

## **The Gospel of Right Now**

Mark 1:1-3 (10/19/14)

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*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.'"*

*Mark 1:1-3*

George Pettey began preaching through Mark on June 7, 1618, and finally concluded on May 23, 1643. That's a mere 25 years! We're going to spend about 15 months in this shortest of the Gospels. Matthew has 28 chapters, Luke 24, and John 21; Mark only has 16 chapters. John Calvin wrote his commentaries guided by the principle of "lucid brevity." I like that. I like books that get right to it. Some authors seem to spin their wheels for three or four pages until they finally get to what they're trying to say. Mark is not like that. He gets right to it. So let's get right to it this morning. Let's look at four characteristics of the Gospel of Mark to get us started.

### **Mark was written by a man who must have felt completely out of place.**

He would tell us, "Of all the authors of the New Testament, I'm the least deserving to be mentioned with all these other heavy hitters." Mark is living testimony that failure is not final. You'll remember Paul and Barnabas took him on that first missionary journey in Acts 13 and shortly after arriving on the southern shore of Asia Minor, he turned back. R. C. Sproul says Paul "fired him." We don't know why he turned back – perhaps fearful or homesick – we don't know. Barnabas wanted to take him on the second missionary trip in Acts 15, but Paul refused causing Paul and Barnabas to have a sharp disagreement. So Barnabas took Mark under his wing. And instead of licking his wounds, Mark worked on his weaknesses, became strong in the faith, and Paul actually calls for him in 2 Timothy 4:11 to come up to Rome to help in the ministry!

Who is this Mark guy anyway? His mother was Mary, a believer with a spacious home in Jerusalem. When Peter was freed from jail, he went to her home where the church was gathered in prayer (Acts 12:12). We don't know anything about his father. He may have been the young man in Mark 14:51-52 who left his sheet behind and fled naked from the garden when they came to arrest Jesus! Peter refers to him as "my son" in 1 Peter 5:13. Early church leaders like a fellow named Papias and others clearly said that Mark wrote down what Peter told him about the life of Christ. And what better mentor for Mark to have than Peter. Both are an encouragement to any believer who really messes up. Remember Peter's denial of Jesus, "Blankety blank I don't know the man!" Talk about failure!

So here we have these God-breathed 16 chapters through the pen of Mark for our edification. Some say Mark was the first Gospel written. He wrote it to the Roman Christians who were facing severe persecution heading up to Nero's horrendous treatment of believers. They needed a concise, clear letter outlining the life, death, and resurrection of their Lord and Savior, and that's exactly what you have here. Mark doesn't relate many of Christ's teachings, but he takes us right there with Jesus as He demonstrates that he truly is Man and God in one Person.

Our goal through Mark is to get to know our Savior! Mark focuses on Christ's humanity and we'll see that Christ is very real! The closer we get to Him the more we'll love and delight in Him.

**Mark moves rapidly through the life of Christ.** I'm calling it the Gospel of "Right Now" because stuff happens quickly. His Gospel rushes along from one act to the next. There's no time to get bored. G. Campbell Morgan described him as "almost blunt." Another commentator said he wrote "to make the story as vivid to others as it is to himself." Mark uses two literary devices to keep our attention.

Mark uses that word "immediately" (the Greek word is "euthus") 41 times in his Gospel! You've all seen the names people give their boats or yachts. I don't know if this is true or not, but I heard a story of a pastor who named his boat "visitation" and loved spending time out on the lake. When people called to see if the pastor was in, the secretary would tell them, "I'm sorry, he's out on visitation right now." R. C. Sproul tells about a missionary friend whose father, aware of the Greek in the New Testament, named his boat "Euthus." Why? Because he read that "Immediately [Euthus] the boat left the shore...." Right here in chapter one you have *euthus* used eleven times. I circled the word "immediately" in my Bible. Check out verses 10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 23, 28, 29, 30, 42, and 43.

Mark also uses the present tense, what grammarians call the "historical present." My Bible has an asterisk in front of each one. In present tense we go right with Jesus into Peter's house to heal his mother-in-law. We're right there when the leper runs up and falls on his knees asking Jesus to heal him. We watch as the paralyzed man's friends carry him on a pallet to Jesus for healing. We're sitting with Jesus in Matthew's house with all the sinners and tax collectors. We go right up with Jesus there on the mountain when he chooses his apostles.

Mark is all action, living, vivid, real, quick-paced. Author Mack Stiles encourages us to use Mark as an evangelistic tool. Read through it with an unbeliever, one chapter at a time. Wycliffe translators of the New Testament usually begin with Mark. I'm told the Gospel of Mark is the most translated book in the world. What an exciting adventure we have ahead of us as we walk with Christ right through His three and one half years of public ministry heading to that cross. We'll walk with Him serving in chapters 1-8 and then suffering as our Savior in chapters 9-16.

**Mark starts with the public ministry of Jesus Christ.** Matthew focuses on Christ as the King of the Jews and starts with a genealogy starting with Abraham. Luke wrote for the Gentile world focusing on Jesus' humanity, so he begins with Jesus' birth and early years of growing in wisdom and stature, going to the temple with his parents at twelve. Luke includes a genealogy going all the way back to Adam at the beginning of Christ's public ministry. John wrote to prove that Jesus was truly the God-Man, so he begins his Gospel in eternity past: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." But Mark focuses on Jesus as the Servant-Savior. He doesn't include any genealogy or earlier biography. Who cares about a servant's genealogy or family background. We just want to know what He does!

And so you have Mark starting right in with the public ministry of Christ when He was about 30 years of age. The key verse capturing the essence of Mark's message is Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." He came to serve us! He came to love us and represent us and live the life we failed to live. And He came to die and to rescue us from our desperate situation in slavery to sin. We were prisoners of war, bound by sin, Satan, and death, and He came to extract us!

**Mark is about the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

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

By “beginning” Mark means that right now we begin to see God’s salvation in full, vivid color, and action in time. John the Baptist is now on the scene, he’s going to let Israel know her Messiah has come, and it all begins right now. Up to this point most people had no clue Jesus was special. He was just Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth. But now the veil of who He really is removed, like unveiling a new model at a car show. The sheet is ripped back and Jesus the God-man is revealed for all to see! Now we are going to see the most amazing, incredible, history changing Person living out a life of absolute obedience, of truth, of love, of power, and then of redemption before our very eyes.

From Genesis 1 to this beginning of His earthly ministry, everything over those several thousand years pointed forward to Him. He came out of eternity as the Agent of Creation, the One who formed Adam of the dust of the ground. He breathed His image into that first man, put him to sleep and pulled out a rib and fashioned it into a lovely lady for Adam. As we know, this first Adam sadly disobeyed God’s command and brought death and misery to the human race.

But immediately God promised a second Adam to crush the deceiver’s head (Satan) and bring redemption and good news to sinners. Through Abraham, Judah, and David the promise came. Through the grand and glorious promises in the prophets everything pointed forward to Christ over those long centuries. Isaiah 7:14, “A virgin shall conceive.” Isaiah 9:6-7, “Unto you a child is born, a son is given, the government shall be on his shoulders. He’ll be your wonderful counselor, prince of peace, everlasting father. Of his kingdom there will be no end!” Isaiah described the gospel of Jesus Christ 700 years before He came: Isaiah 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners.” Sin had beat us up, ripped us up, utterly twisted our souls. The Jesus came to take our beating and bruising and curse. That’s the good news!

Jesus appeared to Moses and Joshua and others, to those three Hebrew lads in the fiery furnace, to Daniel and in the lions’ den. We call these “Christophanies” or appearances of Christ in the Old Testament. He is the One who will crush all earthly empires in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision! And now, so many hundreds of years after all this, all this good news pointing to the One who will come and bring salvation, here He is, “The beginning of the greatest news of all, Jesus Christ the Son of God!”

We’re going to walk with this Man Jesus who was also God, conceived in Mary’s womb, gestated nine months, born in Bethlehem, grew up in a nondescript village, looking like every other Jewish boy, growing in wisdom, stature, in favor with God and man, and now, the beginning, the flesh and bone and dust and air beginning of the ministry of this Man. We’ll see Him go out to meet John, and then go around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

What an adventure we have for these Sunday mornings. Do we really know who He is? Is He real to you? The God-Man walking on the planet which He Himself created, setting it and all the planets orbiting around the sun held at just the right place by the gravitational pull of all the heavenly bodies, drinking the water, eating the food, breathing the 20% oxygen-enriched air He Himself designed and created, living with a beating heart pushing enriched blood to all the cells of his body, thinking with a brain full of those synapses that He Himself designed, unique fingerprints, unique voice print, looking with eyes and hearing with ears He Himself designed, a real human being, experiencing everything we humans experience, except for sin. He slept. He wept. He got weary. He felt the sting of rejection and betrayal. He knew the struggle of being misunderstood. All this was part of the plan. He was made just like us, His brothers.

Hebrews 2:14-15, “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”

And listen to this:

Hebrews 2:17-18, “Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the

people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”

The beginning of the good news, the joyful tidings, the good news that infinitely exceeds any other human message anywhere at any time! And this good news is none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the God-Man! Not two Persons but One Person, and yet with two natures, human and divine. This is our Savior. This is the One who must ravish our souls as we think about Him and His Father and the love the Father had for us sinners that He would send His Son, and the love His Son has for us sinners that He would condescend to identity with us completely, except for sin, and live the life we never could, and then die the death we deserved to die!

Philip Schaff wrote of our Lord, “Truly Jesus Christ, the Christ of the Gospels, the Christ of History, the crucified and risen Christ, the divine-human Christ, is the most real, the most certain, the most blessed of all facts.”

The greatest news of all is Jesus Christ the Son of God. Is He real to you? Greta Van Susteran of Fox News interviewed a northern Nigerian, posted on October 17, 2014 (see link below). Boko Haram terrorists had come through his village killing Christians. They shot this Christian man in the face right in front of his family. The bullet entered at his nose and exited his jaw, blowing a large piece of flesh away. They thought he was dead, but he wasn't. In Greta's interview He gave a powerful testimony of the reality of Christ to him. “I'm ready to die as a Christian,” he said. When Greta asked him about hating the men who did this, this believer assured Greta that Jesus' words tell us to love our enemies. Jesus is real to this brother in Christ.

Your greatest need in this world of sin, misery, hate, broken relationships, suffering, horror and worse, your greatest need is to be so filled with Christ, so focused on Christ that all your relationships are sweetened and guided and determined by Christ. Let Him be so real, right now, that you can handle the trials and tests and temptations of your life with your affections and the eyes of your heart set on Him. That's what we want. The gospel is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He lived the life we couldn't. He died the death we deserve to die. He rose again for our hope of eternal life. And now He intercedes for us sinners at the Father's right hand.

There's nothing better or bigger for you than to have a heart consumed by Jesus Christ in all His manifold glory, His humanity, and His deity.

2 Corinthians 5:9 Make it your goal to be pleasing to Him.

Colossians 3:1 Set your affections on things above, where Christ is.

Hebrews 12:2 Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Link to Greta Van Susteran interview: <http://video.foxnews.com/v/3846002201001/boko-haram-attack-survivor-im-ready-to-die-as-a-christian/#sp=show-clips>