

Day 1

## **Mark 1:1**

Kevin James walked onto the track at Daytona and screamed into a microphone, “I’ve got three things to say: God bless our troops. God bless America. And gentlemen, start your engines!” It was a pretty good way to start a race.

Here’s how Mark starts his gospel...

*Mark 1:1, “This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.”*

This simple yet profound statement sets the stage for Mark’s entire gospel. It’s not just the start of a book but the announcement of a world-changing message.

The word “beginning” reminds us that because of Jesus, something new is happening. Just as Genesis starts with “In the beginning,” Mark is signaling a fresh start in God’s relationship with humanity. This is not merely the continuation of an old story; it’s the dawn of a new era.

Mark calls the message “good news.” In a world often filled with bad news, the gospel stands out as a beacon of hope. This isn’t just good news; it’s the best news possible. God has come for us to bring us His love and save us in the person of Jesus Christ.

The verse identifies Jesus as both “the Messiah” and “the Son of God.” As Messiah, Jesus fulfills the long-awaited promises of the Old Testament. As the Son of God, He is divine, carrying the full authority of God Himself.

This verse serves as an invitation. As we read Mark’s gospel, we don’t just observe history but are invited to become participants in God’s ongoing story. Every day, we have the opportunity to experience a new beginning in Christ, to embrace and proclaim the good news, and to recognize Jesus as both the promised Messiah and the Lord of our lives.

Reflection Question: In what areas of your life do you need to experience a new beginning with Jesus today?

Day 2

## Mark 1:1-3

After announcing that he was about to share the good news about Jesus, Mark quotes Isaiah. In so doing, Mark immediately establishes a connection between the story of Jesus and the prophecies of the Old Testament.

*Mark 1:1-3, <sup>1</sup>It began <sup>2</sup>just as the prophet Isaiah had written:*

*“Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,*

*And he will prepare your way.*

*<sup>3</sup>He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,*

*‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming!*

*Clear the road for him!’”*

This link to Isaiah reminded people that Jesus didn’t appear out of nowhere but is the fulfillment of promises God has been making for a long time, and of long-held hopes and expectations. It also lent authority to Mark’s account. It was like Mark was saying, “All of this isn’t my idea. It’s not something new. Isaiah talked about this long ago. This is the continuation of God’s long-declared plan.”

These verses are a reminder that our faith has a rich heritage. Our faith didn’t begin with Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem but has roots stretching back all the way back. We are a part of a very long, very amazing story!

The messenger Mark is referring to is John the Baptist (more on that tomorrow), but we can live out and apply this verse as well. God has called *us* to be messengers and to prepare the way for others to encounter Jesus. We can use the way we live and the words we speak to help make straight paths for the Lord in the lives of others.

Too cool!

Reflection Question: In what ways can you be a “messenger” preparing the way for others to encounter Jesus?

Day 3

## Mark 1:4-8

Have you ever met someone who was just kind of weird? They acted differently from the norm and didn't dress like anyone else. You watched them and thought, "Okayyyy, just ... weird."

*Mark 1 4-8:<sup>4</sup> This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. <sup>5</sup> All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup> His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food, he ate locusts and wild honey.*

*<sup>7</sup> John announced: "Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!"*

Let's just say John was a bit strange. He lives in the woods, wears camel hair, and eats locusts. You may have done well on a reality show like *Naked and Afraid*, but probably not on your invite list for Thanksgiving. But he's a prophet. And a preacher. And a baptizer. Thus, he got the nickname John the Baptist, or as we call him, John the Baptist.

God called him to prepare the way for the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus. To do that, he was baptizing people, which was a form of ceremonial washing to prepare yourself to be in the presence of God. Jews had been doing this for centuries, but now John is giving it added significance as he asks people to repent – to turn from their sins – to prepare to be in the presence of the Son of God.

John's humility in this passage is striking. He was clear that he was *not* the main event. Despite his popularity, he never lost sight of his purpose: to prepare the way for Jesus. He understood his role, though important, was secondary to the One who was to come. He pointed beyond himself to One more powerful. John sees himself as unworthy even to perform the task of a slave - untying sandals - for this greater One.

John's example challenges us. Are you willing to decrease so that Jesus may increase in your life and in the lives of other people who are looking to you?

Reflection Question: How can you, like John, humbly point others to Jesus in your sphere of influence?

Day 4

## Mark 1:9-11

John is baptizing people to prepare the way for the “greater one” who is coming, and then, out of the blue, the greater one shows up ... to be baptized.

Wait. What?

*Mark 1:9-11, <sup>9</sup> One day, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. <sup>10</sup> As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him<sup>[e]</sup> like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.”*

We learn in Matthew’s gospel that John objects to the idea of baptizing Jesus. Yeah, so would I!

He basically asks, “Why do you need to be baptized? We are cleansing ourselves for you; why do you need to be cleansed?” Jesus explains that he is getting baptized because it’s the right thing to do; it was out of obedience to God.

When Jesus was baptized, heaven was opened, the Spirit of God descended on him, and God spoke from Heaven, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.”

That’s also what happens when we obey God. We learn that we are loved. We get to experience God’s joy.

And guess what? All those who see you are blessed, too.

- Those sets of eyes from the backseat of your minivan.
- Those coworkers who see you put others before you.
- Those neighbors who see you pick up trash that isn’t yours.
- Those servers who you treat with kindness and tip well.

We obey.

We hear, “You are loved.”

And so do they.

Reflection Question: What is a way you've been struggling to obey God? How do you think you might be missing out on feeling God's love and experiencing his joy?

Day 5

## Mark 1:12-13

Yesterday, we read about the amazing experience Jesus had when he was baptized. He and those around him heard his Father's affirmation, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy" (Mark 1:11).

Mike Breen points out that when his father spoke to him, his three greatest needs were met.

- Approval.
- Appetite.
- Ambition.

These are the defining marks of our humanity - the humanity that Jesus came to share. We need God's approval, we have appetites that should be recognized, and we have ambitions that God must direct if we are to fulfill our God-given destiny as the children of God.

Today, we read that those three things were put to the test in Jesus' life. Immediately after being baptized...

*"<sup>12</sup>The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. <sup>13</sup>He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him." (Mark 1:12-13).*

Jesus heads out into the desert, where he is tempted by the evil one. We read in Matthew's gospel that Satan tempts him with shortcuts to the three things we all need.

- Approval. Take a shortcut and bow to me, then everyone else will bow to you.
- Appetite. Take a shortcut and turn the stones into bread.
- Ambition. Take a shortcut and save the world by submitting to me.

Every time, Jesus responds by quoting the Word of God and rejecting the temptation.

But there's a more basic question about Mark 1:12-13.

Why? Why did Jesus go out alone to be tempted?

He did it for you. For me.

He was tempted in the same ways we are so that he can identify with you. So, when you go to him for your approval, appetite, and ambition, he can offer exactly what you need. When you're tempted to take a shortcut to try and meet these needs, he can say, "I remember that." And he can offer help.

Reflection Question: When you are tempted to sin, do you feel like Jesus is someone to be avoided or someone you can go to because he understands what it's like?



Day 6

## Mark 1:14-15

When have you had a “That escalated quickly” moment that seemed to change everything all at once?

Today, we read about a pivotal moment in Jesus’ ministry. John the Baptist is imprisoned, signaling the end of the preparatory phase and the beginning of Jesus’ public mission. Jesus steps forward, declaring that the long-awaited time has arrived. He begins His ministry with a proclamation of good news.

*Mark 1:14-15, <sup>14</sup> Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God’s Good News. <sup>15</sup> “The time promised by God has come at last!” he announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!”*

The content of this good news is revolutionary, “The Kingdom of God is near.” In Jesus, God’s rule and reign were breaking into the world in a new way. This wasn’t a far-off hope but a present reality that people could experience and participate in.

Jesus’ call to “repent and believe” is an invitation to a completely new way of living.

Repentance involves a radical reorientation of your life, turning away from sin and self-centeredness and towards God and living a Jesus-centered life.

Belief means putting one’s full trust in Jesus and his good news, allowing it to shape every aspect of life.

Interestingly, Jesus began proclaiming this message in Galilee, a region often looked down upon by the religious elite. It suggested that God’s kingdom is accessible to all, not just the privileged or seemingly righteous.

Jesus’ words challenge us to consider: Are we living as citizens of God’s kingdom, allowing His rule and reign to shape our lives? Are we helping to bring his Kingdom to the world? Are we continuing to repent – to realign our lives with God’s purposes? And are we sharing the good news?

Reflection Question: How does the reality of God's Kingdom being "near" impact your daily life and decisions?

Day 7

## Mark 1:16-20

What is the most important call you've ever received? It may have been an invitation you didn't see coming or a phone call that changed your life.

Today, we see Jesus issue a call that turned four guys' lives upside down.

*Mark 1:16-20, <sup>16</sup> One day, as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. <sup>17</sup> Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" <sup>18</sup> And they left their nets at once and followed him.*

*<sup>19</sup> A little farther up the shore, Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. <sup>20</sup> He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men.*

Notice that Jesus did not ask these guys to believe in him. He didn't say, "There is a list of truths about me that I would like you to assent to intellectually. Number one, let's talk about the virgin birth..."

Jesus didn't ask people to believe in him; he asked them to *follow*. Of course, no one would follow if they didn't believe; believing is essential. But believing is not the point.

Jesus called out, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!"

He asked these men to reorient their entire lives around being with him, living life as he lived it, and joining his mission.

The immediacy of Simon's (Peter's), Andrew's, James', and John's responses is striking. They didn't hesitate, make excuses, or ask for time to think it over. They recognized something special about Jesus and compelling in his invitation and acted on it right away.

This passage challenges us to consider how we're responding to Jesus' call in our own lives. Are we willing to leave behind our old ways of living to follow him? Do we realize that following Jesus isn't just about our lives and personal growth

but is about joining him in his mission of inviting others into God's kingdom? Are we ready to reorient our lives and resources around that mission?

Will we respond with the same immediacy and wholehearted commitment as these first disciples?

Reflection Question: What "nets" in your life might Jesus be calling you to leave behind to follow Him more fully? What might "immediate obedience" to the call of Jesus look like in your current circumstances?

Day 8

## Mark 1:21-22

Who was the best teacher you had growing up? Perhaps you sat through most classes in high school bored out of your gourd, but you had one teacher who totally kept your attention.

When Jesus spoke, he took teaching to a whole new level...

*Mark 1:21-22, <sup>21</sup> Jesus and his companions went to the town of Capernaum. When the Sabbath day came, he went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup> The people were amazed at his teaching, for he taught with real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law.*

This passage marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Capernaum. On the Sabbath, He goes to the synagogue - the center of Jewish religious life - and begins to teach. What's striking is not just that he teaches but *how* he teaches. The people are amazed because he teaches with authority.

Unlike the teachers of the law, who often cited other rabbis and engaged in complex interpretations, Jesus spoke with direct, divine authority. His words carried weight, conviction, and transformative power. He didn't just explain the Scriptures; He revealed their true meaning and applied them to people's lives in fresh, compelling ways.

This authority stemmed from Jesus' identity as the Son of God. He wasn't just interpreting God's word; He *was* God's Word. And He didn't just explain the law; He revealed its heart and purpose with clarity and power.

The people's amazement suggests they recognized something different in Jesus. It should be the same today. When people encounter Jesus, it should amaze us and challenge our usual ways of thinking and living. It should be transformative.

Reflection Question: When was the last time you were truly amazed by Jesus' teachings? What struck you?

Day 9

## Mark 1:23-28

Yesterday, we saw Jesus teaching in the synagogue and how the people were amazed. What happens next is even more amazing...

*Mark 1:23-28, <sup>23</sup> Suddenly, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup> “Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”*

*<sup>25</sup> But Jesus reprimanded him. “Be quiet! Come out of the man,” he ordered. <sup>26</sup> At that, the evil spirit screamed, threw the man into a convulsion, and then came out of him.*

*<sup>27</sup> Amazement gripped the audience, and they began to discuss what had happened. “What sort of new teaching is this?” they asked excitedly. “It has such authority! Even evil spirits obey his orders!” <sup>28</sup> The news about Jesus spread quickly throughout the entire region of Galilee.*

Everyone had just marveled at Jesus’ authoritative teaching; this confirms that Jesus has authority even beyond his words.

The evil spirit cries out of the man, recognizing Jesus’ true identity – the “Holy One of God” – even as most people were yet to understand who Jesus was. Jesus’ authority extends into the unseen spiritual dimensions of our reality.

Jesus doesn’t respond to the spirit with some kind of incantations or sprinkling of holy water (like we’ve seen in exorcism movies). He gives a simple command, “Be quiet! Come out of the man,” and the evil spirit immediately obeys. Why? Jesus’ power is absolute.

This passage reminds us that Jesus has power over everything – seen and unseen. We can trust in his authority even in areas of our lives where we feel powerless or overwhelmed. We can bring the troubled areas of our lives to him, and we can experience his transformative power.

He has the authority to bring freedom and healing to your life.

Reflection Question: In what areas of your life do you need to acknowledge and trust in Jesus' authority more fully?

Day 10

## Mark 1:29-34

In this next story, we learn that Simon's (Peter's) mother-in-law was sick. It invites all sorts of mother-in-law jokes and the obvious question: If yours was sick, would healing be on your wish list, or would you be happy just to leave her in bed?

Simon tells Jesus about his ailing mother-in-law...

*Mark 1:29-34, <sup>29</sup> After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and Andrew's home. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. <sup>31</sup> So he went to her bedside, took her by the hand, and helped her sit up. Then the fever left her, and she prepared a meal for them.*

*<sup>32</sup> That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. <sup>33</sup> The whole town gathered at the door to watch. <sup>34</sup> So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak.*

Take note of what Jesus did. He (1) went to her, (2) took her by the hand, and (3) helped her sit up.

In this story, we learn not only of Jesus' power over illness but also of his compassion. He could have healed the mother-in-law from the other room, but he wants to connect with her. Jesus touches the sick and lifts them out of their distress.

Following Jesus means *we* are driven by compassion and willing to touch the sick and do what we can to bring healing.

Take note also of what Simon's mother-in-law did. Jesus served her, she is healed, and her immediate response is to serve.

When we experience Jesus' touch in our lives, it should naturally lead us to serve others. Our healing and blessings aren't just for our own benefit but equip us to minister to others.



Reflection Question: How can you be an instrument of Jesus' healing and compassion to others in your community?