

Mark 1:1-15 • The Authority & Deity of Christ

Introduction

The theme of the Gospel of Mark is Jesus Christ as the Servant of God, proving His authority and servanthood through His words and actions. Peter does not give a lengthy introduction to this Gospel but rather uses the events documented in the first few paragraphs to establish the authority and deity of Christ in the minds of the reader.

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

²AS IT IS WRITTEN IN ISAIAH THE PROPHET:

“BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU,

WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY;

³THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS,

‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.’”

[Read 1:1-3]

Q: According to Isaiah’s prophecy, what should one look for as a precursor to the arrival of the Messiah?

A: A messenger sent from God. (Note: Isn’t it interesting that False Christs almost never have a “John the Baptist” and therefore insist they are Christ coming for the *second* time? But one of the identifying characteristics of the Antichrist is that he **WILL** have such a messenger.)

Q: What is the purpose of God’s messenger and how will he be identified?

A: He will prepare the way ahead of the arrival of the Messiah and is identified as coming not from the populated environs of Jerusalem or other such cities but from the wilderness.

Q: What is the advantage and symbolism of a messenger coming from the wilderness rather than the city?

A: It’s a singular voice that can be heard clearly because there are no other voices to compete with; and it symbolizes the very definition of “baptism”, which is a choice to be separated from the things of this world and devoted exclusively to the things of God – rejecting the seeming opulent life of the city (the world) for the apparent barrenness of the wilderness (spiritual life).

Q: Are there any similarities between us and John the Baptist in terms of our calling, actions or ministry?

A: [Let the group take the lead, but if needed....] We’re to embrace “the wilderness” by rejecting the world yet to still call out to others, preparing them to accept the Messiah into their life. Regardless of the relative success of such results we are to point out the True Messiah.

⁴John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

⁵And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

[Read 1:4-5]

Q: Where did John the Baptist appear? Is there an application of this for us?

A: He appeared in the wilderness, just where God had designated. A possible application for us is that success in ministry comes from being obedient to God, not from choosing our own “prime” location or timing. In both John’s and Jesus’ ministry, the people constantly **CAME TO THEM**.

Application: *Is anyone coming to you? To your ministry? To your local church? What do the answers to those questions mean for you personally?*

Q: What was the substance, the core of John’s message?

A: Seeking people to not just see sin as “bad”, but to “repent” – which means to stop that behavior and not go back to repeating it – and seek personal forgiveness for sin.

Q: How does that compare with our own message to non-believers? How do we raise the issue of sin?

A: [Completely open-ended for group discussion.]

⁶John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey.

[Read 1:6]

Q: What are the personal applications for us in John's personal appearance?

A: He wasn't afraid to allow his personal appearance to reflect his inward appearance. People were able to see that something **GODLY** exuded from John and were attracted to someone that thought more of God than himself.

⁷And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. ⁸I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

[Read 1:7-8]

Q: Many people – including cults and false religions – preach turning away from sin. How does John take his message a bit further to distinguish it from the rest?

A: The issue of turning away from sin is the entry point for focusing not on the current messenger but the Messiah to come, the One through Whom the change in their life will be completed.

Q: What can we personally apply from John's humility?

A: We should always acknowledge that it's not about us or our programs or our church as the attractant or focus but on Jesus, to Whom we need to publicly acknowledge our own subjection. We don't ask others to do what we ourselves are unwilling to do in the first place.

Q: What is the ultimate difference between John and Jesus as given in v.8? How does this apply to us?

A: The difference between baptisms of water vs. the Holy Spirit. John clearly delineates the difference and power of the earthly tools given to conduct his ministry versus the divine tools Christ employs. We are given the tools to point and prepare, Christ has the tools to complete and change.

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; ¹¹and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

[Read 1:9-11]

Q: What is the OT standard for legal testimony? Can the testimony of just one person be received, for instance, to convict someone of murder?

A: The OT standard for legal testimony is to have 2 or more witnesses.

Q: Who are the two witnesses of Christ's deity and authority?

A: John the Baptist – through his earthly ministry – and God through the signs at Jesus' baptism. (Ever notice how False Christs seem to consistently be missing such corroboration and are usually witnesses for themselves? Take Paul's example: Ananias was an additional witness to Saul's conversion.)

Q: Why do you suppose that God is "well-pleased" with Jesus? What is the message being conveyed to us through this statement?

A: Jesus is the model, the example of living a life completely devoted to the things of God and completely forsaking the things of this world. God is specifically giving us something we can see, touch and study in order to measure our own life by.

¹²Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. ¹³And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.

[Read 1:12-13]

Q: What?!?! Jesus didn't IMMEDIATELY begin His ministry? What is going on here? What's "wrong" with this picture?

- Before Israel could take possession of the Promised Land they had to become spiritually prepared.
- Before Samuel could take over the High Priest role from Eli, Samuel underwent years of preparation.
- David was anointed king of Israel but there were still 20 years of preparation before he could actually take the throne.
- Paul spent 3 years in Arabia being prepared after his calling.
- And Christ Himself was prepared by God before assuming the work of God.

Q: What is the application for us, for our church?

A: Are we being prepared for ministry or running from our responsibilities? [Let the group discuss what they believe is the answer for themselves and their church.]

¹⁴Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

[Read 1:14-15]

Q: How does Christ indicate that all things came about through the timing of God's will? Was it because He was waiting for John to be arrested?

A: John's arrest – the end of his public ministry – was probably a sign that was part of the bigger picture, but it's in Jesus' own words in v.15, "The time is fulfilled..."

Point: In this and all the examples given above and more, there was always a recognition on each individual's part of the timing of God, of the fulfillment of God's time of preparation, and transition to assume the work assigned.

Q: Whereas John's message was limited to seeking people to turn away from sin, what does Jesus add to the equation in v.15?

A: "...and believe in the gospel."

Q: What are the guidelines for our own profession of faith? Regardless of the tools, programs or organizations we use, what is the substance of our work?

A: To seek repentance from sin combined with communicating the Gospel.

Point: How is the Spirit speaking to your heart through this lesson? What can we do individually to be an effective Christian? What do we need to do as a church?