

Title: The Book of Mark: Part 2

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Mark 1:1-8

Big Idea: Mark 1.1-8 includes some really good stuff we're going to learn about.

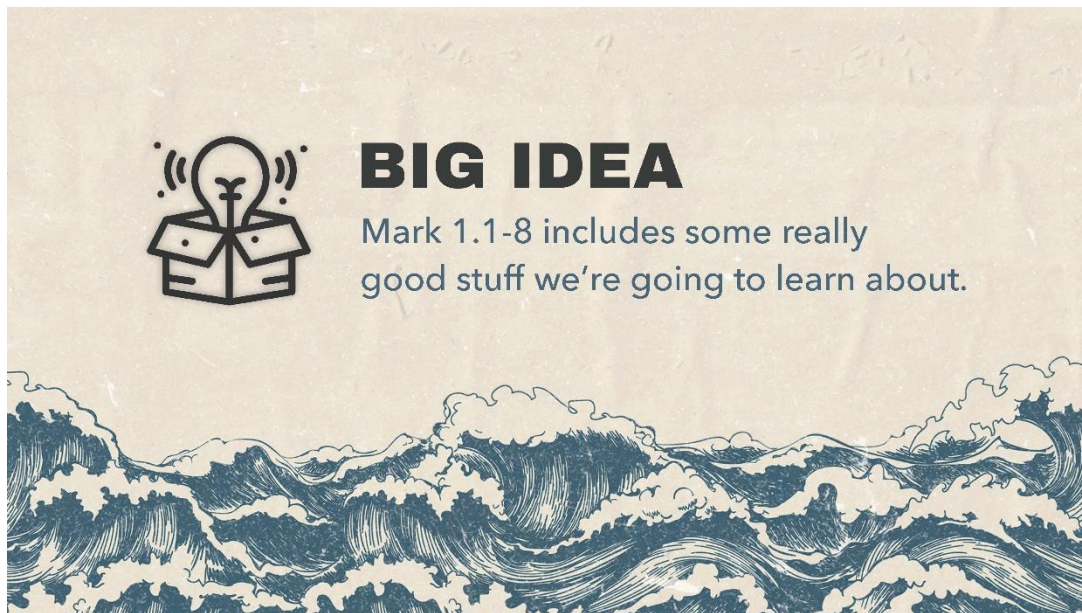


In the education world, there is a concept called 'learning readiness'. It simply means that a good teacher will intentionally include an initial component in their lesson that will set up their students for maximum learning because the goal of teaching is that learners learn.

The same holds true for a public speaker or pastor. Since my goal for a message is that you learn, which hopefully leads to spiritual transformation, I, too, intentionally try to set you up so that you can get the most from the message.

That's why I give a big idea or begin with a story or an illustration. Some passages of Scripture lend themselves to easily do that because the main idea is immediately clear. Sometimes it's a bit more difficult.

The passage today in this series on the book of Mark that we began last week is one of those that is a bit more difficult to craft a clear big idea. So, I (uncreatively) am giving you this big idea:



How's that for creativity?

To break it down a bit more, we're going to see 4 persons, that point to 4 spiritual insights, that lead to 4 questions to consider.

Jesus asked lots of questions. One author said that the Gospels record that Jesus asked 339 questions.

As we read through this section, see if you can find the four persons this passage mentions.

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup> It is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”– <sup>3</sup> “a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

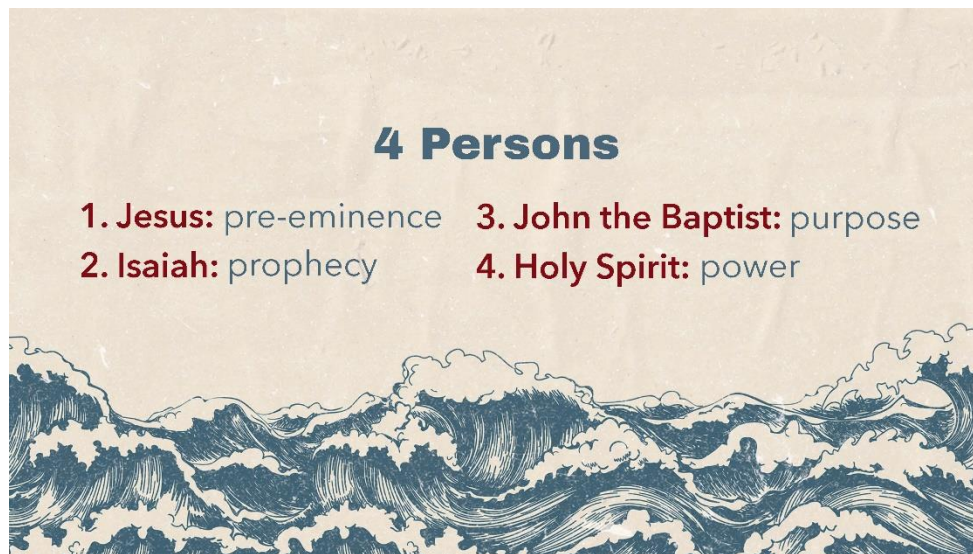
<sup>4</sup> And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup> John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Mark 1.1-8

Did you find the four persons?  
Who was the first one?

We see Jesus, Isaiah, John the Baptist, and the Holy Spirit in this passage. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the trinity. More on him later.

Each of the four insights related to these 4 persons begins with a ‘P.’



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

This beginning he writes about is kind of like the “In the beginning” that the book of Genesis starts with. The word signifies primacy in rank, power, dominion, and time. He’s implying that the first verse is much like a title of the book, its claim to divine origin, and its focus which is Jesus.

It is the beginning of the spreading of the good news of the pre-eminent Jesus. Remember from last week I said that Mark was the first Gospel written.

Remember the word related to **Jesus: pre-eminence.**

Mark refers to Jesus by various titles—teacher, rabbi, Son of David, Christ, Lord, Son of Man, and Son of God.

Jesus’ names point to his pre-eminence.

“Jesus” is the Greek form of the Hebrew name “Joshua,” which means “God is salvation”. It is the name revealed by the angel to Joseph, Jesus’ human father, before Jesus was born, and it was given to describe Jesus’ mission, “and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

“Christ” is the Greek word for “anointed.” In the Old Testament, three classes of people received anointing: prophets, priests, and kings. Kings would be commissioned by anointing. God would commission these three groups for special tasks.

Christ is the ultimate anointed one, King, capital K, which had behind it the Hebrew word “masiah”, from which the English word “messiah” comes from. Jesus as the Messiah means that He would be the perfect, long awaited, anointed King chosen by God from eternity to rescue us from sin.

Son of Man is another title found in Mark. It was actually Jesus’ self-proclaimed title. In fact, the word did not actually exist before he came. It means that he is fully human without sin. By saying he was the “Son of Man,” he meant that he was (and is) the unique representation of the human race. He is not merely a human being; He is *the* human being—*the* true man.

Son of God here is a more complete title for Jesus’s person and mission than simply Messiah.

Son of Man and Son of God essentially meant the same, although if you nuance them, Son of Man refers more to Jesus’ humanity and Son of God more to his divinity. They both have a common element, Jesus’ kingly power.

In this verse there is another important word, gospel.

In both the Old Testament and in Greek literature the word for Gospel, was “euangelion” and was commonly used of reports of victory from the battlefield. Victories were good news. The messenger who brought the report was the deliverer of this “good news”. In the ancient manuscripts the good news was plural. But this good news is singular, which gives the word Gospel a much deeper meaning.

How? Because the Good News is a person, Jesus. God has provided salvation for all who trust Jesus. It’s good news because of what his life, death, and resurrection accomplished. For Mark, the gospel is the story of salvation in Jesus. Jesus as a singular good news, is pre-eminent over all other good news.

Mark is proclaiming the Good News already known and experienced by the Roman Christians, by rooting it in the historical events of Jesus’ life. However, some of these early Roman Christians may have begun to lose hold of some of these historical roots. Thus, Mark included a lot of the historical events in Jesus’ life for their and our benefit.

So, Mark being the first Gospel written, starts a new kind of literature, the Gospels, by applying the general word gospel in a pre-eminent way, the good news of the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus has come and a new age has dawned that requires repentance and faith in Him.

The gospel is more than a set of truths or a set of beliefs. It is that but even more. It is a person, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The next person is **Isaiah**.

Mark 1.2-3 “It is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”—<sup>3</sup> “a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

God had been silent for over 300 years between the time of the Old Testament and the New Testament era. The people were hungry for a word from God.

This quotation combined three Old Testament passages with the majority of the quote from the book of Isaiah. It links Jesus’ life and ministry to the Old Testament. Jesus stands in continuity with the work of God in Israel, as the fulfiller of the law and the prophets. Without the Old Testament we don’t understand Jesus. God began His work in the history of Israel and completed His work in Jesus.

Remember, the primary audience of Mark were non-Jews, Gentiles, who would not be as familiar with the Old Testament. So, Mark uses a term from the Greek world used to designate something with authority for those Gentiles with limited understanding of the Old Testament. The phrase was, "It is written".

Mark also uses "way" or "path" three times. In Mark, the way of God is ultimately the way of Jesus to the cross.

Here is another name for Jesus, "Lord", which was a term for Jesus used by the early church which means his deity, dominion, and direction.

One of the many reasons to believe in Christianity is the number of prophecies that were made about Jesus and the events surrounding his coming that were fulfilled, as this prophecy quoted here was fulfilled.

Prophets were God's spokesmen and foretold the future through prophecies. This prophecy was over 700 years old.

To put prophecies in perspective, scholars tell us that there are around 60 prophecies and 270 ramifications in the Old Testament fulfilled by the life of Jesus.

The probability that Jesus of Nazareth could have fulfilled even eight such prophecies would be 1 in 100, 000, 000, 000, 000, 000 (quadrillion). The odds of your being injured by a lightning strike on any given day are only 1 in 250 million.

It's been estimated that if the state of Texas was covered 2 feet deep with coins about the size of a tooney, and only one was marked, the 1 in 100 quadrillion chance of someone fulfilling just 8 of these prophecies is the same chance that a person would pick up the marked coin on his first attempt.

Fulfilled prophecy is a strong objective support for the truth of Christianity. Christianity is based on verifiable, historical truth. It's a faith for thinking people, those who want evidence. Ultimately, however, it does require faith, but it's not a blind leap of faith. It is based on the historical evidence.

Mark 1.4 "And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

Mark 1.6 "John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey."

### **John the Baptist: purpose**

Who was John the Baptist?

His mother, Elizabeth was a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were old and could not have children until God worked a miracle and she got pregnant, even in her old age.

This happened about 6 months prior to the time Mary was miraculously conceived through the Holy Spirit's work. When Mary learned she was pregnant she went to visit Elizabeth and Luke tells us that when she came into her house, Elizabeth's baby (John the Baptist) leaped with joy in her womb as he somehow sensed that Jesus was in Mary's womb.

When John was born, he was given the name John which was unusual because there were no men named John in their family and you usually gave your baby boy a name that was already in the family. But God told his father, Zechariah, to name him John and the family then knew that there was going to be something special about John because of these events.

Then, as an adult he went to the desert to preach.

The desert region is not like the image that comes to our mind when we think of a desert. It's more the idea of uninhabited and uncultivated place in Palestine that were somewhat barren with some foliage. Although it would be hard, you could eke out a living there.



John the Baptist had assumed the dress and style of another ancient prophet, Elijah, and that was why the gospel tell us that the Pharisees wondered if he was Elijah having come back.

Mark's description meant that he lived a rough, rustic, and secluded life in the desert, perhaps because of a vow he took. A Nazarite vow in those days would require abstinence from alcohol, abstinence from the niceties of life, and great self-discipline. Perhaps he had taken such a vow.

His diet, grasshoppers. There was no Tim Hortons coffee and timbits for him. Interestingly, grasshoppers are a good source of protein and quite nutritious. In other parts of the world, they are eaten. I guess they taste like chicken. I don't plan on eating any of them.

For sure, John was not making a fashion statement. No jeans and sneakers for him.

His camel's-hair robe was the kind worn by the very poor, and his belt, unlike the fancy belts so popular in those days, was simply a leather strip.

His dress was a quite a contrast to the refined dress of the religious leaders at the time. John's dress and lifestyle were a protest against the godlessness and self-serving materialism of his day. It amounted to a call to separate yourself from the sinful culture, to repent, and to live a life focused on God.

Where he preached reminded the people where Israel ended up when they escaped Egypt, the wilderness. It was like a reenactment of Israel's history in Exodus when they were rescued from Egyptian bondage and brought into the wilderness.

Jesus said there was no greater one than John the Baptist other than himself. And he was ultimately put in jail and beheaded by King Herod.

[Mark 1.5](#) "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."

John's preaching had made quite a stir and the people came out in droves. Somebody estimated that over the time he preached before Jesus' public ministry, 300,000 people were baptized by him.

He was effective because he embodied his message. That's what gave him his power. He lived what he taught, and it was evident. He was on fire for God.

Preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The word repent fundamentally means change of mind or altering your understanding, which implies a rational decision and willful act rather than some emotional feeling. Although, when we do repent, there is a sense of joy and lifting of the burden of guilt. The New Testament uses the word in a deeper sense, a deliberate turning, turning from sin and turning to Jesus.

And God's direct response to our repentance is that he forgives us all of our sin.

This baptism he espoused was radical for a Jew. If you were a non-Jew, a Gentile, and you wanted to convert to Judaism you would get baptized. But a Jew being baptized? They had never heard of this.

Second, baptism was focused on repentance from sin. Just as generations before had been separated from Egypt when they went through the waters of the Red Sea and went into the wilderness, John was preaching a second spiritual exodus in preparation for a new covenant from God. That second exodus was baptism. By repentance they were symbolically separating themselves from their sin, pictured through baptism.

So here is John, preaching first to hundreds and then to thousands, calling them to task about their sin, duplicity, and immorality by calling them to repent. And as each person felt conviction of their sin and repented, they lined up to be baptized as a sign that they were repenting of their sins and turning to God.

Mark 1.4 (NLT) “He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.”

That was the first part of John’s message. His purpose was to fulfill the prophecy that one would come to prepare the people for Jesus. John the Baptist did just that.

Now Mark writes about the second part of John’s message, the ultimate, superior baptism, spiritual baptism.

Mark 1.7-8 “And this was his message: ‘After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’”

### **Holy Spirit: power**

So great is this one coming, Jesus, that John felt unworthy to untie his sandals for him. In the first century slaves were given the task to loosen sandals and wash feet. This describes John’s humility and his subordination to Jesus. This section points to the changing of the guard from John to Jesus.

This new baptism relates to New Testament baptism today. Water baptism is not salvific, that is, it does not save you, does not dispense grace, does not give you the Holy Spirit. It is simply a symbol of what has happened in your heart when the Holy Spirit comes into your spirit at repentance and faith in Jesus.

He told them he had drenched them with water, which was only external, but One would come who would drench them in the Holy Spirit and His power, which was intrinsically internal.

And not until the book of Acts which was the recording of the birth of the church and the coming of the Holy Spirit, called Pentecost, do we learn much about the Holy Spirit.

The distinction is not: before Pentecost no Spirit; after Pentecost the Spirit. If this were true, no soul could have been saved before Pentecost. The true distinction is, before the actually completed work of redemption came the limited preparatory work of the Spirit; after that the superabounding fulness of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament the bestowal of the spirit, mentioned a few times, was God’s prerogative for specific people for specific tasks. After Pentecost and the formation of the New Testament we learn much about the Holy Spirit. I could do several messages about the Holy Spirit, but just a summery here.

The Holy Spirit is not:

- a God-sized version of Casper the friendly ghost
- not the biggest angel
- not the good side of the Force
- a new age spirit guide

The Holy Spirit is not an IT, but a person. The Holy Spirit is God himself.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of what is called the Trinity, a word the church fathers coined to describe that the Christian God is one God with three persons. God the father, God the Son, and God the Spirit who are all equal in essence, substance, power, and glory. Not three Gods, one God, three persons.

The Spirit is the one who makes Christ real to us. If you are a follower of Jesus, at the very point you repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus, you were baptized by the Holy Spirit that John refers to. The Apostle Paul wrote...

1 Corinthians 12:13 “Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ’s body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit.”

Water baptism is something we do after the fact. And if you have taken that step, I hope you will at our next baptism. We celebrated the baptism of 19 a few weeks ago and challenge you to take this next step. Call the church office if you would like to be baptized.

Baptism in the spirit is a onetime event that occurs at the moment of salvation. We don’t get the HS on an installment plan, part now and part later depending on how well you’re living because you deserve it.

We all have an equal measure of God’s Spirit. However, some believers are more yielded to the Spirit on a day-to-day basis and thus experience more of his power and joy than others. Being baptized in the Holy Spirit equals having the Holy Spirit dwelling in you and is the universal experience of every believer--there aren’t the haves and the have nots--I have more of God’s spirit than you.

Recap of the 4 people and the 4 spiritual insights:



In light of what we have learned about these four persons, here are the 4 questions to consider that all overlap in some way and are different ways of looking at the same idea.

*Jesus: How pre-eminent is He in your life?*

Is he simply a historical, really good, moral teacher with limited influence in your life? Is he somebody you pray to when you need something? Or, is He central, above all else in your life? Do you have a passion for Jesus like the passion of John the Baptist?

*Isaiah: Is anything hindering your walk in the path of Jesus?*

Remember Isaiah said, make straight paths for him. Does something regularly get you off the right path and into trouble?

*John the Baptist: How well does your life embody your profession?*

One of the reasons John drew people to his message was because he embodied his message, he walked his talk.

The Holy Spirit: *How consistent do you yield your heart to the spirit's promptings?*

The Holy Spirit usually does not direct us through lightning bolts and thunder, but with gentle quiet moves in our heart. It requires attention to the things of God to sense these promptings.

Which person and question resonates most with you. What should you do in response?

**Jesus:** How **pre-eminent** is He in your life?

**Isaiah:** Is anything **hindering** your walk in the path of Jesus?

**John the Baptist:** How well does your life **embody** your profession?

**The Holy Spirit:** How consistent do you **yield** your heart to the spirit's promptings?

