will go forward throughout the

world and throughout history. And so we have in our hands this book, and we receive it, not as man's word, but as it is in truth the inspired Word of God.

The writer is Mark, and on account of that there are some unique qualities and characteristics in this book, but the source and the author is God Himself by the Holy Spirit. And the message is the message of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, come into our world and our flesh as the suffering Savior.

We know that there are four gospel accounts, each of them beginning in a unique way, a way that reflects their main theme or purpose.

Matthew begins by tracing the genealogy of Jesus back to David and to Abraham. He is writing to a Jewish audience and he wants to demonstrate that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and that Jesus is the Seed of Abraham, and so also his account is filled with references to the Old Testament prophecies.

Luke also begins with genealogies, but since his purpose is to emphasize the humanity of Jesus, he traces the genealogy of Jesus all the way back to Adam.

Then John, because he writes to demonstrate the divinity of Jesus, begins in eternity. "In the beginning," he says, "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

So, where does Mark begin? And what does that tell us about this gospel account?

Well, Mark jumps right into the ministry of Jesus. There is nothing of His childhood and origin, except what is before us in this first verse, "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." It is really an introduction that is a theme statement, a summary, of all that this book will contain.

Those first two words, "the gospel," tell us that there is only one gospel, *the* gospel. Often we use the word gospel in the plural to refer to the four gospels, but really there is one gospel, and these four are four accounts of that one gospel, and so not four contradictory accounts, but four accounts with one harmonious message: "the gospel" of Jesus Christ.

The word "gospel" means literally "good news" or "glad tidings." That tells us that the gospel is an announcement of something that has happened. The gospel is not first instruction on what we must do, but it tells us what God has done in *Jesus Christ*. Those are the names given here. He is Jesus, which means Savior, and He is Christ, which means Messiah. And the gospel is the announcement to man of God's work in Jesus Christ, which is good news for the sinner.

One other thing that we should not miss in this first

the Messiah, we do not face His wrath but instead His mercy. And we have been brought to repentance in faith, as Paul puts it when he speaks of predestination, “Where is boasting, then? It is excluded.” And it is humility over *my* sin and a humility over against others, not pride.

But, there is another response, and it is the response of the church. It is the response of the church that realizes the priority and the importance of the preaching of the gospel. Jesus came preaching, first thing. Should not this also be our priority? Should not this be primary? Look down to verse 38, where the disciples say to Him, “All men seek for thee.” And He said to them, “Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.” The people are seeking Him for miracles and He says, “No, let’s go. I came to preach.”

That is echoed by Paul the apostle. He says in I Corinthians 1, “I came not to baptize but to preach the gospel.” This is the calling of the church. Now, it is not the only calling of the church or of believers, but it is primary. And without it, the

church has lost its place as a church. Whereas the church that has a high view of preaching will prioritize this in her worship and in the lives of her members so that our liturgy, our order of worship in the church, will center in this, the preaching of the gospel, because it is in the preaching of the gospel that we expect, we anticipate, Christ Himself to speak to us, to address us with this gospel.

So also as the church we will be careful, when we emphasize the preaching, to choose out men and to train men in the gospel ministry so that the church is equipped with a qualified and called ministry to send forth for this great task of preaching the gospel.

Here, again, there is a personal application to us. Very simply this: as individuals, we will honor the preaching of the gospel when we give ourselves to it, mentally and spiritually, and we will prepare ourselves physically to receive the Word of God, to obey it, and to grow in it continually. May God so help us to love the good news of the kingdom of God.

Amen.

verse is the last phrase, the gospel of Jesus Christ, *the Son of God*. With those words Mark identifies who Jesus is, right up front. He is the Son of God, God Himself in the flesh. That will be a recurring theme in this book, essential to Jesus’ saving work and to the good news of His suffering on the cross. The one who dies for sinners is God Himself in the flesh, strong enough to carry the great weight of the guilt of our sin.

One more thing that we should note about the content of this gospel account is this, that Mark focuses not so much on Jesus’ *teaching* as on what He *did*. If you have a Bible that has red ink for the words of Jesus, you will see far less “red” in this book than in the other gospel accounts. That is because Mark presents the intensity and the busyness of the ministry of Jesus. There are more miracles recorded in this short gospel account than in the others. He uses the present tense—ongoing action is described—and throughout the book the actions of Jesus are connected with the words “and” and “straightway.” There is a rapid pace—a rush of activity in the ministry of Jesus. We see Jesus tired and hungry and needing a rest, a break, from His work at different points in this gospel account.

The Gospel of Mark takes a slow reader only about two

hours to read through. If you have paid attention while you did that, you felt surrounded by crowds, wearied by the demands that come to Jesus, and attacked by the opponents of Jesus. The point of this gospel account is to demonstrate the absolute commitment of Jesus to His ministry. In chapter 10:45 it is put this way: “for even the son of man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.” The word “minister” means “servant.” Jesus came not to be served but to serve, in the laying down of His life as a ransom. When the gospel comes to us, it will make of us servants who are busy in the Lord’s work. That is the encouragement for the persecuted Christians in Rome.

So that is the content of this book, as summarized in the first verse, the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

But now, who was Mark, the writer? I say the *writer*, because the Bible has its *origin* in God. God is the source and the author of Scripture. In II Timothy 3:15, we read, “all scripture is given by inspiration of God.” That means it is God-breathed, it comes from the mouth of God. How that happens is explained in II Peter 1:21: “Holy men of God spake [or wrote] as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” What that means about the content of this gospel account is that we take

everything in this book, word for word, as God-breathed and without error. The gospel account may not be subjected to our criticism or evaluation as to whether it can be trusted, or whether it belongs in the Scriptures. It must not be viewed simply as Mark's perspective as an individual, but it is God's Word, the good news announced to us from God of what He did in Jesus Christ on our account.

I make that point because of what is sometimes called the "synoptic problem." The synoptic gospels are Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and critics and un-

believers love to point to and to exaggerate the apparent differences in these three accounts. And where there are similarities, they like to say that they were copied either from each other, or from another document or record. It is important that we never take such an approach to the Bible, because if we do, we will soon whittle it away as man's word, and be left with almost nothing. No, by faith we must take what is written as God's own word.

Now concerning Mark. Who was he, and how did he come to

write this book to the Gentile Christians in Rome?

Well, this is really a fascinating character study in Scripture, and the story of Mark in Scripture is especially a story of the restoration of one who had faltered as a Christian. He is called both John and Mark in Acts 12 and 15, because John was his Greek name, and Mark

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his Latin name. As to his family, Colossians 4:10 tells us that Mark was a nephew of Barnabas, and in the book of Acts we find that Mark's mother's home was a

known gathering place for the New Testament church. So, when Peter was imprisoned, then released in the night by an angel, he came to the house of John Mark's mother and knocked at the door where they were praying for him. A maid comes to the door, and she thinks it is a ghost. Peter, when released, knew where they would be. The fact that there was a maid indicates that Mark was probably from a relatively wealthy family. His mother was generous and hospitable. It is possible, even, that this was the house with the upper

And immediately, straightway, they forsook their nets and they followed Him. And in verses 24 through 41 you see His dominion over the demons, over illness, over the leper and his disease. In chapter 2, in the first verses, He demonstrates His power not only to heal a lame man, but to forgive sins. And they say, "Who is this that forgives sins?" You go on in this gospel account and you say, "Who is this who has such power that even the wind and the waves obey Him?" And this power we must see here in this gospel call and preaching in this way, that we realize and recognize that the gospel that Jesus Christ proclaims is a two-edged sword that always accomplishes what God has purposed. The gospel call, in verse 15, repent and believe the gospel, is not the call of a pleading, weak, pitiful Jesus who leaves the coming and the believing up to the will of the sinner. Rather, it is the command of the King that effectually works obedience in the hearts of all God's elect to bring them to repentance and to believe the good news.

And you see that when He calls the disciples. He says, "Follow Me," and immediately they forsake their occupation and family relations to be His disciples. Only the grace of the Holy Spirit can produce that obedience. When Jesus comes with that powerful call of the gospel to His elect, His ministry

is stamped with the authority of God, so that every sinner who is confronted by the gospel is confronted by God Himself, is addressed by God Himself, in the preaching. And that gospel preaching becomes a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. It accomplishes God's purpose in predestination—to bring the elect to faith and to render the unbelieving and reprobate without excuse and to harden them in the blindness of their sin.

The Response That It Demands of Us

There are two ways we want to look at that: personally, and as a church.

Personally, the response is this: First, certainly this, that we, having heard the gospel call of the Messiah, repent and believe. And that repentance must be a matter of lifestyle, a way of life of continual repentance and change and conversion so that we hate sin and submit ourselves more and more to the rule and the word of Jesus Christ. That we abandon all trust in ourselves and our righteousness and depend exclusively on the Savior and His work. And accompanying that repentance must be a heartfelt humility. That is the change of heart of thankfulness to God, a humility that is produced by the realization that, as we face

quite different, a different kind of Messiah. But, instead, He comes preaching the gospel of repentance in Galilee.

And that really teaches us, first, the nature of His kingdom and the purpose of His coming. What do I mean by that? He did not

come to be the Jesus that so many today expected and wanted Him to be. He is

not the Jesus of prosperity and health, of success and happiness. He is not the Jesus of tolerance and inclusiveness. He is not the Jesus who is going to save this world from poverty and war. He is not the Jesus who comes to set up an earthly and a Jewish kingdom. No, He is the Messiah who comes preaching the gospel. That is His message. He is the Jesus who addresses the sins of humanity, who confronts man in his heart, who calls men and women and children in every age to turn from their sins, who announces the way of salvation and forgiveness and reconciliation to God through faith in His work and His sacrifice, who goes to the cross, who is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows.

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And in this introductory statement here in verse 15, He speaks of the kind of Messiah He is with absolute clarity. The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent ye, and believe the gospel. That is a summary statement, really, of what will follow in the gospel of

Mark, all the way from here through the Passion Week. And the gospel He comes to proclaim and the kingdom He comes to establish is a gospel of repentance from sin and of the spiritual and invisible rule of the Spirit, which He establishes in the heart of His own. That is the kind of King and the kind of Messiah He is.

But then, second, this gospel call and the summary of Jesus' teaching demonstrates to us also His power, how powerful He is. He is the Messiah, the King appointed of God. He has come with all of His power. He confronts the enemy. He will have the victory. He will overcome every obstacle and every foe till His kingdom is perfected. And that power of Jesus is really emphasized as Mark goes on in his gospel account. Just look down to verses 17 and 18: "Come ye after me," He says.

room where the disciples gathered with Jesus to eat the Last Supper, and where the Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost. And, if that is the case, then Mark, perhaps as a boy, even witnessed and heard the teaching of Jesus.

Mark appears several times in the book of Acts. In chapters 12 and 13, he accompanies Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, until when they come to Pergamos, where he abandons and deserts them and returns to Jerusalem because the

work was too difficult. Because of this inexcusable failure, when Paul and Barnabas are ready to go on a second missionary journey, Paul refuses to take Mark along. On the first missionary journey, Mark had been tested, and he had failed. The result of Paul's refusal to take him was a sharp disagreement between the two missionaries, and they go their separate ways, Paul with Silas, and Barnabas with his nephew Mark.

But the beautiful part of this story is that, later on in Paul's ministry Mark proves himself to be a faithful and reliable helper to Paul. So, in Colossians 4 Paul

tells the believers in Colossae to receive Mark, whom he calls his "fellow worker in the kingdom" and one, Paul says, who "had been a comfort to me" during his first imprisonment. And then, at the very end of his life, when Paul is in prison a second time and everyone has deserted him, he writes to Timothy in II Timothy 4:11, "take Mark, and bring him with you to me, for he is profitable to me for the ministry."

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in Jesus Christ and, despite our failures, we can be restored to usefulness in the kingdom of God.

That is what happens here. And Barnabas, who is called the son of consolation, is right there with Mark to bring him back into the fold and to restore him. And not only Barnabas, but also the apostle Peter, who himself had failed (in his denial of Christ) and needed to be restored.

In I Peter 5:13, we see that there is a very close relationship between Peter and Mark, when Peter calls Mark "my son," similar to the way Paul refers to

Timothy. We can surmise that it is through Peter's influence that Mark is helped to overcome the wavering of his youth and to become a faithful and diligent servant and leader in the church. And through this, Mark is not only returned to useful service in the church as a missionary, but he becomes the hand that writes the record of the ministry of Jesus, from the mouth of Peter.

Why do I say, from the mouth of Peter? Well, because the gospel accounts are eyewitness accounts. The early church fathers tell us that Peter and Mark spent much time together, and that Mark recorded and wrote down much of Peter's preaching. And you can see the similar-

ity in this gospel to Peter's preaching at the house of Cornelius, the Roman centurion. But what

is most intriguing about this gospel account is the prominence of Peter over the other disciples. The gospel accounts are not mere biographies, but you do see personal and biographical information in them. In Matthew and in John, who were disciples of Jesus, you catch that. John refers to himself in the third person as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" or "that other disciple." And in Mark, we have

something similar to that with respect to Peter. There are more than sixteen events that include Peter. Five of those are unique to this gospel account. These are written in very vivid, firsthand ways. And then, in the last chapter, Mark 16:7, in one of my favorite phrases in the Bible, after Jesus is risen, the angel tells the women who came to the tomb, "Go, tell his disciples, *and Peter*, that he goeth before them into Galilee." This is the only gospel account that records those words, "and Peter." The angel wants Peter, who has denied his Lord, to know that Jesus still loves him and forgives him and seeks his restoration.

That is it, that is the good news. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, to forgive sinners, to restore those who have fallen. That

is what I want to emphasize in closing.

Like Mark, like Peter, we need to be restored. We are failures and we are sinners. And the beauty of looking at the ministry of Jesus Christ is to see, not just His power and His miracles, not just His authority and His teaching, but also His compassion in His ministry. That He came, not to be ministered unto,

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"Believe." Repent and believe the gospel, He says. Here you see that the gospel, the good news of what God has done in Jesus, demands a response. The gospel is the good news, the glad tidings of God saving His people by sending His Son as a substitute for the sins of His elect. It is the good news of what God has done for us in Christ. That is the gospel. And it is summarized in words like substitution, atonement, satisfaction—what Jesus has done. But the gospel is not just information to be acknowledged. Rather, the gospel is action and a person to depend on. To believe the gospel is to stake your life upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Whenever the gospel is preached, it must be accompanied by this serious call and demand to all who hear, to turn from their sins and to rest in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Repent and believe the gospel. Have you done that? Do you believe the gospel? So much of what goes for preaching and evangelism in the modern church is all about man, about happiness and success for Christians who follow a certain plan for living. And it cheapens the grace of God in the gospel. Yes,

there is a sense in which we all need moral improvement, but the repentance and the faith that is genuine is a sorrow over sin, a deserting of all trust in self, a dependence for salvation on Jesus Christ alone and a worship of God the King.

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Jesus has come as God, the King, and He confronts man with this call: "Repent, believe, or perish." This is

what He preached.

What It Demonstrates about Him

What does this tell us about Jesus? I ask that question because that is the purpose of the gospel accounts. They are not just stories, they are not just a biography. They bring us to Jesus Christ. And they present us with the truth about who He is. That is so important to see when here, in Mark's gospel, He opens His mouth for the first time, to speak. Today, many come up with their own version of Jesus. But here, in plain language, we learn who Jesus is and we learn why Jesus came. And it is surprising. If we had lived in His day with the Jewish mind under Roman rule (you see this even with the disciples), we might have expected something

hand. And He comes preaching the gospel of the kingdom. So, wherever this gospel comes, this kingdom has come.

So, He says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." And the third element of what He preaches is this (and I want you to see a difference here): "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." In the first two statements, we have indications. That is the gospel. It tells us what God has done in Jesus Christ. But now, following the declaration of the gospel, there are two imperatives. Jesus here issues the call of the gospel to all who hear: "Repent ye, and believe the gospel."

What is it to repent? Well, repentance is not merely feeling bad or sorry about some sins that you have committed. There are plenty of sorrows that are not repentance. Repentance is, literally, to change—a change of mind. Repentance, then, is a radical turning, a change of mind, of heart, and direction. And the call to repentance tells us that there is something wrong with man, there is something wrong with humanity. And what is wrong is sin. This is what John preached, too. And this is what Jesus is saying, that there is something wrong with the human race. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. And He

is telling people: Change, turn from your sin.

You see, our lives are not controlled and lived as they should be in the presence of the King. We all need to change. And we must know that this is not simply a call to unbelievers, but this is a call that comes to us in our condition as believers as well. It is not a call to one-time conversion, but a call that we must hear over and over, and in the church as well, so that there is change, continual change, in every part of our life. We must turn from our apathy toward spiritual things. We must turn from our pride in our relationships; we must turn from our laziness in our work; we must turn from our materialism, in our pleasure-seeking; we must turn and repent from our anger and our discontentment. Repent, turn, change!

Have you repented? Are you repenting? Is there a change in your attitude, your thinking, towards sin? You see, in our Christianity, there is too much pride, too much self-justification, too much defensiveness when we are confronted with our sin. And this is precisely what Jesus targets with the call of the gospel when He says, "Repent, humble yourself before the King." Every time we see the King and stand before the King, we should say, "I need to change, to repent."

And the other imperative is:

but to minister (to serve) and to give His life a ransom for many.

In preparing this message, I read a number of biblical commentaries, and I want to conclude this message by quoting from one of them. The summary of the Gospel according to Mark that this commentator gives is that it is the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ in His humiliation. And he uses a beautiful story as an illustration. That is what I want to read in conclusion. This commentator is obviously an Englishman. He describes the Gospel of Mark this way, and now I quote:

It is the gospel of the Lord as the servant, the gospel of the Lord of glory who showed his glory by becoming little for us. He descends, he condescends, he stoops, he serves, he dies; this is his glory.

I remember seeing pictures of George VI at his coronation, with his enormous, jeweled crown, his ermine robes, all the pomp that marked the occasion. I was very impressed.

But I saw another picture of King George where I truly knew him as king. The photograph showed the East end of London after it had been bombed by the Nazis into a pile of rubble. George VI was there with Winston Churchill to inspect the damage. He wore no crown or robe, just a suit and a derby hat. He looked totally unremarkable, except for one thing. As he walked through the debris, he cried. As he saw the dam-

age, his suffering people, the union jack, which his subjects had draped over the wreckage of their homes, he wept. Churchill's memoirs record that, as the people watched their king weeping in the midst of their ruin, they said, again and again, "He loves us. He loves us."

That, to my mind, is the noblest picture of the king of England that I ever saw. And when I want to see the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, I look at him on the cross, dying for me. That is the glory of the gospel. It is what Mark saw when he looked at Jesus, and it is the vision that we must receive for ourselves, that we might be transformed by it and in newness of life bear our own testimony to the glory of grace.

There I end the quotation. Is that not a beautiful picture? Jesus on the cross, suffering for us. This is His glory; this is His greatness. And this is the gospel we need, and this is what we will be shown, as we make our way into this great book, the Gospel according to Mark.

Let us pray.

Lord, we are so thankful for the good news of Jesus Christ, Thy Son. Without that good news, we would be lost in the hopelessness of our sin, and in the darkness of our unbelief. Lord, we pray, that the good news of Jesus Christ will come to us like water to a thirsty soul, refreshing and satisfying. Hear us we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

February 14, 2021
No. 4076

The Voice Crying in the Wilderness
Rev. Rodney Kley

Dear Radio Friends,

We return again today to the Gospel of Mark. We looked last week at the first verse of the first chapter, “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Today we continue by looking at verses 2-8. I will begin by reading those:

As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; and preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

As we get into this gospel, we

see immediately that the starting point is different from the other gospel accounts. There is no mention of Jesus' birth or childhood. Mark jumps right into the adult life of Jesus and the beginning of His public ministry. That is because Mark's purpose is to show us that Jesus is the Servant-King, the One who came (according to chapter 10:45), not to be served, “but to [serve], and to give his life a ransom for many.” So Mark begins the public ministry of Jesus with the announcement of Him from the mouth of John the Baptist.

John comes to announce and proclaim the gospel. He does that, not by presenting a program for the people to follow or a philosophy or ideas for the people to adopt, but by pointing his listeners to Jesus Christ. As we saw in verse 1, “The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” It is the good news of what God had done for sinners in Jesus Christ, His Son.

And that is the most important thing for us to see about John the Baptist—that he comes, not with a ministry about himself, but a ministry concerning Jesus Christ. If we asked John: “Who are you?” he

The time is fulfilled. He is conscious of this.

Secondly, He says in His preaching: “The kingdom of God is at hand.” Those are much discussed and disputed words. The best summary of those words is this, that the kingdom of God refers to the rule of God over the hearts and the lives of His people. The kingdom of God is not the rule over a place, a geographical place, but it is the invisible rule and the eternal rule of God. Jesus, in Luke 17:21, says that the “kingdom is within you,” and when one has become a citizen of this kingdom, been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, then that one, forever, comes under the rule of Jesus Christ in His heart. He has an eternal position and citizenship in that kingdom, invisible and eternal.

We see here that Jesus comes preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. The gospel and the kingdom are not separate from each other. They are not two different things. But the kingdom is established by the preaching of the gospel. And all of Scripture is about the kingdom in the coming of Jesus Christ. It is about the rule and the sovereignty of God in the hearts of sinners by His grace that comes in the gospel.

Now, as Jesus comes and says the kingdom of God is at hand, it does not mean this,

that the kingdom comes just partially, that there is kind of a partial reign that increases incrementally. But Jesus comes Himself as the King with all the fullness of His power, with His absolute rule. And that is present in Jesus here. At first, that rule is veiled—it is veiled when He is born in Bethlehem, it is veiled when He goes to the cross and He suffers. But it is there in all its power. He goes to the cross and lays down His life and gives up His Spirit to the Father and rises from the grave.

So the kingdom of Jesus Christ is not something that has to come incrementally, but we could put it this way, that as His work moves from the cross to the resurrection and glory, and as history moves from the time of Pentecost to the time of the return of Jesus Christ, and as the church is built and gathered, what we see is the unveiling of the power of this kingdom. That is why Jesus says here, “The kingdom of God is at hand,” not “The kingdom of God is future.” But what He means is that the kingdom of God is near, it is within touching distance, close by. And it is that when Jesus comes both in regards to time and in a very physical way. He has come to establish the rule of His kingdom. He is a King. He embodies that kingdom. And He can be touched right there. The Kingdom, He says, is at

God is at hand. And then third, repent ye and believe the gospel.

The time is fulfilled. Jesus realizes that He is at an important juncture or turning point in history. The Greek word “time” here refers not to a chronology of events or a period of time, but rather to a particular point in time, an event. They are two words in the Greek, one of them referring to a period or chronology of time and the other to an event. And Jesus uses the word here that refers to a specific event. The *time* is fulfilled, He says. This is a time that will change everything—an event. Maybe an illustration will help us to understand that. If a man and a woman are in a relationship and that relationship develops over a number of years, there is an event that will change that relationship, and that event would be a wedding. Jesus is saying something like that here: Here is an event. An event is about to take place that will change all things in relation to time. He is saying that His coming, His birth, His ministry, His suffering, His cross, and His resurrection—all these things that are about to take place in His public ministry will shape and change time and history.

So, He says, the time is fulfilled. And that word “fulfilled” has the idea of something being full to the brim, to overflowing. When we pour our coffee in the

morning, we do not fill the mug to the top. We leave a little room so that nothing will spill. But now, Jesus is saying, the fulness of time has come. In Galatians we read, “When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” The idea is that all of time since the beginning of the world (the creation) has been working toward this point. Jesus said these words, “The time is fulfilled,” against the background of the Old Testament, indeed, against the background of the eternal counsel of God. The time of fulfillment has come. All the promises of the Old Testament, the promise of the seed of the woman that would crush the head of the serpent, the promise of the nations of the earth being blessed in the seed of Abraham, the promise of one being raised up like to Moses or the Son of David sitting on his throne, or the servant of the Lord coming to bear our stripes and carry our griefs and sorrows—that time now has come.

And, if we look at Luke 4, we see Jesus standing up in the synagogue in Nazareth and expanding on this. There He reads Isaiah 61: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel....” And Jesus says to the listeners in the synagogue in Nazareth: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

would say, “I’m nobody.” They came and asked him: “Are you the Christ, are you Elijah, are you that great prophet?” And he said (in the gospel according to John), “I am just a voice.” Here in verse 7 he says, there is one that comes “mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.” This reflects the words of the gospel of John, in 3:30, where he says of Christ: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

So Mark here describes John in verses 2 and 3 as a herald, a messenger, a voice, one who prepares the people and calls the people to see the King who is coming. Every king has a herald, one who announces his arrival. Recently I watched a Press conference at the White House, and before the President emerged to his podium, there was an announcement: “Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States of America.” Then the Press corps stands and there is music: “Hail to the Chief,” and the President emerges to his podium with the seal of the United States embossed upon it. So there is a messenger, a forerunner, a voice: “The king is coming. Be prepared.” That is the point here. John’s message is not a message about John himself but a message that points to Jesus Christ.

In verses 2 and 3, there are two Old Testament prophecies that Mark quotes and strings together. He does that because both of these refer to the same person, to John the Baptist. In verse 2, he says: “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.” This is a quote from Malachi 3:1. What we should notice especially is that, in this quotation, Mark changes the pronouns. The difference in the pronouns is this, that in Malachi, Jehovah speaks of Himself: “I will send my messenger before me, and he shall prepare the way before me,” whereas here, in Mark, Jehovah speaks to the Son: “I will send my messenger before *thy* face, and he shall prepare thy way before thee.” Now, Mark is not misquoting, but there is a divine interpretation here in the New Testament of the Old Testament prophecy. And it points to the fact that the One who comes, Jesus Christ, is Himself divine. “I will send my messenger before my face.” This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The second prophecy quoted here is from the book of Isaiah, chapter 40:3. Here, in Mark, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” In the context in Isaiah, this is a message of comfort to God’s people, who are waiting for the servant of Jehovah to

come: “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.” We can imagine that there were those in the days of John the Baptist who were waiting. Perhaps they knew of Zacharias’ child born some three decades earlier. Perhaps they heard of the birth in Bethlehem and the shepherds’ vision. But what had happened to all this? Zacharias’ son is alone in the wilderness. The child born in Bethlehem is now in Nazareth, an unknown carpenter’s boy. And now the voice comes, the voice in the wilderness: “The King is coming. Prepare the way.”

Now we have a description of John here that matches his task. He is described here in verse 6 both in terms of his dress and his diet. And both of them are telling us something. Verse 6: “John was clothed with camel’s hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey.” He wore camel’s hair, a girdle of skin. He was not wearing this just for fun or because he liked it. But there was a message in his clothing. His rough clothing here identifies him as a prophet. This was the garb, the dress, of the prophets in the Old Testament. Zechariah 13:4, 5 describes prophets who do not want to be known as prophets removing their rough clothing. And this particular outfit of rough clothing that John wears identifies him with the Old Tes-

tament prophet Elijah. You see that in the description of Elijah in the beginning of II Kings. He was dressed the same way. And in the very last verses of the Old Testament, there is a prophecy of Elijah who would come before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Mark, in describing the dress of John the Baptist here, is really saying what Jesus would later say, “Elijah has come. Elijah has come to announce the coming of the Messiah.” So this is his dress.

And then there is also his diet: locusts and wild honey. Why does he eat these? Well, again, it is not because this is what he prefers. This is not his preferred food, but it speaks of where he lives in the wilderness. This is the food that is available for him. And this really adds another dimension to his description. John did baptize and preach in the wilderness, we read in verse 4. Why does he preach in the wilderness? In the Bible, the wilderness is a place of seclusion and separation and judgment. Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness for her sin. And on the great Day of Atonement, the goat who had the sins of the people spoken on him was led into the wilderness. By setting up his pulpit in the wilderness and by dressing as he did, John rebukes the established religion and the elitism of the Jewish leaders of his day and calls the people to

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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The Messiah Comes Preaching
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

We are going to consider together verses 14 and 15 of Mark chapter 1.

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Now, you recall that the gospel of Mark is an action gospel and that Mark gives really a summary of the high points of the ministry of Jesus. I bring that up because between verse 13 (Jesus’ temptation) and verse 14 (the beginning of His public ministry) there is almost an entire year that Mark does not record. I mention all this not just because it is interesting, but because it fits exactly with the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry as it is recorded in the gospel of Mark. Jesus is baptized and receives the Holy Spirit and the commission to do His great work, and He remains off the radar for almost a year. I say that fits with the beginning of Mark’s gospel and what we have in these verses in this way, that in His baptism we have the heavenly announcement that He has come, and then the things that we might expect to

happen, especially if we lived in those days, do not happen. We expect action. We expect the Messiah, as it were, to lay out a plan for the establishment of Messiah’s kingdom—perhaps a palace to be erected and the shift of His labors from Galilee (which is in the north and despised) to Jerusalem. But, instead, we have this very small beginning in verses 14 and 15 (our text for today). This very small and unlikely beginning in a place called Galilee. Jesus comes preaching in Galilee.

We take as our theme today: “Messiah Comes Preaching.” Notice, first of all, what He preached; second, what it demonstrates about Him; and third, the response that it demands of us.

What He Preached

That is stated for us in verse 14 and then summarized for us in three points in verse 15.

In verse 14, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel (the good news) of the kingdom of God. That is the statement that summarizes. And in verse 15 we have the three elements of that preaching. First, the time is fulfilled. Second, the kingdom of

confront them over and over again throughout His ministry. But here, at the beginning, the perfect angels of God come to minister to Him and to encourage Him.

So Jesus is encouraged here at the beginning of His work. This teaches us two important things. First of all, it teaches us the greatness of the task that lay before Him. He needed to be encouraged for the struggles He would face and for the sufferings He would endure. He needed the encouragement of God to Him as He took these on Himself. Sometimes in our lives, we need encouragement, too. But the struggles that we face are nothing in comparison to what Jesus would face as He would be the sin-bearer.

But this encouraging of Jesus also says something to us about the character of God and the kindness of God towards us. Psalm 103 says of God that He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust. And we could say of God in this account here in Mark that even when God is displeased with us, still He is faithful to us and shows His kindness to us. That was true for Christ. In His humiliation, Jesus Christ carried our sins and was constantly exposed to the wrath of God for our sins. And yet God sees His obedience in that. God encourages Him in that.

And that is important for us as we think about difficulties and sufferings and sometimes the chastening hand of God in our lives, which comes sometimes even as a result of our sins. Then we can know, in our suffering, that God will come in kindness to encourage us and to minister to us. He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens.

So, we should see our suffering not as punishment from God but as chastening, because Christ (we see that here in His baptism) has taken the wrath of God from our trials and removed the curse of sin from us. That does not mean we do not have to suffer sometimes, but it means that God loves us in our suffering. He who knew no sin was made sin for us, and He took our suffering on Himself so that we might be the friends of God.

Let us pray.

Father, we are thankful for this word, for the willingness and the obedience of Jesus Christ; for what He did as our Savior in taking on the enemy of sin and Satan; and for the victory that He had in the end over all these so that we might be redeemed and know Thy love for us. Sanctify us by this word we pray, and cause our faith to look forward to the day of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

spiritual change and separation from the empty religion of the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

And that brings us to his message. What was his message? Mark does not give us the kind of detail of John's preaching that we find in the other gospel accounts, but he summarizes the message of John here as two things. First, in verse 4, a message of baptism, and then in verses 7 and 8, a message concerning Jesus Christ.

In verse 4: He preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." There is something very radical about this, and that is especially the message of baptism. He preached baptism.

Baptism is a sign or symbol in the Scriptures that teaches us our need for the forgiveness and the washing of sins. When it says here that John *preached* baptism, it means that he demanded that those who heard his message respond to it by being baptized. That, especially, was the radical element of John's message. He was John the Baptist, John the Baptizer. It is not that baptism, as a ritual, was altogether a new thing. If you go to the Old Testament, you will see that there are many ceremonial washings for unclean things, even for unclean people. But by this time baptism was used primarily as a symbol for the Gentile converts who came

into Judaism. In the mind, it symbolized that Gentiles (the *goyim*) were defiled and unclean, whereas being a Jew and having Abraham for your father meant that you did not need to be washed. We see that when the Jewish leaders come to John and they say to John in Matthew 3:9 and Luke 3:8, "We have Abraham for our father. Why are you baptizing? We have Abraham for our father." And John is saying to the Jews who come to him at the Jordan River that, regardless of whether they have Abraham for their father, they need to be baptized, they need repentance, they need the washing of their sins, they are unclean.

That was the distinct message of John, and it was preached with such clarity and such authority and such urgency that when the people came to John, they knew that his preaching was different from what they had been hearing from the Jewish leaders. And because of this, thousands of them, perhaps tens of thousands of them, came to him. In verse 5 it says, there went out to him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and they were all baptized of him in the Jordan River. It does not mean that every last one of them came, but that they compelled one another. They said, "Have you heard this man? Have you seen his dress? Have you heard his preaching?" And

we can imagine thousands coming, perhaps tens of thousands coming to the Jordan River to listen as John pointed out their sins, as he called out the sins of their leaders, as he pointed to the publicans and the soldiers and the false religious leaders and he called them by name and he called them to flee the wrath to come.

That, especially, is the radical part of John's message here in verse 4: He preached the "baptism of repentance." Repentance is both a change of mind and heart and a change of conduct or life. True

repentance is the result of a transformed nature, which is changed and made new by the work of the Holy Spirit.

And true repentance brings forth, as John calls it elsewhere, the fruit of repentance—a turning from sin and a turning to God. And John is saying that only in the way of repentance is there forgiveness in Jesus Christ. The baptism here is a symbol of that forgiveness that comes in the way of their repentance.

And if we think about John's message of sin and judgment, what a blessing this message was, what a gracious message this was for the people in John's

audience. They had been taught to be secure in their religious practice and in their religious lineage of the house of Abraham, and here John comes with a message of comfort and he comes declaring remission. He preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Today there are many who call themselves preachers, but there is no message of sin, no call of repentance, no comfort, no promise of forgiveness. And Christianity is emptied of the good news of the gospel. John, in contrast, preaches good news in

True repentance is the result of a transformed nature, which is changed and made new by the work of the Holy Spirit.

the coming of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. And in this way John prepares the way for the coming of Je-

sus Christ. Only in the way of repentance, only in recognition of sins, is there forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ.

So John preached first the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

The second element of John's message we find in verses 7 and 8, and it is really this: The gospel, the good news, of Jesus Christ. John magnified Jesus Christ. He preached saying, "There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy

to the Son: "Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Now, of course, these words were intended for others to hear as well. But they were directed at Jesus. God is saying to the Son, "I have chosen you. I have anointed you. I am sending you. I love you. I am pleased with you in your taking this work on yourself."

Those will be such important words for Jesus, and important gospel words for us as well. Later on, Jesus will go to the cross and will cry out in the hour of His suffering: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But He will do that with these words in His ears: "Thou art my Son. I am well pleased with thee." And those are words spoken not just for Him, but also for us. God is pleased with His Son. Isaiah speaks of this pleasure in Isaiah 53 this way, and he is thinking of the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross, that God, when Christ is suffering, shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied. This is the pleasure of God in the work of His Son. It is a satisfaction in God that His Son is paying the price for our sins. That is what this means. God is pleased with His Son, and, at the very beginning of His ministry, as in His baptism, He takes our sin on Himself. The Father says, "I am well pleased with Thee." What an encouragement.

But there is also encouragement for Christ here as He comes out of His temptation. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan, and was with the wild beasts. And verse 13 concludes by saying, "And the angels ministered unto him." God sends His angels to minister to Him as He comes out of His temptation. Now that does mean that they brought Him food, but it also means that they came to encourage Him.

There is something more than we can really grasp that is going on here. In I Peter 1:12 we are told that the angels looked diligently into the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning our salvation, that is, they know the Old Testament Scriptures, but, as creatures, they do not know how all of this will unfold, and there is, among the perfect angels when Christ comes into the world, an anticipation of His coming. We see that in the angels coming from heaven and singing to the shepherds. And here we see this in the beginning of Mark's gospel as well. They were interested in the work of Jesus. They come to encourage Him. They are, we might say, His greatest cheering squad. We read about the angels here, at the beginning of his gospel, and then not again until after His resurrection. But we do read about other angels, and those are fallen angels, the demons and devils. Jesus will

to the Father, which, for Him, is the way of the cross and the way of suffering.

At the beginning of His ministry here, Mark sets the scene for the entire gospel account. We are going to see this conflict. We are going to see attacks on Jesus. They are going to come, not only from Satan, but from the unbelieving Jews, from Jesus' own family, who would not understand the purpose of His ministry, and from His closest disciples. And we are going to see the conflict of His own soul in the Garden of Gethsemane in the hour of His suffering.

But, in His temptation here, as Mark records it, we also see a foreshadowing and a token of Jesus' final victory as the Messiah and the Christ. And we see that especially in the setting and the circumstances—the wilderness and the wild beasts. Those are very interesting references here. We already said that, when John preached, he preached in the wilderness. And the wilderness symbolized a place of separation. John separated himself from the apostate nation of Israel. But it was also a place of judgment.

God had caused Israel for forty years to wander in the wilderness. Here, Jesus is forty days in the wilderness, fasting. It is a picture of God's judgment upon Him. And the symbolism is that

*And He would triumph.
He would bear the judgment
of our sins.
He would, as it were,
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Jesus would take upon Himself the judgment and the isolation that our sins deserved and would also be confronted in that by many adversaries and would show Himself the obedient servant of the Lord. And He would triumph. He would bear the judgment of our sins. He would, as it were, starve and take our punishment so that we might receive bread from heaven in the wilderness.

That brings us to the third thing that I want us to recognize in these verses. First, we saw the baptism of Jesus, then we saw the temptation of Jesus, and now we have the encouragement of Jesus. In these two verses, we see two ways that God encourages Jesus. First, in connection with His baptism at the beginning of His ministry. In verse 11 we read, "There came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." We should recognize that the Father here addresses these words directly

to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." John is diverting attention away from himself here. He is saying, "Yes, I'm first, first on the scene, but I'm not the Christ." What John emphasizes here is the qualitative difference between himself and the One who will follow after him—Jesus Christ. John is finite, but the One who comes after him is infinite. John is temporal, but the One who comes after him is eternal. So John says in verse 8: "I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." What he is really saying is, "All I can really do is wash you on the outside. But the One who comes after me, he can cleanse you from the inside." And the washing of the Holy Spirit is the work of regeneration in salvation. In saying this, John indicates that the Messiah who will come after him is no mere man. Who can command the Spirit of God, and who can forgive sins, but God? What good news this is to those who came to hear John preach. They waited, not just for a Messiah, but they waited for the day when God would come for the deliverance of Israel and for their deliverance from sin, and the day when God would come and pour out His Spirit upon all flesh. And this is the good news that John announces.

Let us see that there is a proper response to the preaching and the methods of John. It is the humble response of repentance that God works in the hearts of His elect people. We see that here in the passage, first of all in John's own response to the message that he brings. In verse 7 he says, "I am not worthy even to stoop down and undo the latchet of Jesus' shoes or sandals." The feet were the dirtiest and the most despised part of the human body. And to stoop down and unloose the shoe latchet was the task of the lowest servant. And John is saying, "I am not even worthy to be the lowest servant of Jesus." He points to a great difference between himself and the Savior. That is humility. There is no hypocrisy in what John declares here. He speaks of his own knowledge, his own sinfulness, and his own need also of repentance and remission of sins.

But we see this humble response secondly in this passage in the way that the multitudes who came to hear John responded to the message that he brought. In verse 5, they "were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins." This does not mean that every last one of them was baptized or confessed their sins. The other Gospels make that plain. But here is the beginning in Mark of the great multitudes that will

follow Jesus, understanding their sin and understanding Him as Savior. And what is said of them here is marvelous. They came confessing their sin. That is the Spirit-worked response of repentance and faith to the gospel. That is their turning from their sin to God. And do you not see in that that God, through John's message, is preparing the hearts of God's people for the coming of the Savior, for the ministry of repentance for the cross? Here is the only way for them to understand who Jesus is and why He will, in the end, go to the cross. Sin, sin, necessitates the death of the Savior on the cross. So, again, the key verse in this gospel account, Mark 10:45: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." One cannot understand the ransom apart from knowing his own sin.

And so, John preached, and so we preach, the gospel of Jesus Christ as the ransom for sinners. This gospel demands the same response from us who hear it today. Jesus has now come, and the gospel we hear is essentially the same—the gospel of baptism for the remission of sins. Baptism is the symbol that teaches us three things: that we need forgiveness and that we must repent and believe

in Jesus Christ; that there *is* forgiveness to all who are in Christ and are washed by His Spirit and blood; and then, third, that there is a call to holiness and separation from sin. That is the message of the gospel that comes to us today—that we confess our sins; that we come to Jesus for washing and remission; and that we lead a new and holy life.

So, as we go forward in this book, we are not interested just in information. John does not present a program to follow, a philosophy to adopt, but a person

to believe in. And the person is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Let us pray, as we go forward, that God, by His Spirit, will

keep us looking toward Christ and toward the cross, because that is what the gospel, the good news, is all about for unworthy sinners.

Let us pray.

Father, we pray that by the Spirit we will be awakened to see our sin and the washing of remission and repentance, through Jesus Christ. Help us, in understanding our sin, to seek the ransom that Christ paid for us and to believe, looking away from our unworthiness to His worthiness in our place. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

*John does not present
a program to follow,
a philosophy to adopt,
but a person to believe in.*

cross through a life of suffering and temptation.

The word here, in verse 13 calls attention to that when the one who comes to Him is described not as the Devil or the Tempter, but as Satan, which means Adversary. That takes us all the way back to the beginning when, after God had made Adam and Eve, Satan came into the perfect, sinless creation as the enemy of God and the enemy of man. And that is explained after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin in the great promise of Genesis 3:15 spoken to the Devil: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." This, of course,

is the promise of Christ, but it also speaks of the history-long struggle between Satan and Christ. And the whole Old Testament is really the outworking of that.

There is an antagonism in every generation in the Old Testament to the coming and the fulfillment of the promise of Christ.

That is true even today, after Christ has ascended into heaven. There is resistance to Christ and the gospel. And

Mark means to tell us at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry that this will be the nature of His ministry, that behind every scene and every event of His life from here on, there is a spiritual and a supernatural warfare and conflict. And that is connected directly to His baptism, which is His anointing. In His baptism, He is given His work, and when He begins His work and He shows His obedience, Satan wants immediately to shake Him from that calling and that task, to break Him from His resolve to do this work. Certainly we can see that in the specifics of the three temptations: to turn stones to bread to feed His hun-

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gry belly; to throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple in order to call attention to the fact that God was His support; or to bow down to Satan, as a much easier way to have

dominion over the nations of the earth than the way of the cross. Satan wanted Jesus to settle on some other way, some easier way than the way of the cross—to abandon His humiliation, to exercise His divinity in some self-serving way. Instead, Jesus goes the way of obedience

in the form of a dove. The significance of the dove is not clear. But what is important here is that the Holy Spirit comes in a visible representation. The Spirit, of course, is invisible. But occasionally He is represented in a visible form, as later at Pentecost, when He comes in tongues of fire, or in the Old Testament when He was represented in the oil of anointing. Now He comes in the form of a dove. And that is to prove, as it were, that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, the Anointed. Hosea 11:12: "The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him." Isaiah 42:1: "Behold, my servant whom I uphold: mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him." Or Isaiah 61:1, the great Messianic prophecy that Jesus will read in the synagogue in Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings." So, God here anoints the Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth is singled out for this great work.

And this is not just an identifying of Him as the One who will do this work, but it is also an empowering of Him, equipping Him for this work. John, in his gospel account, says of the Spirit not just that He descended, but that He abode on Him. And the point is that, from here on,

Jesus would not only be willing but also be able to do the work that God had sent Him to do. The Spirit would go with Him, equipping Him and strengthening Him for the work.

So, here, at last, we have the long-awaited Messiah at the beginning of His earthly ministry.

And that leads us into the next great event that Mark records here: His temptation. Notice how Mark begins in verse 12: "And immediately." We get the idea that Jesus, as it were, hits the ground running. He begins immediately. But it is rather surprising *how* He begins. We would expect Him to get on with His public ministry, His teaching and His miracles. Instead, we read that the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness. What Mark wants to call attention to at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus is the conflict between Satan and the Messiah. The Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. This does not mean that Jesus is unwilling here. But this is an emphatic way of showing us that God willed for Jesus' ministry to begin with this conflict with Satan, the great enemy. He must learn obedience through suffering; He must learn to submit to the Father's way for Him, hard as it may become. He will be prepared and tested for the cross and the suffering of the

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

February 21, 2021 *The Beginning of Jesus' Public Ministry*
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Dear Radio Friends,

We return again today to the Gospel of Mark, and we will be looking at verses 9-13 of Mark, chapter 1.

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

There are two main events recorded in this opening scene in the ministry of Jesus Christ. They are His baptism and His temptation. Before we get to those, though, I want to say a couple of introductory words about these verses. First, in these verses we have the moment that Jesus, as it were, bursts unto the scene in His public ministry. "It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee." Those days were the days when

John was baptizing. Jesus was in Nazareth of Galilee in the north and John was baptizing all the way in the south, in Judah, by the Jordan River. And we can imagine that people were anticipating the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He is the Messiah; He is appointed to save. How will He do that? What will His ministry look like? And then suddenly, in these days, Jesus appears on the scene.

The second thing I want to notice is that, characteristic of the Gospel of Mark, as he begins, he does not tell the whole story of these events, but in very rapid pace he gives attention to little details here and there. The rapid pace is reflected in these words in verse 9: "It came to pass"; in verse 10: "And straightway"; and in verse 12: "immediately." Mark wants us to see in these words not just that Jesus was busy, that His ministry was exhausting, but especially that He was dedicated to being busy with the work that God had given Him to do. That is what we want to see in this message, especially as we come to the baptism and the temptation of Jesus. He is taking on the work that the Father has given Him to do. "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God."

As we think about the baptism of Jesus, we want to look at this event from the point of view of the question: Why was Jesus baptized? And we ask that question because if we look at verse 4, we hear John preaching a baptism of *repentance* for the remission of *sins*. Certainly, Jesus had no sins that needed to be washed away, nor was repentance necessary for Him. In fact, in the other gospel accounts we read that John was very reluctant to baptize Jesus. And Jesus does not argue with John, but He says to John, “Do it anyway.” And He explains it this way: “This must be to fulfill all righteousness.” And He means, not just that this is the right thing for Him to do in obedience to the Father, but that this baptism symbolizes how He would accomplish and obtain righteousness for us.

So, why was Jesus baptized? The first part of the answer to that question is this: to identify Himself with His people in their sin. That is one of the meanings or symbolisms of baptism. Romans 6 says,

*At the very beginning
of His ministry,
we see the willingness of Jesus
to take this sin on Himself,
to be the sin-bearer,
the sinless Lamb, submitting
Himself to a baptism
designed for sinners
and a baptism that represents
the wrath and the justice of God
against sin.*

“We are baptized into Christ.” Elsewhere, Paul writes that the Israelites were baptized unto Moses in the Red Sea, and that we are baptized by one Spirit into one body. Now Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry, is baptized with sinners. The idea is that He is numbered with the transgressors, as Isaiah says it. And as One who is identified with our sin in His baptism, He would take that sin upon Himself and He would have to pay for that sin and die for that sin.

That is the righteous requirement of God’s law for sin: “The wages of sin is death.” And the baptism of Jesus Christ looks forward to the cross.

In fact, He calls the suffering on the cross *exactly* that when He says, in Luke 12:50, “I have a baptism to be baptized with.” And He says to James and John, “Are you able to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” He is talking about His work in identity with sinners, and He is taking their sins upon Himself. So, at the

very beginning of His ministry, we see the willingness of Jesus to take this sin on Himself, to be the sin-bearer, the sinless Lamb, submitting Himself to a baptism designed for sinners and a baptism that represents the wrath and the justice of God against sin.

But there is a second reason that Jesus was baptized. In the first reason we are really seeing that Jesus is speaking to the Father of His willingness: “I am willing to do this.” In the second reason, God really speaks to the Son. And He does that literally: “Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,” but He does that also in the symbolism of baptism, because the baptism represents the anointing and the commissioning of Jesus to do His work. It is God saying to Him, “You are the One, you are My servant, you are the Messiah. Now, be about your work.”

As Jesus comes up out of the water, a dramatic scene unfolds. It is a trinitarian scene. It is both visible and audible. And it is best described as Jesus’ coronation and His commissioning. No other king ever received such a coronation. In verse 10: “Straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened,” and the word there is, literally, *rent* or *torn*, just as the veil of the temple was rent in two. It is reminiscent of Isaiah 64: “Oh, that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down.”

This was an attention-grabbing, loud event. And as the people lifted their eyes to see, and Jesus Himself lifted His eyes to see the rending of the heavens, they saw a dove descending. This was the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. We have here a trinitarian scene, which was both visible and audible. Visibly the Son is anointed by the Holy Spirit, who descends in the form of a dove, and audibly the Father speaks from heaven and affirms to the Son that He has sent Him into the world.

Mark brings home to us here in his brief description of it the importance of this great event. When a president is sworn into office, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is there to administer the vow of office. Here, God Himself manifests that this Triune is there to commission and to appoint and to send His Son to be the Messiah. You remember in the Creation account in Genesis 1, “God said, Let there be... God said, Let there be...” But then, when He came to the creation of man—His crowning work—He stops and He consults within Himself as triune God and says, “Let us make man in our image and after our likeness,” to bring home the uniqueness and the significance of the creation of man. Something like that is here in the anointing and the baptism of Jesus.

So, the Holy Spirit comes