

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
7-15-24

Mark 1

The Place And Ministry Of John The Baptist – Verses 1-5

¹ The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”—³ “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” ⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

1:1 When you experience the excitement of a big event, you naturally want to tell someone. Telling the story can bring back that original thrill as you relive the experience. Reading Mark’s first words, you can sense his excitement. Picture yourself in the crowd as Jesus heals and teaches. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples. Respond to his words of love and encouragement. And remember that Jesus came for us who live today as well as for those who lived 2,000 years ago.

1:1 Mark was not one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, but he probably knew Jesus personally. Mark wrote his Gospel in the form of a fast-paced story, like a popular novel. The book portrays Jesus as a man who backed up his words with action that constantly proved who he is— the Son of God. Because Mark wrote his Gospel for Christians in Rome, where many gods were worshiped, he wanted his readers to know that Jesus is the one true Son of God. Without God’s revelation, our finite minds cannot comprehend the infinite. But because of what we know about Jesus (thanks to writers like Mark), we can understand what God is like. Mark gave the “punch line” of his Gospel in the very first verse, but both Jesus’ enemies and his disciples would not get it until Jesus’ resurrection. For us who read Mark today, the message is clear that we must not ignore or reject Jesus Christ.

1:2-3 Isaiah was one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. The second half of the book of Isaiah is devoted to the promise of salvation. Isaiah wrote about the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and the man who would announce his coming, John the Baptist. John’s call to “make straight paths for him” meant that people should give up their selfish way of living, renounce their sins, seek God’s forgiveness, and establish a relationship with God by believing and obeying his words as found in Scripture (Isaiah 1: 18-20; 57: 15).

1:2-4 Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Isaiah had predicted that John the Baptist and Jesus would come. Isaiah’s words comforted many people as they looked forward to the Messiah, and knowing that God keeps his promises can comfort you, too. As you read the book of Mark, realize that it is more than just a story; it is part of God’s Word. In it God is revealing to you his plans for human history— and offering the Good News of his salvation to you.

1:3 John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. People who do not know Jesus need to be prepared to meet him. We can “prepare the way” by explaining their need for forgiveness, demonstrating Christ’s teaching by our conduct, and telling them how Christ can give their lives meaning. We can “make straight paths for him” by correcting misconceptions that might be hindering people from approaching Christ. Someone you know may be open to a relationship with Christ. What can you do to prepare the way for this person? 1: 4 Why does the Gospel of Mark begin with the story of John

the Baptist and not mention the story of Jesus' birth? Important Roman officials of this day were always preceded by an announcer or herald. When the herald arrived in town, the people knew that someone of prominence would soon arrive. Because Mark's audience was primarily Roman Christians, he began his book with John the Baptist, whose mission it was to announce the coming of Jesus, the most important man who ever lived. Roman Christians would have been less interested in Jesus' birth than in this messenger who prepared the way.

1:4 In John's ministry, baptism was a visible sign that a person had decided to change his or her life, giving up a sinful and selfish way of living and turning to God. John took a known custom and gave it new meaning. The Jews often baptized non-Jews who had converted to Judaism. But to baptize a Jew as a sign of repentance was a radical departure from Jewish custom. The early church took baptism a step further, associating it with Jesus' death and resurrection (see, for example, Romans 6: 3-4; 1 Peter 3: 21).

1:5 Jesus came at a time in history when the entire civilized world was relatively peaceful under Roman rule, travel was easy, and there was a common language. The news about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection could spread quickly throughout the vast Roman Empire. In Israel, people were ready for Jesus, too, and they flocked to hear this wilderness preacher. There had been no God-sent prophets for 400 years, since the days of Malachi (who wrote the last book of the Old Testament). Anticipation was growing that a great prophet, or the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, would soon come (see Luke 3: 15).

1:5 The purpose of John's preaching was to prepare people to accept Jesus as God's Son. When John challenged the people to confess sin individually, he signaled the start of a new way to relate to God. Is change needed in your life before you can hear and understand Jesus' message? You have to admit that you need forgiveness before you can accept it. To prepare to receive Christ, repent. Turn away from the world's dead-end attractions, sinful temptations, and harmful attitudes, and turn to God. He can give you a new start.

John The Baptist: The Man And His Message – Verses 6-8

⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

1:6 John dressed much like the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8) in order to distinguish himself from the religious leaders, whose flowing robes reflected their great pride in their position (12:38). John's striking appearance reinforced his striking message.

1:7-8 Although John was the first genuine prophet in 400 years, Jesus the Messiah would be infinitely greater than he. John was pointing out how insignificant he was compared to the one who was coming. John was not even worthy of doing the most menial tasks for him, like untying his sandals. What John began, Jesus finished. What John prepared, Jesus fulfilled.

1:8 John said Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit, sending the Holy Spirit to live within each believer. John's baptism with water prepared a person to receive Christ's message. This baptism demonstrated repentance, humility, and willingness to turn from sin. This was the beginning of the spiritual process. When Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit, the entire person is transformed by the Spirit's power. Jesus offers to us both forgiveness of sin and the power to live for him.

The Baptism Of Jesus – Verses 9-11

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

1:9 Jesus grew up in Nazareth, where he had lived since he was a young boy (Matthew 2:22-23). Nazareth was a small town in Galilee, located about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. The city was despised and avoided by many Jews (John 1:46). Nazareth was a crossroads for trade routes and had contact with many cultures.

1:9 If John’s baptism was for repentance from sin, why was Jesus baptized? While even the greatest prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) had to confess their sinfulness and need for repentance, Jesus didn’t need to admit sin— he was sinless. Although Jesus didn’t need forgiveness, he was baptized for the following reasons: (1) to begin his mission to bring the message of salvation to all people; (2) to show support for John’s ministry; (3) to identify with our humanness and sin; (4) to give us an example to follow.

1:10-11 The Spirit descended like a dove on Jesus, and the voice from heaven proclaimed the Father’s approval of Jesus as his divine Son. Here we see all three members of the Trinity together— God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

1:11 The dove and the voice from heaven were signs that Jesus was the Messiah. Many people want something tangible, visible, and “real” before they will believe. So Jesus did healings and other miracles, and God raised him from the dead. Still people doubt. Will visible signs convince anyone? The “sign” that really brings us to faith is the power of God’s message to answer the cry of the heart. To the confused, God offers a mind enlightened by faith. To the depressed, God offers a reason for joy. To the lonely, God offers eternal companionship. Don’t look for a spectacular visible sign; instead, seek a cleansed and renewed life as evidence of his presence.

Jesus’ Temptation In The Wilderness, Among The Wild Beasts – Verses 12-13

¹²At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted^[a] by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

1:12-13 Satan is an angel who rebelled against God. He is real, not symbolic, and is constantly working against God and those who obey him. Satan tempted Eve in the garden and persuaded her to sin; he tempted Jesus in the wilderness and did not persuade him to fall. To be tempted is not a sin. Tempting others or giving in to temptation is sin. For a more detailed account of Jesus’ temptation, read Matthew 4:1-11.

1:12-13 To identify fully with human beings, Jesus had to endure Satan’s temptations. Although Jesus is God, he is also man. And as fully human, he was not exempt from Satan’s attacks. Because Jesus faced temptations and overcame them, he can assist us in two important ways: (1) as an example of how to face temptation without sinning, and (2) as a helper who knows just what we need because he went through the same experience (Hebrews 4:15).

The Galilean Ministry Of Jesus Begins – Verses 14-15

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

1:14 Jesus came to Galilee: Jesus spent most of His time in the region of Galilee, usually only going up to Jerusalem for the appointed feasts. Galilee was a large, populated area north of Judea and Jerusalem, where Jews and Gentiles lived together, though usually in their own distinct cities. Galilee was not a small backwater region. According to the ancient Jewish historian Josephus, Galilee was an area of about 60 by 30 miles and had 204 villages, with none less than 15,000 people. This means there were more than 3 million people in the extended region.

1:15 Preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God: Jesus was a preacher and He brought the message of God’s rule on earth, though not in the manner that was popularly expected or desired. Most people wanted a political kingdom that would replace the oppressive occupation of the Romans. Contrary to the expectations of most people in His day, Jesus brought a kingdom of love, not subjugation; of grace, not law; of humility, not pride; for all men, not only the Jews; to be received voluntarily by man, not imposed by force.

Jesus Calls His First Disciples – Verses 16-20

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

1:16-20 We often assume that Jesus’ disciples were great men of faith from the first time they met Jesus. But they had to grow in their faith just as all believers do (14:48-50, 66-72; John 14:1-9; 20:26-29). This is apparently not the only time Jesus called Peter (Simon), James, and John to follow him (see Luke 5:1-11 and John 1:35-42 for two other times). Although it took time for Jesus’ call and his message to get through, the disciples followed. In the same way, we may question and falter, but we must never stop following Jesus.

1:17 Fishing was a major industry around the Sea of Galilee. Fishing with nets was the most common method. Jesus called the disciples to fish for people with the same energy they had used to fish for food. The gospel would be like a net, lifting people from dark waters into the light of day and transforming their lives. How can God use you to fish for people’s souls? How can you train new converts to find new seas and cast new nets where waters have never been fished before? The gospel makes missionaries of all God’s people. Where are you casting your net?

Jesus Drives Out An Impure Spirit – Verses 21-28

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” ²⁵ “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. ²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other,

“What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

1:21 Jesus had recently moved to Capernaum from Nazareth (Matthew 4: 12-13). Capernaum was a thriving town with great wealth as well as great sin and decadence. Because it was the headquarters for many Roman troops, pagan influences from all over the Roman Empire were pervasive. This was an ideal place for Jesus to challenge both Jews and non-Jews with the gospel of God’s kingdom.

1:21-22 Because the temple in Jerusalem was too far for many Jews to travel to regularly for worship, many towns had synagogues serving both as places of worship and as schools. Beginning in the days of Ezra, about 450 B.C., a group of 10 Jewish families could start a synagogue. There, during the week, Jewish boys were taught the Old Testament law and Jewish religion. Girls could not attend. Each Saturday, the Sabbath, the Jewish men would gather to listen to a rabbi teach from the Scriptures. Because there was no permanent rabbi or teacher, it was customary for the synagogue leader to ask visiting teachers to speak. This is why Jesus often taught in the synagogues in the towns he visited. While the Jewish teachers often quoted from well-known rabbis to give their words more authority, Jesus didn’t have that need. Because Jesus is God, he knew exactly what the Scriptures said and meant. He was the ultimate authority.

1:23 Impure spirits, or demons, are evil spirits ruled by Satan. They work to tempt people to sin. They were not created by Satan because God is the Creator of all. Rather they are fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellion. Though not all disease comes from Satan, demons can cause a person to become mute, deaf, blind, or insane. But in every case where demons confronted Jesus, they lost their power. Thus, God limits what evil spirits can do; they can do nothing without his permission. During Jesus’ life on earth, demons were allowed to be very active to demonstrate once and for all Christ’s power and authority over them.

1:23 Some people dismiss all accounts of demon possession as a primitive way to describe mental illness. Although throughout history mental illness has often been wrongly diagnosed as demon possession, clearly a hostile outside force controlled the man described here. Mark emphasized Jesus’ conflict with evil powers to show his superiority over them, so he recorded many stories about Jesus driving out evil spirits. Jesus didn’t have to conduct an elaborate exorcism ritual. His word was enough to send out the evil spirit.

1:23-24 The impure spirit knew at once that Jesus was the Holy One sent from God. By including this event in his Gospel, Mark was establishing Jesus’ credentials, showing that even the spiritual underworld recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

1:25-28 Jesus rebuked him: Jesus didn’t need to rely on hocus-pocus or ceremonies. He simply demonstrated the authority of God. Be quiet: Jesus often told demons to shut up. Today, many self-styled deliverers from demon possession encourage the demons to speak, or even believe what the demons say. Jesus avoided such theatrics and merely delivered the afflicted man.

Jesus Heals Many – Verses 29-34

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. ³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

1:29-31 Each Gospel writer had a slightly different perspective as he wrote; thus, the comparable stories in the Gospels often highlight different details. In Matthew, Jesus touched the woman's hand. In Mark, he helped her up. In Luke, he spoke to the fever, and it left her. The accounts do not conflict. Just as four people might witness the same event and all recount different details, so each Gospel writer simply emphasized different details of this story.

1:32-33 The people came to Jesus in the evening after sunset. That day had been the Sabbath (1:21), their day of rest, lasting from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. The Jewish leaders had proclaimed that it was against the law to be healed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:10; Luke 13:14). The people didn't want to break this law or the Jewish law that prohibited traveling on the Sabbath, so they waited until sunset. After the sun went down on Saturday, the crowds were free to find Jesus so he could heal them.

1:34 Why didn't Jesus want the demons to reveal who he was? (1) By commanding the demons to remain silent, Jesus proved his authority and power over them. (2) Jesus wanted the people to believe he was the Messiah because of what he said and did, not because of the demons' words. (3) Jesus wanted to reveal his identity as the Messiah according to his timetable, not according to Satan's timetable. Satan wanted the people to follow Jesus around for what they could get out of him, not because he was the Son of God who could truly set them free from sin's guilt and power.

Jesus Prays In A Solitary Place – Verses 35-39

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" ³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

1:35-37 Were the disciples impatient that Jesus prayed in solitude while so much ministry waited to be done? How would you have responded if you had been the one to find Jesus in prayer? It's easy to be so caught up with ministry that you neglect times of solitude, individual worship, and prayer. Perhaps you need to redesign your schedule to find time for earnest prayer. It is vitally important to: (1) seek the Lord before your busy schedule takes over your thoughts; (2) withdraw from noise and demands so you can focus on God; (3) take Jesus' attitude of regular communion with the Father; (4) reflect on the priorities Jesus had for his life; (5) determine to pray on a more regular basis, not just in times of crisis. If prayer was important for Jesus, then it must be important for his followers. Pray—even if you have to get up very early in the morning to do it!

1:39 The Romans divided the land of Israel into three separate regions: Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Galilee was the northernmost region, an area about 60 miles long and 30 miles wide. Jesus did much of his ministry in this area, an ideal place for him to teach because there were over 250 towns concentrated there, with many synagogues.

Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy – Verses 40-45

⁴⁰ A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." ⁴¹ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. ⁴³ Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴ "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your

cleansing, as a testimony to them.”⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

1:40-41 In keeping with the law in Leviticus 13 and 14, Jewish leaders declared people with leprosy unclean. This meant that lepers were unfit to participate in any religious or social activity. Because the law said that contact with any unclean person made a person unclean too, some people even threw rocks at lepers to keep them at a safe distance. Even the mention of the name of this disabling disease terrified people. How astounding it was, then, when Jesus reached out and touched this man who had leprosy. The real value of a person is inside, not outside. Although a person’s body may be diseased or deformed, the person inside is no less valuable to God. In a sense, we all have leprosy, because we have all been deformed by the ugliness of sin. By sending his Son, Jesus, God has touched us, giving us the opportunity to be healed.

1:43-44 Although leprosy was incurable, many different types of skin diseases were classified together as “leprosy.” According to the Old Testament laws about leprosy (Leviticus 13–14), when a leper was cured, he or she had to go to a priest to be examined. Then the leper was to give a thank offering at the temple. Jesus adhered to these laws by sending the man to the priest, demonstrating Jesus’ complete regard for God’s law. Sending a healed leper to a priest was also a way to verify Jesus’ great miracle to the community.