

The Gospel Appears in Person

Mark 1:1-15

Sermon

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Once again, if you're new welcome. If we haven't met, I'm Tony. **If we have met, my name is still Tony.** We love going through books of the Bible. It's the best way for shaping people into the image of Christ, and is the best way to keep me honest, and away from my favorite subjects. Today, we begin the study of one of my favorite gospels, the gospel of Mark.

Several years ago one of the world's renowned scholars of the classics, Dr. **E.V. Rieu**, completed a wonderful translation of Homer into English for the Penguin classics series. He was 60 years old, and he had been an agnostic his whole life. The publisher soon approached him again and asked him to translate all the Gospels. When Rieu's son heard this he said:

"It will be interesting to see what Father will make of the four Gospels. It will be even more interesting to see what the four Gospels will make of Father."

A year later Dr. Rieu, was convinced and gloriously converted to Jesus Christ, and joined the Church of England. (Ht: Kent Hughes)

J.B. Phillips asked him, **"Did you not get the feeling that the whole material was extraordinarily alive?"**

Rieu replied, **"I got the deepest feeling. My work changed me. I came to the conclusion that these words bear the seal of the Son of Man and God."**

Phillips concluded, "I found it particularly thrilling to hear a man who is a scholar of the first rank, as well as a man of wisdom and experience, openly admitting that these words written long ago were alive with power. They bore to him as to me, the ring of truth."

I look forward to seeing **what the Gospel of Mark will make of us!** I pray it **makes us more like Jesus** – more **sacrificial**, more **generous**, more **compassionate**, more **prayerful**, more **holy**, more **evangelistic**...

Why would the gospels have such an impact, and why would Mark in particular?

It's simple: **Mark confronts us with the most important questions you can answer: Who is Jesus Christ, and how should we respond to Him?** If you're just exploring the faith, I would beg you to stay with us through this study, as we consider this question.

In the opening chapter Mark gives us the answer to these questions, but the characters in throughout the story of Mark don't know this! They haven't read it! Before I show you the identity of Jesus in verses 1-15, allow me to make a few introductory points about this book.

I. Introduction to Mark

Mark is the only gospel to call itself a "gospel." Many believe that Mark pioneered this literary genre (Kostenberger, Kellum, Quarrles). These are the "synoptic gospels" – synoptic means "to see together, to have the same view." They're very similar.

8 aspects of the Gospel of Mark

The Length of the gospel. It's the shortest gospel. 11,000 words compared to 19k in Lk & 18 in Matt.

The pace and direction of the gospel. **It's a fast moving, cross-centered gospel.**

A particular form of writing that involves a series of short stories that was intended to be heard and not just read. Mark shows more than tells. There are fewer editorial comments than in other gospel writers. **It's like Mark is doing a slide show.**

They are arranged in such a way as to repeat and re-tell

Mark uses the word "immediately," **41 times** – like the "**24 of the Gospels**" "**It is a passionate narrative with a long introduction**"

He spends more time on the last week of Jesus than any other gospel writers – **about 20%** compared to 15% in Matthew/Luke

The shadow of the cross hangs over the story.

Theme verse: "**For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many**" (Mk 10:45). Mark presents us with Jesus, the King, who is also the suffering Servant.

All of life should be lived in gratitude for the cross, and in light of the cross.

The historical significance of the gospel. Most now believe that Mark as the oldest gospel, **the first gospel**. I affirm this view. No commentary on my shelf suggests otherwise. Even though this is a more recent view, virtually everyone affirms this. Given this fact, Mark is massively significant. Here we have for the first time the words and deeds of Jesus recorded! It became the model for Matthew and Luke. **92% of Mark is in Matthew, and about 48% in Luke.**

The [human] source of the gospel. Obviously, this letter is inspired Scripture. But we believe that the writing of Scripture involves a divine/human authorship (2 Peter 1).

Humanly speaking, Mark's primary source seems to be **Peter's testimony**. This is really Peter's gospel written by Mark. Mark served as Peter's "interpreter."

3A. External Support for Peter:
Eusebius citing Papias (A.D. 130):

"And this the presbyter [elder] used to say: Having become the interpreter of Peter, Mark wrote accurately – not indeed, in order – as much as he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord..." (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.15)

The statement about John the Elder (most likely the apostle John) dates the tradition back to 90-100 A.D. Further, Eusebius (4th century) also basis this tradition upon the testimony of second century church fathers Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria.

Clement (A.D. 180) said:

When Peter had publicly preached the word at Rome, and by the Spirit had proclaimed the Gospel, that those present, who were many, exhorted Mark, as one who had followed [Peter] for a long time and remembered what had been spoken, to make a record of what was said; and that he did this, and distributed the Gospel among those that asked him. (*Hist. Eccl.* 6.14.6–7)

Irenaeus (A.D. 170) said:

Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also himself handed on in writing the things that had been preached by Peter (*Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1).

In another document, the *Anti-Marcian Prologue* (A.D. 150-180) we read:

“... Mark declared, who is called “stump fingered” because he had rather small fingers in comparison with the stature of the rest of his body. He was the interpreter of Peter. After the death of Peter himself he wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy.

Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) also mentions “Peter’s memoirs”

Edwards summarizes: “Thus, from a variety of traditions from the end of the first century onward we see a complementary testimony that the author of the Second Gospel is Mark, the interpreter of Peter, who composed the Gospel in Rome.”

3B. Internal Evidence for Peter:

Mark is a close friend of Peter. **1 Pet. 5:13** – “at Babylon [Rome]... “Mark my son”

Peter is mentioned more frequently than any other disciple in Mark, appears in the most important scenes. Very strikingly, he is mentioned by name after the resurrection in a very short little account, in a punchy little way, in chapter 16. Peter’s restoration may have given particular hope to those that caved into persecution and denied Jesus.

The scene with Peter’s mother-in-law seems to include personal details.

Mark’s gospel is similar to Peter’s sermon **Acts 10:34-ff.**

Mark’s account is especially vivid when recounting incidents involving Peter.

The writer of the gospel: Mark. He’s a young man, John Mark – Mark 14:51-52.

Mark’s name appears several times in the NT (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37-39; Col. 4:10; II Tim. 4:11; Philemon 23, 24; I Pet. 5:13).

“John Mark” – as Luke notes. Hey may be the young dude in the end of the gospel who flees without his garment on.

Mark was the son of a Jerusalem widow whose large home was a meeting place for the believers during the early days of the church. (The detailed description of the “guest room” in Mark 14:12-16; cf. Mt. 26:17-19; Jn. 13:1-12) would be more natural had it been his house).

Mark and his cousin Barnabas accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 12:25), but Mark turned back before the mission ended (Acts 13:13). This later brought division between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41). However, Paul eventually was reconciled to Mark and commended him (II Tim. 4:11).

The Original Audience of the gospel: Suffering Christians in Rome. Probably written from Rome (or just outside Rome) and to Roman

Christians.

There are a number of **Latinisms**, and explanations of Jewish customs. The audience seems to be a Greek-speaking audience, for he also translates Hebrew and Aramaic phrases.

Mark also uses the **Roman reckoning** of time, like 4 watches of the night instead of 3 (Jewish)

The inclusion of Rufus and Alexander (omitted by Luke/Matthew) as sons of Simon of Cyrene also points to a Roman context. (see Rom 16:13)

Lane: **“The gospel of Mark reaches a climax in the confession of Jesus’ deity by a Roman centurion” (Mark 15:39).**

The allusions to suffering/persecution appear throughout the book (e.g., Mark 4:16-17; 9:41; 9:49-50; 10:30), and relate to a time of persecution in Rome.

I think Mark was written after the fire of A.D. 64 and before A.D. 70, about A.D. 65.

Believers were suffering at the hands of the emperor Nero (A.D. 54-68).

Following a fire that swept the city in A.D. 64, the Christians were blamed and local persecution broke out with many being imprisoned and martyred.

Roman Historian **Tacitus** writing in second century says: **“They were wrapped in the skins of wild beasts and dismembered by dogs, others were nailed to crosses; others when daylight failed, were set afire to serve as lamps by night.”**

The Purposes of the Gospel: 3 Fold

Why should we bother with Mark?

To **encourage** the Suffering (Roman) Christians, predominately Gentiles.

Christ Focus: **“The Suffering Servant”**

This letter was meant to help sustain and strengthen.

To **equip** believers for discipleship (ch. 8-10)

It has been called a **“discipleship manual.”**

ESV Study Bible: **“The ultimate purpose and theme of Mark is to present and defend Jesus’ universal call to discipleship.”**

To **evangelize** the world

This book is a **proclamation**, more than a formal biography. (Mark 10:45)

The Gospel demands a **response**, **“repent and believe”**

Mark Dever takes people through this during lunch time Bible studies, as an evangelistic outreach

Illustration: Foshee and Tyler. What book would you study?

The big questions in the Gospel

Who Is Jesus?

How should we respond to him?

This theme runs right through the narrative – the first half climaxes in Mark 8:27-30; 9:2-13 (Jewish confession) and the second half climaxes with a Gentile confession in Mark 15:39.

Mark 1:1 – The unmistakable answer! The rest of the prologue confirms the answer (1-15). Some end the prologue at v. 13. I see a bracket with “gospel” like Witherington, so I include verses 14-15. Some also see verses 14-15 as a second introduction.

II. Jesus' Identity Revealed in Mark's Prologue (1:1-15)

These two questions appear in the Prologue here, and also throughout the book...

Question #1: Who Is Jesus? (1:1-15)

A. Answer: The Christ, the Son of God (1:1)

“This Gospel is about, or concerns Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

The Gospel is the Good News About God's Son.

“**The Gospel**” (**Euangellion**)... The topic sentence of the book (“Gospel” book ends, 1:15).

A “Gospel” was an announcement of the news.

It has both a Greek and Jewish background.

In both the OT and in Greek lit *euangelion* was used of reports of victory from the battlefield. (1 Sam 31:9; see also 2 Sam 1:20; 18:19–20; 1 Chr 10:9; 2 Sam 4:10; 18:26; Isaiah 52:7; 61:1-3).

In 9 B.C., within a decade of Jesus' birth, the birthday of Caesar Augustus (63

B.C.–A.D. 14) was hailed as *euangelion* (Edwards)

It was the announcement of a significant change in the world, an **epoch making event**. Christians used it to describe the greatest epic-making event ever: The coming of the Savior!

This is Good News, not Good Fiction!

Jesus.... “Yahweh is salvation” (Yeshua). Matt. 1:21. His mission is in his name.

Christ.... Long awaited Messiah, particularly awaiting his appearing in time of oppression. They had much to learn about what kind of Messiah he would be. (Not what they expected, even John the B later wondered...).

Son of God... Caesars were known as Gods, as sons of God. He was nothing like this.

Old Testament background: 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; Ps 89:26-27.

If Jesus is not God in human flesh, then Christianity crumbles.

We are left with just some lovely ideas and noble ethics, but its unique distinction would be gone.

Summary: v 1. – Mark’s main subject: Jesus. He reveals His identity in verse 1.

“The Beginning” (1:1). Something old is continuing (There is an illusion to Genesis) and something new is happening.

Now in redemptive history, God is doing a new thing!

In C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, he tells of a country, Narnia, which is under the curse of the White Witch. This evil queen places a spell on the land so that it’s “always winter and never Christmas.” Under her control, the future of Narnia looks bleak until word gets out that “Aslan [the Christ figure] is on the move.” He’s coming to destroy the White Witch and reverse the curse on Narnia. *The first sign of Aslan’s movement toward this cursed land is that the snow begins to melt—“spring is in the air.”*

My friends, in Mark 1, Spring is in the air! Christ is on the move! He came to destroy our enemies, and reverses the curse. He came to restore us and all things.

Confirmation #1: John the Baptist (1:2-8)

The first person mentioned after Jesus is the forerunner, his freaky cousin John.

John wasn’t a **Toyota forerunner**, but the one who told people to get ready for Jesus.

He wasn’t a Baptist either, even though we love to count everybody!

But he did **baptize people**.

Matthew 11:11, “the greatest man born of woman.” That is an amazing endorsement!

Politicians seek endorsements from influential people. Here John the Baptist gets one from the Messiah! Who was this John?

John was a messenger (2-3)

Verse 2 quotes Isaiah. But there are two passages here. The first Malachi and Isaiah the second. Isaiah is the major prophet, so he mentions him.

Malachi 2:17-3:2 – This is what John the Baptist was fulfilling

Where’s God? He’s coming and before He comes I will send a messenger.

The Messenger comes before God.

Malachi 4:5 – Elijah the Prophet will come before the great and awesome day....

Isaiah 40:3 – quoted in all four gospels

God is coming, and like any great King, someone is going to prepare the

way
Mountains and valleys will prepare for his coming
“the red carpet will be rolled out.”

Point: They knew that before God the King came to them, a messenger would come.

“A man in green boots will tell you who you will marry!” You be like, “Who got the boots?”

Verse 4, “so John appeared.” They had been waiting.
The people’s expectation of God the King was a bit different, right?
Here came Jesus.

John was a baptizer (4-6)

Not only did he look strange, but his ministry was strange!
Baptizing in a wilderness! *What a ministry!*
Who’s going to start a ministry in the desert of baptizing?
(Probably around Jericho, just up from the Dead Sea).
John didn’t pick this for convenience and accessibility.
He picked it because of the historical significance.

Like Elijah, John is identified with the wilderness, which in the OT, repeatedly symbolizes a place of repentance and hence a *place of grace*.
It is where God delivers his people.

John’s baptizing is complex. No one knows where he really came up with his baptizing.

Jews had ritual washings since their time in the wilderness;
Gentile converts were also baptized...
People were familiar with the idea that washing made one clean
(**Ezek 36**).

John may have come up with his own version of baptism...
It symbolizes his message of repentance; a sign of cleansing, a radical change of direction...

What’s striking is that he’s baptizing *Jews*.
It’s a sign that their religion had gone amiss and they were in need of a radical change in order to be ready to welcome the Messiah.
He tells them to “Repent and seek forgiveness.” Prepare for Messiah.
Repentance is the message of John the Baptizer in a word.
“Hey thanks for inviting me, I’d like to talk about Repentance.”
And people were coming to him in droves. Being baptized in the Jordan.

John was an Elijah-Type guy (6-8)

He was a bohemian vibe, would have lived in the village in the 60's.
He had a prophetic look, not a polished look.
He ate at whole foods – way ahead of his time.
He had locust and honey.
“Would you like a donut?” “NO, I’ll take the locust.” Spoon fulls of honey and locusts.
(Locust met the Jewish standards and is a source of protein).

Afro, beard, camel’s hair – bugs and honey. We would want to give him a round room!

But nope, that’s the man of God.

2 Kings 1:8. His dress of course was also a point back to **Elijah**, not a stylistic preference. This is the Elijah they had waited on: **Mark 9:13.**
Elijah was the most famous prophet – see Mt of Transfiguration.
John is coming in the spirit and power of Elijah, as predicated.
John is the voice in the wilderness.

John was nothing compared to Jesus (1:7-8)

If anyone had reason for ministerial pride, it was John the Baptist.

He was the long awaited prophet

He was the messenger of Jesus, indeed a relative

He baptized Jesus!

He would be the talk in the Christian sub-culture. His sermons would be the most downloaded.... But he says:

“I am unworthy to tie Jesus sandals.” That would be like saying, I am not worthy to clean his toilet. A slave could be reduced to that task, but not a disciple.

John said, “I’m lower than a disciple. I’m even lower than a slave. I’m unworthy to un-strap them.... Don’t look at me, look at him.”

Later, “Are you the Christ?” John doesn’t say, “Well, I can see how you confused me for him!” No.

He’s the best man to the Groom. He’s not the Groom.

He’s the one singing the national anthem. He’s not the main event.

What a great word for today, when pastors and teachers and leaders are treated as rock stars, and celebrities. *God is interested in Christ-exalting servants, not rock stars.*

We need more John the Baptists and fewer ladder climbers.

The sky already has enough stars, and they all sing his praise.

We are not the point. We are pointers.

John 3:30, “I MUST (Necessity) decrease, he MUST increase.”
Until you get this, and live this, you won’t mature, and you won’t be happy.

V. 8: “He will Baptize You with the Holy Spirit”

Water touches your skin, only the Spirit truly cleanses.
Jesus will bring total cleansing. Complete cleansing. He is the Savior, and I am not.

“Baptized with the Holy Spirit”

This is not a second blessing or the ability to speak in tongues
Here, this is simply another way of talking about the gift of the Spirit – given to every believer.

Ezekiel 36, Joel 2 – a new age of the Spirit

John talks about the new day; Jesus is the new day!

John can preach renewal, only Jesus can renew!

Jesus gives us the Spirit! (John 14)

No one can give the presence of God but God!

Confirmation #2: The Voice of the Father and the Descent of the Spirit (1:9-11)

Notice the Trinitarian nature of this baptism.

There’s something to **hear** and something to **see** that reveals Jesus’ divine nature, and His relationship in the Trinity.

And it explains why he was baptized..... 7 Reasons (Akin)

It inaugurated his public ministry. Recall in Acts 1:21–22. The main criterion was finding someone to replace Judas, was that this person had accompanied Jesus from his *baptism* onward. His baptism served as **the commencement of his public ministry.** You couldn’t be an apostle if you weren’t there. Our baptism serves as the commencement of our **public profession of faith in Jesus**, the one who died for us, and rose on our behalf (the wonderful picture of believer’s baptism).

It identified him with us. Jesus aligns himself with those he came to save. He never sinned, yet he identifies with sinners, fulfills all righteousness, and then dies on their behalf.

It associated Him with John’s ministry. There were/are lots of false prophets. Jesus’ ministry told people, “Pay attention. He’s telling the truth. We’re together.”

It demonstrated his divine approval of the Father. At Jesus’ baptism, the booming voice of the Father also confirms Jesus’ identity.

This is not “adoptionism” – Jesus didn’t become the son at his baptism. Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

The prophet Isaiah (64:1) spoke of a desire for God to **rend the heavens** and come down. The Father’s voice is the answer to the longing for God to come

down. He has, in the person of Jesus, who has ushered in a new era of grace.
God doesn't want anyone to miss it: This is the long expected Messiah.

It revealed the Triune God.

**At the beginning and the end (Matt 28:19-20), the Trinity is revealed.
It showed his reliance on the Holy Spirit.**

The OT also foretold of this eschatological age, in which the Messiah would be endowed with God's Spirit.

Isaiah 61 – Messiah, empowered by the Spirit

Further back: Gen 1:2 – the Spirit brooding over the water is seen as a dove. This is a new beginning

Through our union with Christ, the Spirit is making us more like Jesus.

It showed what type of Messiah He would be.

Mark 1:11 is a combination of significant OT texts:

Genesis 22:2 – The “beloved Son who would be sacrificed”

Exodus 4:22 – Israel is God's son, Israel is reduced to one!

Psalms 2:7 – “You are my Son ... greater than David who will rule the nations”

Psalms 42:1 – “I take delight in you” – the first of the Servant Songs of Isaiah which climax in Isaiah 53 which describes Jesus' atoning sacrifice.

His baptism shows us what he came to do – Mark 10:45

His messianic identity is perplexing to people throughout the narrative, because they don't get the idea of a sacrificial Messiahs. I mean, Messiah's win!

But he is the sacrificial Savior, who is baptized in death, and raised to life – and now gives life to all who believe in him.

Confirmation #3: The Triumph in the Wilderness (1:12-13)

What do you expect next? A great song? A coronation? How about the devil!...

The same Spirit that descended on Jesus, now sends him to the wilderness.

Lest we think that Jesus is some automaton with no will of his own, he now is “tempted” by the devil, in which he must choose to obey. The language is forceful.

The Spirit “drives” Jesus or “thrusts him out” (*ekballein*) to meet the adversary.

And He does obey!

Jesus is representing a new Exodus, a new Israel.

Once again, Israel is reduced to One.

He triumphed where Israel failed. That's present in the other temptation accounts...

The OT imagery is obvious – with the wilderness, the forty days, the the Jordan

Tripp called this “**Substitutionary Temptation.**” He obeyed where we couldn't, and then died the death that we deserved for failing in temptation.

But there's more... Mark includes one thing that the other two Gospel writers doesn't include, on purpose: “**tempted by wild animals.**”

The region just alluded to abounds in boars, jackals, wolves, foxes, leopards, hyenas, etc.

*While this phrase is disputed I side with Lane and Edwards in thinking that Mark mentions this is most likely because of his **Roman readers.***

Remember those bloody animal skins mentioned by Tacitus?

Ignatius also mentions wild beasts six times with reference to the pending martyrdom by wild beasts in Rome.

Mark wants his hearers to know that Jesus knows about suffering – *for he himself has been among the wild beasts, but escaped victorious.*

Lane says: “**They [The Roman Christians] found that nothing they could suffer from Nero was alien to the experience of Jesus.**” (15).

Application: What encouragement!

Imagine hearing this the first time, perhaps hidden away in a catacomb!

We will have our own wilderness experiences, our own trials.

Jesus identifies with us in our trials. He sympathizes with us. He knows. He cares.

Following Jesus isn't easy, but the Spirit of God is with us.

Notice the reference to the Spirit in each of these sections....

Is there something you are trying to conquer? Some battle with the flesh?

Is there some obstacle?

God uses people who live out of their weakness into God's strength.

“The angels ministered [attended] to him.” This is Spiritual warfare!

The imperfect tense here indicates that the angels ministered to Jesus throughout the forty days, not after the test was over.

There is a spiritual battle going on... Satan's presence – But God is greater; victory is possible because of Jesus Christ.

Confirmation #4: The Preaching of Jesus (1:14-15)

Jesus came into Galilee (after beginning his ministry) “proclaiming”
Jesus came preaching! See **1:38; 2:2.**

It was great to hear C.J. live. As he was preaching yesterday, I told Kimberly in the middle of the third sermon (I could listen to three

more sermons). I've heard Piper, Keller, Carson, Chandler, Begg, etc. I would love to have heard Luther, Spurgeon, Calvin, Whitefield, Augustine.... But oh, I would love to hear Jesus! Can you imagine! One day we will hear him. We will see him. We will be with him.

Verses 14-15 summarizes his preaching ministry: "The **Kingdom** of God Is At Hand; repent and believe the good news."

He's proclaiming the dawning of the kingdom because He's the king!
The kingdom of God involves the rule of the Spirit in the hearts of God's people.

But it's not just a spiritual reality.

It will one day involve the restoration of all creation (Rev 21:1).

However, Jesus hasn't revealed that it will come in stages yet...

The kingdom is "**already not yet.**"

Jesus inaugurates it; later he will consummate it.

The kingdom is about the King.

So, Jesus comes preaching about the saving rule of God.

Question #2: How Should We Respond to Jesus? (1:15)

Christianity is not just a creed; it demands action!

Repent and believe the gospel.

Throughout the gospel, you will see people respond with:

Anger – this happens throughout the narrative, leading ultimately to his crucifixion

Terrified – demons, disciples, observers

Awe. Go with this one! – paralyzed man, Blind Bartimeaus, Syrophencian woman,

Rarely, if ever, do you see a person being **cold and indifferent and dismissive** to Jesus.

They may have questions, but they aren't unmoved.

Repentance is a radical act (examples in the NT). It involves turning from sin and trusting in the Savior for the forgiveness of your sins.

It involves taking his claims seriously, seeing them as truth, and then renouncing sin and self and trusting in Jesus – in aligning yourself with this King.

John and Jesus came to religious people and preached repentance first!

It's possible that you're here and you are not converted.

Will you give up your own way and follow Jesus?

Believer

Keep repenting

Follow the model of JB

Take comfort in your trials today – Jesus identifies with us, and the Spirit empowers us.

Soon, this King will consummate the kingdom. And people like us will be with him.

We didn't see him at his first coming, but we will see Him soon.

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