

**First Baptist Church Merritt Island**  
**Executive Pastor Carey Dean**  
**March 19, 2023**  
**Who Do You Say I Am**  
**Mark 1:1**

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Does your heart want to just beat out of your chest when you hear what God is doing through people we know, to people whom we have never met?

This has been a process leading up to this moment. These students and leaders on the Guatemala mission trip didn't just wake up last Sunday morning, get on a plane and say, "Okay, Lord, here I am use me if you can!" They have been praying, "Lord, prepare me so I can be useable for your glory." Throughout their preparation, the Lord has refined their expectations according to who He is and to be willing to follow wherever He is leading.

For me, the most powerful, effective, and impacting journeys I've ever made are the ones I spent preparing my heart and hands.

I have a group of 52 very excited people who will take a plane this Thursday and place their feet and heart in the Holy Land, most of whom are for the first time. We spent all of January meeting, studying, praying, and getting so excited about finally going to Israel. Some have prepared at levels I rarely see. I believe Betty Hoffa has had her suitcase packed for at least 3 weeks. Now that takes preparation to a new level.

Tomorrow begins a journey for everyone in this room and everyone viewing online. We call it Pray21. Starting tomorrow, we as a church family will be preparing our hearts in a focused and intentional way so that we can consider fully and experience the upcoming Easter Sunday rightly. Resurrection Day is a moment worth preparing our hearts for!

Today you can receive a Pray21 prayer guide for those 21 days. It is also available online at [fbcmi.com/pray21](http://fbcmi.com/pray21) and will be posted on social media each day leading up to Easter Sunday morning.

During Holy Week, we will open the worship center from 11 am-1 pm, Monday, April 3 through Thursday, April 6, for you to come and pray. There will be a simple, self-guided prayer prompts for you. Come and stay as long as you wish as the Lord refines your heart as you remember Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

Good Friday, April 7, will be a deeply meaningful time together as we all gather in this room and sit inside the weighty seven last sayings of Christ while on the cross. His cross will be before our hearts, and we will remember His love that allowed His body to be broken and His blood to be poured out for our salvation.

Then Easter Sunday morning! With hearts overflowing, we will proclaim the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our tears over His loving death will become uncontainable joy over His glorious resurrection.

So, this morning, instead of preaching, I want to use our time together to prepare you for your next 21 days. Like Rob's mission trip or my Israel trip, preparation is key to a fully experienced journey. Your journey is not going to be a random one. You will travel from the first to the last verse of The Gospel According to Mark.

This is not only going to prepare your heart for Easter Sunday morning, it will also prepare you for this new sermon series that we will be in for a very long time!

Knowing where each gospel begins is an indicator of their perspectives and intent.

- John starts with "In the beginning".
- Matthew starts with Abraham as the beginning of Christ's lineage.
- Luke starts with the birth of Christ.
- Mark begins with the inauguration of Jesus' ministry at His baptism.

On your first day, you will begin with Jesus entering the baptism waters of the Jordan, and on your twenty-first day, you will end Mark's gospel rejoicing at His resurrection.

Now that I've shared my excitement let me be honest with my initial disappointment. I fell into the same trap that many have fallen into. At first glance, it is easy to consider The Gospel of Mark the lesser of Matthew, Luke, and John. As the Gospel of Mark stands next to the Gospels according to Matthew, Luke, and John, it is easily overlooked, underestimated, and neglected.

Where Matthew digs deep into the Old Testament law and prophecies to show Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah King, Mark's use of OT references and Jewish customs are few and far between.

Where Luke is the longest gospel and presents Jesus as the Son of Man with precise chronological detail, the Gospel, according to Mark, is the shortest and moves through time rapidly.

Where the Gospel according to John emphasizes Jesus as the unique Son of God through His words and miracles, Mark includes the fewest of Christ's words and miracles of any of the four gospels.

We've been studying the theme of "humility" for the last two weeks. Well, the Gospel of Mark has humbled me for the last five weeks! Spending much time in Mark's sixteen chapters, I have come to love how Mark tells of the good news of Jesus. It is small but mighty. It is simple in format yet complex in structure. Its language is common, but its understanding is challenging.

Something I NEGLECTED...to learn about the first Gospel written. It is believed by many scholars to be the first gospel written, probably before the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. If the first of the gospels were written, it would make sense to serve as a primary source for both Matthew and Luke's Gospels

Something I completely OVERLOOKED...the intentionality and authority of the work of Christ. As I have studied and taught Matthew, Luke, and John, I would pour over the words of Christ that explained His work. Mark flips it on its head. He brings the work of Christ to the forefront as a validation of every word and claim of Christ. Mark moves without delay from story to story to emphasize a bigger story, love's story of redemption that cannot be stopped.

Something I UNDERESTIMATED...the unique point of view of the person of Mark. How can you not be drawn to the first-hand accounts of the Apostles John and Matthew, or Luke the Gentile physician who wrote both a Gospel and the book of Acts. But this little-known man named Mark probably was a teenager or a little older during the ministry years of Jesus. It wouldn't be the first time God used someone relatively unknown as a conduit of His glory to be known among the nations.

Before you start day one, you need to know some things about Mark. He is actually referred to as John Mark. This tells us much in that he had a Hebrew-Greek name. His Jewish friends would have called him John and his Roman friends would have used the Greco-Roman name, Mark. Thus John Mark. This was a huge AHAA for me! This explains why John Mark does not include Jewish detail or language within his Gospel. His primary audience is Roman Christians under persecution who would not understand the Jewish cultural or Old Testament references. He kept it common Greek and easy to understand for his Roman readers.

His mom Mary was a follower of Christ whose home became a common gathering place for believers. The disciples would have found Mark's home a safe place to gather, pray, study, and fellowship.

*Acts 12:12 (ESV): When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and praying.*

This is Peter experiencing the incredible miracle of being freed from prison by an angel of the Lord. Where did he run? To John Mark's house. Who was there at the house? Many were praying for Peter. John Mark grew up in a home where the likes of Peter, James, and John would come freely and probably often. Can you even imagine?

He accompanies his cousin, Barnabas, and Saul as an assistant on his first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:4) and quit the journey for unknown reasons (Acts 13:13). This caused a rift between Paul and John Mark, but reconciliation in the relationship was revealed 10 years later in Paul's epistles to Colossae (Col 4:10). The final New Testament reference maybe is the most because of two small words. *1 Peter 5:13 (ESV) 13 She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.*

It is thought by many that Mark's Gospel is the transcription and retelling of Peter's first-hand account of his walk with Jesus. As you can see, John Mark is a man who has a most unique point of view and powerful ministry experiences with both Paul and Peter. The group that is going with me to Israel will hear me say over and over again, "This is where...", "Make sure you pay attention to...", "Please don't miss this", "Keep looking, there is more to see." Let me do the same for you before you open Mark 1:1 tomorrow!

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The Movement of Christ
  - This is the Gospel of Christ.
  - He is the main character of His Gospel.
  - Mark uses "immediately", 41 times.
  - Mark moves his reader from one act of the ministry of Christ to the next with a sense of motion, urgency, and expectancy.
  - But don't move too quickly through the passage. See the word "immediately" not simply as a change of scene but as a bridge from one thought to another.
  - Mark is intentional about the sequence of events. He chooses the stories He includes for a purpose.
  
- The Work of Christ
  - In Mark, you will learn who Jesus is more from His work than His words.
  - Although you won't encounter many words of Christ, you will be engaged with the action of Christ.
  - Take note of all the verbs attached to Jesus.
  - Let those verbs come to life for you in a love Christ has toward us that is active, determined, and unstoppable!
  
- The Heart of Christ
  - Mark includes rich layers of Jesus' thoughts, desires, and emotions such as
    - walking with his disciples,
    - teaching the masses,
    - healing the one, and
    - personal journey to the cross.
  
  - Mark consistently reveals the emotions of Christ that show us how real He really is as the Son of Man, who is the Son of God.
    - The tender compassion of Jesus that moves Him to feed the thousands.
    - The astonishment of people's unbelief.
    - The righteous indignation of Jesus turned over tables.
    - The desperate cry at being forsaken by His Father while bearing our sin.

So, you are prepared with some familiarity of why this Gospel is unique and special, who John Mark is and what to look for each day.

## ONE QUESTION and ONE COMMAND

I want to leave you with two last things before you begin Pray21. One is a daily question to be answered and one is a daily command to be obeyed.

Mark begins his gospel with a strong, unwavering declaration of belief. This opening verse also serves as Mark's personal confession and a masterful clue to the reader of two climaxes to come within his gospel telling.

THE QUESTION — Who do You Say that I Am?

### **Mark 1:1**

#### **1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Son of Man, is God's promised, anointed Messiah. In Mark 8, after many miracles were seen and teaching heard, Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" That question led to His real question, "Who do you say that I am?" It was answered by John Mark's mentor and father in the faith, Peter... "You are the Christ". I can't help but believe that this Mark 1:1 is his own answer to that question, echoing the words of his own mentor, Peter.

The second declaration is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This comes at the highest point in all of his Gospel. To this point in Mark's Gospel telling, only a demon has called Jesus the Son of God. And Jesus quickly quieted that demon! Not until the end of Mark is Christ's identity believed and confessed as God's Son from man's lips to God's ears. It came not from a disciple, a family member of Jesus, someone who experienced the healing power of Jesus, or a religious leader who finally saw the light. It comes from the most unexpected believer, a Roman centurion guard standing at the foot of the cross as a witness to the dying breath of this innocent man placed between two thieves.

*Mark 15:39 (ESV): And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"*

There is so much I want to unpack here, but I want to prepare you for your next twenty-one days and not preach 21 sermons! As you open Mark and meditate on the passage for each day, would you be like the centurion guard and stand before the cross of Christ? For it is only there that your heart will recognize Jesus Christ as God's Son.

Only in the light of the cross does His work and word make sense. Make the cross of Christ where you run to and not run from. Don't leave its shadow. Only in the shadow of the cross can you answer the question rightly, "Who do YOU say that I am?"

## THE COMMAND — Follow ME

Every day, say “yes” to wherever He is leading you. Follow with determined love, quick obedience, and full surrender. Sounds so easy, doesn’t it? To know Christ is to know whom you are following. Many follow a Jesus we wouldn’t recognize if he walked in the room today. I’m afraid we follow a Jesus whom we pick and choose what we want to believe.

Why do I say that so firmly and directly? Because I know my own heart. There came a crux of a moment of faith for me when I was 30. This was my question, “There has to be more to this. What is it?” I was following Jesus, but nothing was satisfying my deepest part. My core problem was that, over time, I was following a Jesus that I formed instead of following the Jesus that formed me. Like a master artist, Mark paints Jesus as the suffering servant throughout his gospel. Jesus tells us why He came. His purpose demanded the cross.

*Mark 10:45*

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

This was the “something more” I was looking for and didn’t know. Christ told me that all that was missing in my walk with Him could be found in embracing His cross to experience the power of His resurrection.

*Mark 8:34–36*

*34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. 36 or what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?”*

Twenty-five years later, I feel like I am only at the beginning of discovering what it means to follow Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The denying of self is a daily battle, but oh the satisfaction of trusting Christ. I have never once regretted choosing Christ over my flesh. Resting in the shadow of His cross is a challenging place to remain, and my flesh tells me a thousand reasons to put down the cross I am carrying, but oh the honor and joy of sharing in the suffering of Christ.

And to follow Christ when I am so prone to distractions and flesh’s impulses is a humbling reminder of just how weak I really am. But oh the resurrection power that comes with every step. Would you ask Christ to lead you daily and commit your heart to follow Him?

For the next three weeks, I encourage and exhort you to be intentional and not casual. I want you to leave this place today committed to the twenty-one days before you...of knowing and trusting Him more intimately. I want you to think about all of us entering

this same room on Easter Sunday morning, twenty-one days from now. What will that Resurrection Sunday look like? So, let's prepare for a journey that will prove worth every daily step.