

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

Today we're beginning our new series on the Gospel of Mark, and some of you will be going "Phewwww"..... I know I am (to some extent)....

The last 2 series have been pretty heavy going, and boy-O-boy, we've really had to engage our minds as we've studied them...: The Revelation of Jesus Christ, followed by Paul's first letter to the Corinthians,,, And I reckon these have probably been the 2 toughest books that I've ever had to teach

- heavy topics;
- Scriptures that take a lot of explaining; and
- there's been some tough application along the way, as well...

And over the last 2 series, I noticed (as you probably have too) that the messages have been a bit longer than normal.

Were they longer because I like to hear the sound of my own voice? No. We needed the readings to be long enough to hold the key themes together, and yet, to adequately 'unpack' these 'deep' subjects, took quite a bit of doing....

But now we're moving on to the Gospel of Mark, and we're going to notice an **enormous** difference. It is the fastest moving of all of the gospels.

It seems that over and over and over again, we hear the word "immediately". Immediately this happened, and immediately that happened. Immediately Jesus went here. Immediately

Jesus went there... Very fast moving. *If it was a movie, I'd probably have trouble keeping up with it – chopping from one scene to the next...*

It's the **shortest** gospel, and it's the fastest moving of the gospels...

Some people refer to the Gospel of Mark as “A passion narrative, with an introduction”... What that means is, it's an account of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, with a bit of an introduction, to get us there...

And I understand that perspective:

- There's no Christmas story;
- it begins with John the Baptist, and the baptism of Jesus;
- Straight into the temptation of Jesus; and
- then the ministry of Jesus...

And that **all** happens by the end of the first chapter.

- By chapter 8 (which is about half-way through) Jesus is predicting His death.
- By about chapter 9, He's on his way to Judea, which is on his way to Jerusalem.

So, we're only about half-way through the Gospel, and his journey to the cross has begun.

- And the last week of Jesus' life and His resurrection, take up a whole 6 chapters...

....

A key verse in Mark, would have to be 10:⁴⁵ **For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**

Alright, so the Gospel as a whole, focuses on what we call “The Passion of Christ”. His journey to Judea – His journey to Jerusalem, was made, in the full knowledge of Jesus, that He was journeying towards the cross... And the Gospel of Mark then focuses on:

- the growing tension between Jesus and the religious establishment;
- His arrest
- His trial
- His **humiliation** (When I studied the Gospel of Mark in Bible College, my lecturer made it very clear, that for Jesus (the son of God) pain wasn't the issue – it was the humiliation.) And I agree
- So the humiliation of being put on trial for a start
- The humiliation of the people choosing Barabbas over him;
- The humiliation of being mocked; and
- flogged; and
- of course, the humiliation of being nailed naked to a cross, to be left out in the elements to die...

The God of creation – the Son of God – The Lord.... was humiliated...

And so, the Gospel of Mark, is a story of humiliation – It reveals how God is humiliated, as the cost of salvation...

Now, I don't know about you, but I would much rather bear physical pain, than humiliation.

But of course, for the Gospel of Mark to reveal the humiliation of God, it also has to reveal the true identity of this man called "Jesus". Throughout the Gospel, we encounter community after community, grappling with the question, "Who is this Jesus fella?"

Righto. Well for today, we're only going to read the first 3 verses, so let me read them for you now

Mark 1:1-3

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

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,' "

Some of you may be familiar with something called an "executive summary".... Put your hand up if you've ever heard of an executive summary... *There you go – now we*

know who has to spend time working out what reports are worth reading and what aren't...

An Executive Summary is a section of a document (usually right at the beginning) that gives the main points of a detailed report¹.

For those who have to read a lot of reports:

- a) it lets them know “if this a report they should bother read” (whether it’s relevant for them or not);
- b) it helps them to focus on the sections of the report that **are** the most important; and
- c) it’s the ultimate spoiler – alright: What the report ultimately reveals (in reams of paper), is right there, in a few paragraphs, right at the beginning. (so if you’re lazy, that’s all you read)

V1-3, (but especially V1), is a bit like an executive summary...

The whole Gospel of Mark, is about the identity of Jesus – Who is this Jesus fella??? And there’s an undercurrent of what we call “The messianic secret”... Jesus is concealing who He really is...

And as we work our way through this Gospel, there’s going to be some “aha” moments... In 8:29 (which is pretty much in the middle of the Gospel), Jesus asks “**who do you say that I am?**” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.”
Aha!

But even at that point, it’s like Jesus is still trying to keep His identity a secret... And it’s only when we come to the **very**

end, when Jesus dies on the cross, that finally, a **Roman soldier** (of all people) says “Truly this man was the Son of God!” Aha!

But we’ve got the executive summary – we already know the conclusion...

And so the Gospel of Mark isn’t written like a thriller, or a mystery, where we enter into the story and we’re surprised at the twists and turns along the way, and we’re held in suspense until the end... What it does, is it puts us in the position of being able to see the bigger picture, and to not only understand who Christ is, but to understand why so many people (in His day) missed it... And to understand why, especially the religious establishment, got it so wrong, and crucified the Son of God... Oops...

I mean, the religious establishment crucifying the Son of God, would be like “The Greens” bulldozing a rainforest to build their party headquarters...

You get this, don’t ya – For the religious establishment, to crucify the Son of God – no matter what marking system you use – it’s pretty much an epic “fail”.

But Mark makes sure we know (right from the start), “**Who** Jesus is”:

He is Jesus Christ; He is the Son of God; and He is Lord...

Righto:

The beginning of the gospel....

The word “gospel” in the original Greek, is εὐαγγέλιον (euangelion). It means “Good News”

Imagine we’re in first century Rome.

And imagine that Caesar’s armies have been in a battle in some far-flung land...

And approaching Rome, comes a runner – a messenger – in Greek (euangelos or evangelist)- a messenger of good news. And as he comes running into town, he’s shouting εὐαγγέλιον εὐαγγέλιον or in English “Gospel. Gospel”. “Good news. Good news.” Caesar’s armies have won the victory... “Gospel. Gospel”

That’s how the word “εὐαγγέλιον – Gospel”, was used.

And when the early disciples of Jesus had to describe what Jesus has done for us, and the life that we live in Him, they could find no better word than “εὐαγγέλιον – Gospel”... A message of good news – great news – a great victory has been won – it’s something to celebrate – It’s something to bring us joy...

And Mark begins: **1** The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

What’s he saying???

- Is he saying that “This is the beginning. I’m starting to write now, and this is the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.”??? So is it an introduction to the Gospel of Mark; **or**
- Is he saying that “John the Baptist, announcing the coming of the Lord, is the beginning of the Good news? ; **or**
- Is he saying that the **whole** of this Gospel, right through, to the death and resurrection of Jesus, is only the beginning??? That the Good news of Jesus Christ, will go on and continue throughout history.... And even today, as God works in our hearts and lives, and as God saves those who are lost, the Gospel – the good news – the great news, of a great victory that is won, continues...

Well, Mark could mean **any** of those things, for it is all of those things:

- He **was** beginning to write about the good news of Jesus Christ
- John the Baptist announcing the coming of the Lord, **was** the beginning of the Good News; and
- this whole Gospel, **is only the beginning** of the Good news – the good news continues...

So, it’s good news – it’s great news – it’s joyous news, about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

What does Mark reveal to us here, about the identity of Jesus?

Well, let's start off with the name Jesus. The name Jesus, was a very common name – nothing extraordinary about it at all.

- In the Greek, Ἰησοῦς (Iesous);
- In the Hebrew, Yeho-sua (Joshua)

It's made up of 2 Hebrew words “YHWH” (which is God's personal name) and the word for “salvation”, and so it means “YHWH saves”

And so, while the name “Jesus” was one of the most common names of His era, the meaning was entirely appropriate
YHWH saves – The Lord Saves...

And that's exactly what Joseph was told by the Angel in Matthew 1:21 **You will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.**

First name: **YHWH Saves**

Second name: **Christ** – no, that's not His second name at all. Christ is a title. Χριστός in the Greek, means someone who has been anointed for an office... In the Hebrew, it's *m^ešîḥā'*.

....

The Jewish people were a defeated nation. Israel was occupied by the Romans... They had kings, but they were only ‘puppet kings’. They were an oppressed people... And for years, they'd been seeing in their Scriptures, the promise of the anointed one, who would come and save them from all this – the Messiah... – A King (God's anointed), who would raise up an army and save them from their oppressors... (at least that's what they thought the Messiah would do)

First name: YHWH Saves

His Title: Christ (Messiah) – God’s anointed one who would save...

Third name (Once again, not a name, but His identity): The Son of God...

We know right from the start, “Jesus Christ is the Son of God”... It would be blasphemous to say it about any other man, in fact, that’s exactly the charge for which Jesus was crucified – He claimed to be “the Son of God”...

And as we read this Gospel of Mark, we’re going to see that everything Jesus said and did, was revealing that He could be no one other than the Son of God...

But can you understand, why this was such a massive claim???

For Jesus to truly be “the Son of God”, means “He Himself, is divine” – He is God...

And yep, that’s what Isaiah the Prophet foretold:

Vs 2 & 3, are a combination of 3 Old Testament passages:

Exodus 23:20 Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,

Malachi 3:1 “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the

messenger of the covenant in whom you delight,
behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

And most importantly, Isaiah 40:3 A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Isaiah foretold John the Baptist, and his message.

³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,' "

....

'Prepare the way of the Lord, - that's blasphemy...
The Lord is YHWH – the Lord God Almighty...

What's Mark telling us here??? That Jesus is God? Yeah, He is....

So, let's put all this together: The executive summary of the Gospel of Mark:

This is the beginning of the really, really fantastic, victorious news, of:

- Jesus – YHWH Saves
- The anointed one who will save us
- The Son of God

- The Lord God almighty...

This is who Jesus is...

And if this is true, and I believe it is, we cannot possibly remain neutral... We are either:

- **for** Jesus Christ, the Son of God – our Lord; or
- we are **against** Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who **is** Lord, but we reject His Lordship....

We are either **for** Him, or **against** Him, but it is **impossible** to remain neutral toward Him

Which is it for you??? Are you **for** Him, or **against** Him?

As we continue to study this book of Mark, We're going to discover, that nothing is more important, and no sacrifice is too costly,,,,, to follow Jesus as Lord.

Let's pray,

Lord God, I thank You for this Gospel of Mark.

*I thank You, that Jesus did not come **to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.***

And Lord, I pray for all those who, are in this room, and for those who will hear this recording in their cars, their tractors, their living rooms and in other churches;

Lord, I pray that Your Holy Spirit would reveal to them, your identity –

That Jesus is the God who saves;

That Jesus gave His life as a ransom;

*And Lord, I pray that **all** of us, would choose to be with You, for the only other alternative, is to be against You.*

*Lord, if there be anyone hearing this, who isn't following You as 'their Lord',
I ask that you would give them a divine discomfort – a disquiet – a restlessness, until they turn completely to You, as Lord and Saviour.*

*in Jesus' name.
Amen.*

And let me say, “If you’re not sure that Jesus is your Lord, and you have that restlessness, knowing that You need to address this,, That’s God...” You can’t ignore Him. You’re either **for** Him or **against** Him, but you can’t be neutral...

Just come up to me (or one of the elders), and say “I want to make sure Jesus is my Lord”...

OK.
Don’t put it off. Don’t feel, “Oh, Michael’s too busy”...

No matter what I’m doing, nothing is more important than this. Just say to me, “I want to make Jesus my Lord”.

Amen.

ⁱ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/executive-summary>