



Mark 1:1-20

An OCF Bible Study

Mark 1:1-20

Mark is widely considered to be the earliest of the Gospels. Mark “was not a disciple of Jesus during Jesus’ ministry or even an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry. He accompanied the Apostle Peter and listened to his preaching. He based his Gospel on the eyewitness account and spoken ministry of Peter.”¹ Some think of Mark as “The Gospel according to Peter.”

Who was Mark? He was a traveling companion of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25, 13:5) but he deserted them (Acts 13:13) and did not continue with them in the work. Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them on their second missionary journey, but Paul did not think it wise to take him because he had deserted them. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company (Acts 15:36-40). Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left to revisit the churches he had earlier established in Asia on his first missionary journey. The result of the disagreement between two godly men—two missionary teams!

Who were the recipients of the Gospel of Mark? The Church at Rome—Roman Gentile converts. Since this Gospel was written for Gentiles—people unfamiliar with Judaism—Old Testament quotes are rare.

Then why does Mark begin his gospel with a quotation from the Old Testament as he describes the arrival of Jesus (vv. 2-3)? An understanding of Jesus’ ministry requires an understanding of prophecy concerning the Messiah. Mark is setting the stage. He is sending the message that, “This story of Jesus is not something new that we invented. You haven’t heard about it before, but 700 years ago the prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3) as did Malachi 400 years ago (Malachi 3:1).” These prophecies are the only time Mark quotes from the Old Testament.

In addition to prophesying about the arrival of Jesus, who is the messenger that Isaiah (and Malachi) prophesied about in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1? John the Baptist. Like Jesus, John’s appearance is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. John the Baptist is considered to be the last of the Old Testament prophets. This passage Mark quotes, *In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God (Isaiah 40:3)* has in mind building up a great road for the arrival of a king. The idea is to fill in the holes and knock down the hills that are in the way. John was God’s bulldozer to build that highway.

What was John’s ministry all about (vv 4-5)? A call to repentance. John’s baptism was a baptism characterized by confession and repentance. For a Jew in John’s day to submit to a baptism of repentance was a true act of humility. It’s essentially saying, “I confess that I am just as far away from God as a Gentile is and I need to get right with Him.”

How would you describe or define repentance? Some people think that repentance is mostly about feelings, especially as in *feeling sorry* for your sin. It’s wonderful to feel sorry or remorseful about your sin, but true repentance isn’t just about *feeling sorry* for your sin. The Greek word *metanoia*, translated “repentance,” literally means a change of outlook, to reconsider. It’s about turning away from sin, not merely feeling sorrow in your heart. Think of repentance as taking sides with God against yourself.

Why was there such a large Jewish following of John (v. 5)? This was foremost a real work of the Holy Spirit. God had been “silent” for 400 years after the Old Testament prophet Malachi. But the Jews knew Messiah was coming sometime. The Jewish community was familiar with Malachi 4:5, *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes*. They knew Elijah never died. John looks like Elijah. He is ministering in the same geographical area as Elijah. There is great anticipation, excitement and conviction. If indeed Elijah is here in the person of John the Baptist, Jesus can’t be far behind! John offered them hope! This is a time of revival.

What was John the Baptist’s overriding message (v. 7)? “This is not about me.” John preached Jesus. John pointed the people to Jesus, not to himself. John’s main message wasn’t, “You’re a sinner; you need to repent.” John’s main message was, “The Messiah is coming. Get your hearts ready for His arrival.” **John clearly understood his singular purpose in God’s grand scheme. Have you discovered any of God’s purposes for your life?**

Why was this sinless Jesus baptized? He certainly didn't need to repent (v. 9). Jesus was baptized in keeping with one primary aspect of His mission on earth: to identify with sinful mankind. Jesus started the identification process when he became flesh and dwelt among us. He was identified with sinners in His baptism. He also ate the same things, went to our places, wept with us, was hungry and tired, walked with us, suffered with us, underwent the same temptations. He became one of us. Baptism is one important step in the overall mission of Jesus to identify with fallen and sinful mankind, a mission that would only finally be fulfilled at the Cross.

What was God the Father conveying to Jesus by His comments (v. 11)? He is preparing Jesus for vv. 12-13. Jesus is being sent into the desert to be tempted by Satan knowing He has His Father's approval and blessing. It's like the Father is saying, "You're my son...I love you...I'm proud of you. I have a job for you and I know you will do it well. I'll see you back here in 40 days." What an encouraging and confirming sendoff that must have been.

Why did the Holy Spirit prompt Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan (v. 12)? One primary aspect of Jesus' mission on earth was to identify with sinful mankind. Here He is identified with sinners in their temptations. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us, *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* Hebrews 2:18 says, *For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.* He's been there, done that. Jesus knows what we're going through. In His humanity, the wilderness experience was not an easy ordeal for Jesus. **Have you ever been on the receiving end of a "wilderness" experience for God's purposes?**

What was a predominant focus of Jesus' ministry (v. 14)? Proclaiming the good news (gospel) of the kingdom of God. He taught the people. He wanted people to know that the kingdom was near - as close as your hand. "And I'm here to reveal it to you" is the essence of His message. It wasn't as distant or as dreamy as they had imagined. Jesus was a preacher who sometimes did great miracles, not a miracle worker who sometimes preached. (v. 38)

What do we know about these first disciples? What kind of men were they? They were Jewish men without theological credentials or status in the world, who hadn't made the "religious cut" on the road to becoming a rabbi. Jesus met them in the workplace, as they labored like any common man.

What was Jesus' invitation to them (v. 17)? Follow Me. Jesus shows by His invitation what Christianity is all about – following Him. At its root, Christianity is not about theological systems, rules, or even helping people – it is about following Jesus where and when he leads. Someone once said, "The purpose of my life is not to please God – the purpose of my life is to follow a person."

And if they follow Him, what did Jesus say He would do next? He would make them fishers of men. Note that He doesn't say I will make you great theologians, Bible scholars, pastors, etc.

How did the men respond to Jesus call (vv. 18-20)? With a sense of urgency without questioning. They dropped everything they were doing. They didn't say, "We'll pray about it first and get back to you."

Application: Is there anything Jesus might be calling you to drop, get rid of, or immediately leave in order to follow Him more faithfully? Is there anything getting in the way of your relationship with Jesus – Internet, video games, a relationship, hobbies, sports?

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®) copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

This is copyrighted material provided by Officers' Christian Fellowship (OCF). Permission is granted for use in local groups. For more information about the ministry of OCF: www.ocfusa.org.