

**First Baptist Church Merritt Island**  
**Senior Pastor Titus Green**  
**March 26, 2023**  
**Prepare The Way Of The Lord**  
**Mark 1:1-8**

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Growing up as one of five heathen boys in a pastor's home, there was a commonly used phrase around our house that had a wide range of effects on me. Sometimes it brought me comfort. Sometimes it scared me to death. That phrase was, "Get ready; Dad is on his way."

There were times when I had done something I shouldn't have done, like the time we broke the neighbor's window playing baseball or when I taught my little brother how to start a fire inside the shed or when my brothers and I hid from our babysitter and made her think she lost the pastor's kids. The phrase "Get ready, Dad is on his way" struck fear in me.

There were also times when I was hurting and broken, literally, and was waiting to go to the hospital, like the time my brothers tied me to the tailgate of the old pickup truck, and it somehow opened and made me fall to the ground, and I needed stitches or the time my brother kicked me in the hand and broke it, and I needed x-rays or the time my other brother hit me in the eye with a bat, and I had to stay in the hospital for a week or the time I busted my head open playing basketball and needed more stitches. The phrase "Get ready, Dad is on his way" was a great comfort to me.

You see, Dad never changed. He was always strong and smart and good. He was always the same. But my condition varied greatly. And, depending on my condition, Dad's arrival was either my greatest comfort or my greatest threat.

And that dynamic is similar to the one we find in the opening scene of the Gospel of Mark. Through the ministry of John the Baptist, God delivered a word to the Jews. And the basic message was this: Get ready; the Lord is on His way. And for some, that was their greatest comfort. For others, it was their greatest threat. It all depended on the condition of their hearts...and that's not just true for those who lived 2000 years ago in Israel; it's true for us today. But I'm getting a little ahead of myself. So, let's dig into our text for this morning...

**Mark 1:1 (ESV)**

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

Mark begins his account of the life of Jesus with the phrase "the beginning of the gospel." The word "gospel" is a word that is familiar to most of us. Even if you didn't grow up in a Christian family, you likely have heard that word associated with the message of Jesus. It's from a Greek word that simply means "good news." So, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the Good News of Jesus Christ. Most of us likely knew that coming into the room today.

But Mark isn't writing this book to people who grew up associating the word gospel with Jesus. Mark was the ministry assistant to the Apostle Peter as he served the people of Rome. So, Mark is writing this account of Jesus' life to people who have grown up in the Roman culture. In their day and time, the Greek word for gospel was commonly used to report a victory from the battlefield.

Imagine living in a group of people who had just sent their husbands and sons off to war. Without any modern form of communication, days and weeks would go by without any idea what was happening. You would gather with family and friends each day, hoping for a message from the battle, even more, you'd hope the message was good news.

And, once you saw the messenger on the horizon, you wouldn't want to wait to hear the full report. You'd want the initial word: is it good news or bad news? If your army had won the battle, the messenger would come back with a summary of the battle but wouldn't just launch into the details. Instead, he would shout, "It's Gospel, it's good news, the victory has been won!"

And that's how Mark starts this account of the life of Jesus. Before he recounts the details, he leads off with the summary, "It's gospel. It's good news. The victory has been won!" And here's why I want to point that out. Mark is most likely writing to the people in Rome when Nero was the emperor. Scholars believe it was during the height of Nero's persecution of Christians. Many of them were thrown to the wild animals as a sadistic form of entertainment at the Colosseum. Some were even tied to posts and burned like streetlights to light the way for Nero's chariot. The persecution was so intense that the Church started meeting in the catacombs, the underground tombs of Rome. They were in a battle for their lives and their livelihoods. They were in a battle for their joy and peace. They are gathered together, waiting to hear the word from God and as the messenger arrives with this letter from Mark, what are the first words they hear? "It's gospel. It's good news. The victory has been won!"

And my prayer for us as we walk through the details of this study is that we will hear the truth about Jesus and respond like it's good news. So, as you face the battles that are going on in your life, the hardships, the fears, the things that would keep you up at night or wake you up in the morning, I pray the truth about Jesus will bring you peace and joy and power. It's gospel. It's good news. The victory is won!

Now, let's look at the first details Mark gives us in the good news about Jesus.

#### **Mark 1:2-3 (ESV)**

**2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,' "**

This quotation is from the Old Testament. As verse 2 says, the central part is from Isaiah (40:3). But there are allusions to a prophecy from Exodus 23:20 (which is from the first section of the OT) and one from Malachi 3 (which is the last book written in the OT). So, Mark combines them to show that the entire Old Testament was pointing to the arrival of Jesus and it happened just like God said it would.

And how did He say it would happen? Someone would show up as God's messenger to prepare the way for the Lord. And we should ask ourselves, "What did God's messenger do that prepared the way for Jesus?"

#### **Mark 1:4-8 (ESV)**

**4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

Ok. So, John the Baptist appears to fulfill the prophecies of Moses, Isaiah, and Malachi. He is just like the prophets of the Old Testament. He's out in the wilderness. He's dressed in an outfit made

from camel's hair. His diet consists of bugs and honey – which must have been something in the days before toothbrushes and breath mints. And even though he is bizarre, verse 5 says the whole region was going out to the wilderness. It would be like Billy Graham's crusades popping up in the middle of nowhere and being led by a homeless man. Essentially, the only way to explain it was that the hand of God miraculously was on him.

And what question are we supposed to be asking about John the Baptist? (*What did he do that prepared the way for Jesus?*) There are two things our text tells us.

1. John prepared the way for Jesus by calling people to repent of their sin.

***4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.***

The baptism of John was an expression of repentance. The word “repent” means to “have a change of mind.” It carries with it the implication of acknowledging your sin. That’s why verse 5 says the people who were being baptized were confessing their sins. They were acknowledging they had sinned. And the symbolism of John’s baptism was that they desired to be clean and pure. They didn’t want to continue in sin. They didn’t want to continue offending God and rebelling against Him.

Next week, we will see that Jesus was baptized by John. And that should make you wonder, “Why would Jesus be baptized if He had never sinned and didn’t need to repent?” That’s a good question, isn’t it? Unfortunately, you’ll have to come back next week to get the answer.

But, for this morning, I just want us to consider that repentance prepared people's hearts to receive Jesus. But that’s not all that our text says. John did something else.

2. John prepared the way for Jesus by telling people the truth about Jesus.

***7 And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”***

The way John compelled people to repent was by warning them that the Lord was on His way. So, he’s essentially using the phrase used around my house when I was growing up, “Get ready. The Lord is on His way.” And John didn’t just say that Jesus was on His way. Instead, he told them at least three things about Jesus that would motivate them to repent.

## **JESUS IS MIGHTY**

John said, “Jesus is mightier than I am.”

Now, just think about how these people would have heard this. John was the first prophet from God to come to Israel in over 400 years. And he came with the very power of God. The whole country of Judea and the great city of Jerusalem were turned upside down with God’s power on display in John’s life. He would have been unlike anyone these people had ever seen before. If you have been following along in Pray21, you might have read this morning about the death of John the Baptist in Mark 6. I hope you noticed in that account that Mark specifically points out that King Herod was afraid of John the Baptist.

In *Matthew 11:11*, Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.”

And the greatest man to ever live said that Jesus is mightier. The birth of Jesus wasn't the beginning of Jesus. He existed before He was born because Jesus is God!

*Colossians 1:15-16: He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*

Hydrogen bombs produce a kind of energy that is measured in units that are called megatons. One megaton is roughly the amount of energy produced by one million tons of TNT. The largest hydrogen bomb on earth has the power to make 100 megatons of energy, or the explosive effect of 100 million tons of TNT. The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War 2 killed over 200,000 people. There were roughly 1000 times less powerful than a hydrogen bomb.

Every second, our sun produces 100 million quadrillion quadrillion hydrogen bomb-type explosions. And Jesus made the sun, and He holds it all together. Let me put that another way: Jesus is mighty. He is mightier than our little pea brains can even fathom. With a single word from His mouth, the worlds were formed and will one day be destroyed.

Jesus is mighty, and Jesus is on His way...so get ready.

## **JESUS IS WORTHY**

***Verse 7: "...the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie..."***

Back in the day, people wore sandals and pretty much walked everywhere they went. Unfortunately, there were no paved roads, so the dirt and dust from the streets got caked on their feet. Even worse, the animals that shared the roadways produced a kind of exhaust that got deposited in the dirt and dust that collected on their sandal-wearing feet. So, after a long day of walking around the town, a person's feet were downright filthy.

When they got home, it was customary to have a servant take off their shoes and wash their feet. That was the first ever episode of "Dirty Jobs" on the ancient Discovery Channel. It was a gross, filthy job. So much so Jews wouldn't make their Jewish servants do it if there was a Gentile servant in the household. It was a task reserved for the lowest of the low.

And, this man of God, John the Baptist, the man that mesmerized the nation of Israel and swayed kings by his power, said that he wasn't worthy to be the servant who takes off the sandals of King Jesus. In other words, Jesus is worthy of the highest honor that heaven and earth can bestow. The angels around the throne of God bow in worship before Jesus.

And John's message was, "Jesus is worthy, and Jesus is on His way...so get ready."

## **JESUS IS HOLY**

***8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.***

The word "baptize" literally means "to immerse." And John said that Jesus would immerse people in God's Holy Spirit. Now, that might sound like a good thing, and it is. But the holiness of God isn't good news for sinners because sin can't exist in the presence of a holy God.

*Habakkuk 1:13*

*13 You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong,*

God is so holy that He cannot even look upon sin without bringing His judgment and wrath upon it. So, when John says Jesus will immerse people in the Holy Spirit of God, that word should cause our hearts to tremble when we consider our sin. One commentator put it this way:

“[John] the Baptist evidently meant that the great coming One would not merely cleanse with water but would bring to bear, like a deluge, the purging, purifying, judging presence of God himself” (Moule, Gospel of Mark, p. 10).

Jesus is perfectly holy and is on His way...so get ready.

So, how did John prepare the way for Jesus? He proclaimed that Jesus is mighty, worthy, and holy. And, since He is on His way, we should ready our hearts to receive Him by repenting of our sin and turning to Jesus in humble submission, asking for His forgiveness.

And that gives us our Big Idea for this morning:

**Repentance prepares our hearts to receive Jesus – the mighty, worthy, and holy Son of God!**

The message of John the Baptist is a message for every one of us. Jesus is on His way...so get ready...repent!

Friends, the call of God is the same today as it was 2000 years ago. We have sinned against a holy God.

Romans 3:10-11 says, *“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside;”*

Romans 3:23 says, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”*

Ephesians 2:1-3 says, *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”*

The greatest problem facing our world today isn't inflation or political factions, or social reordering. The greatest problem facing the world today is sin against a holy God. The greatest problem in your life isn't economic instability, your family of origin, or the social ills of a world gone mad. The greatest problem in your life is the problem of your own sin. And the call of God that prepares your heart to receive His Son is the call to repent, to have a change of heart where you hate the sin you once loved and turn your back on sin as your master.

Church, it's time we get serious about sin and repent. Beware of any so-called version of the gospel that minimizes the need for personal repentance. It's cheap grace, not gospel, that sweeps repentance under the rug and acts like you can go through life loving your sin and still enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

So, let me ask, what sin are you harboring in your life today? What patterns of this fallen, unholy world are part of your life? Confess them to God and repent.

The mighty, worthy, and holy Son of God is on His way...are you ready? Repent from your sin. And that brings us all the way back to the beginning. The message of Jesus Christ is gospel. It's good news. The victory has already been won!

You see, Jesus has already come. And He came to use His might and worth and holiness to do for us, what we cannot do for ourselves. He came to settle our sin issue once and for all, not by our work but by His mercy and grace.

### *Ephesians 2*

*4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

God sent Jesus into this world, not to condemn the world but so that the world could be saved by His mercy and grace. Jesus lived and died in our place so that He could pay the price for our sin and provide forgiveness to those who repent. Jesus rose from the dead so that He could raise us up to a heavenly, abundant, eternal life.

You see, biblical repentance isn't just turning your back on your sin. Biblical repentance is turning your face to your Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. You won't defeat sin by focusing on your sin. You'll defeat sin by focusing on your Savior, depending on the mighty, worthy, holy Jesus to do for you, what you cannot do for yourself.

That's why we need Jesus. And we don't just need Jesus; we have Him. For God so loved this world, God so loved you and me, that He gave us His Son so turn to Jesus. Trust in Jesus. Call on Jesus.

There's gospel. There's good news. The victory has been won. Jesus Christ has come and is coming again...are you ready?