

Mark
“God’s Bulldozer”

1:1-8

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I. Introduction

The gospel is not a discussion or a debate, it’s not good VIEWS; its GOOD NEWS. Each of the gospels present a different picture of Jesus:

- Matthew presents Jesus to the Jews as their long waited King.
- Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man to the Greek mind, the Philosophical mind.
- John presents Jesus the Son of God and is for the believer and follower of Jesus as it reveals the relational aspect of our faith.

Matthew and John were both disciples of Jesus whereas Luke and Mark were both disciples of disciples, (Luke of Paul and Mark of Peter).

Mark was written for the Roman mind, it contains the most Latin words, it’s a gospel of haste and action which are characteristics of the Roman spirit. It is the briefest of the Gospels as it only has 16 chapters and for that reason is the most translated book of the Bible according to Wycliffe translators. Though not identified, the author is a young man named John Mark (*John being his Jewish name, Mark being his Roman name*). He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey but as far as Paul was concerned proved to be less than dependable. It seems at first he didn’t take to the life of a missionary and went with Barnabas. But in the end according to 2 Timothy 4:11 he and

Paul serve together. Here is a man who early on in God's work is thought of as unreliable but over time God use him to record the truths about Jesus. We know that Mark was close to Peter and as you read this gospel we see that Mark writes a lot about Peter's experiences and thoughts. In fact in 1 Peter 5:13 Peter calls Mark his son in the faith. It is believed that Mark was the son of a well to do woman named Mary who lived in Jerusalem in a home that was often used by Christians. Many believe that it was in the "Upper Room" of this house that the last supper took place and where they were all gathered after the ascension waiting for the promised Holy Spirit. Later on we learn that he was the cousin or nephew of Barnabas. He traveled a lot as he joined the missionary team of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch, went to Perga in Pamphilia, then with Barnabas to Cyprus, served with Peter in Babylon modern Iraq and finally was with Paul in Rome. Tradition also links him with Peter in Rome as well as Egypt where he founded the church in Alexandria and was killed in 68 A.D.

The dating of any ancient literature isn't an exact science and the way in which you come up with dates is based upon the other accounts and work by a process of elimination. It's believed that Mark wrote before Luke's account and we that in Luke's two volume work in Acts Paul's first trial in Rome isn't completed which places the writing of Acts at 63 A.D. Luke wrote his gospel first which places it at around A.D. 58. This date would place Mark's gospel between 40 A.D. and 56 A.D. with most evidence placing the writing at 50 A.D. That would make this and James the earliest New Testament writings and would mean that it served as the main source for both Matthew and Luke a fact that is further bolstered when you realize that all but about 50 verses of Mark are found in their entirety in Matthew and Luke. The location where it was written

is equally as difficult to determine as some say, Alexandria Egypt, others say Antioch in Syria, others Caesarea or Rome.

The evidence that Mark wrote for the Roman reader is seen eternally by the lack of Old Testament quotations, explanations of Jewish customs, absence of Jewish law and descriptions of the geography Jewish land such as the Mount of Olives. Both Luke and John tell us why they wrote their account of Jesus but with Mark we must look for it in what he wrote. Mark's favorite word in this gospel is "immediately" which occurs 40 times as we see Jesus as a very busy servant. Mark's emphasis is more upon the "works" of Jesus than upon the "words" of Christ. No genealogy in Mark's account because no one cares about the pedigree of a servant. As we examine Mark we can see that Mark arranged the gospel both in events as well as geographically:

- Chapter 1:1-3 His preparation
- Chapter 1:14-9:50 His ministry in Galilee
- Chapter 10:1-52 His Journey to Jerusalem
- Chapter 11:1-15:47 His final week
- Chapter 16:1-20 His consummation

II. Vs. 1-3 Road work for God

Vs. 1-3 Church tradition says that Mark was Peter's interpreter and that is believable as this gospel reflects Peter's personal experiences. He boldly proclaims Jesus Christ is the Son of God to Roman readers, how radical was this statement. The word "*gospel*" would have meant more to the Romans as it meant "*joyful news about the emperor*". In biblical times before a king visited any part of his realm, *a messenger was sent before him to prepare the way this included **repairing roads** and **preparing the people** for the visit.* That is how Mark sees John the Baptist as he highlights John's work of preparation for Jesus. John's work was not unexpected, it was written about by the prophets of Malachi

in 3:1 and by Isaiah in 40:3. These two prophets both spoke similarly about John's work describing it as "*preparing*" Jesus' way before Him and "*making His paths strait*". My father and grandfather were both employed in this occupation as they operated "*heavy equipment*" operators and worked making roads. That's what John the Baptists work was, he was a "*road builder*" a "*bulldozer*" for Jesus. He removed the debris and straitened the path for Jesus. These two prophets describe the Baptists "*road work*" for Jesus to come to people and not for people to come to Him. The Baptist worked on the roads of human hearts removing the "junk" and striating the crookedness so that Jesus could come to their hearts. The stuff that John needed to bulldoze was religion that had clogged the entrance of human hearts.

III. Vs. 4-5 A radical work

Vs. 4-5 Mark says that John's primary message was "*baptism of repentance*". This was totally radical in nature, no one else had done or even suggested it. The only thing close to this was Gentile converts to Judaism. John's baptism was far different from the Jewish ritual washing from the defilement of the past. The Jews that came out to John were doing something that was never asked of them before by a person unlike they had ever seen before. And they did so in an odd location, the wilderness, this would have summoned in their mind their ancestor's pilgrimage from Egypt and baptism would have seemed as a preparation for a new covenant with God. When we were in Israel we traveled right to the wilderness spot where John was preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Today it is right on the boarder of Jordan and Israel where ½ the river is in Jordan the other ½ in Israel. It's still very much wilderness today and very barren even though Jericho is only 10 miles away. That John's "road work" was done in

the wilderness in a forsaken isolated place where people needed to needed to leave their cities, comfort and pleasures to come to this place and travel some 30 miles to hear John tell them they need to change and to symbolize this change by washing. Mark tells us that “*all the land of Judea, and those in Jerusalem went out to him*”. This describe a steady stream of people who were not indiscriminate curiosity seekers but rather their migration was a deliberate act of people who knew what John proclaimed and what they would need to do to get right with God. The good news that John preached was that religion was no longer a barrier to right living and that message brought such hope that people came in droves to receive this truth. John offered them the opportunity not to go through religious leaders but to go direct to God. Their sin, guilt and fear was bottlenecked by the hands of self-righteous religious leaders who for pride and financial reasons wouldn’t release people.

IV. Vs. 6-8 A stranger in the wilderness

Vs. 6-8 John assumed the style and lifestyle of the prophet Elijah described in 2 Kings 1:8, in life and actions bore out what he was. He was simple, balanced and fearless in his words as his clothing and diet portrayed. **Preaching is not the art of making a sermon and delivering it, it is the art of making a preacher and delivering him.** Filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb, a Nazirite from birth, totally committed to God, he embodied the message. Without the “Bulldozer” Jesus wouldn’t have had a clear path to hearts as Isaiah in chapter 40 verse 4 tells us that John would need to lift up valleys, make low mountains and hills, level uneven and rough ground. That’s what repentance does as it knocks down our pride, it fills in our excuses, it straightens out the lies we have believed and it smooth’s out the rough places of our lives.

Mark describe John's character by giving a description of what he wore and his diet, "*camel hair with a leather belt and locusts and wild honey*". John was a simple man a basic man both in clothing and diet and as such those things reflect his message. His diet was simple but balanced grasshoppers for protein and honey for carb's thus he was healthy.

The menial task of a slave was to take off the sandals of the guest and wash their feet as they entered the home. And John the Baptist didn't want people to get the wrong impression of him as he saw himself below the lowest of slaves. John came only to smooth out lives so that the "ANSWER" people are looking for can come and make His home in our hearts. John would take them TO GOD but Jesus would take them to be WITH GOD. This would require life to be lived in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. There is too much from the pulpits today that is like John's ministry "*designed only to bring people to God*" but friends we need more than this we need the power to live. There is a greater baptism and cleansing than water and it is one of fire of the Holy Spirit. Water was the instrument in which John baptized with but the Holy Spirit is NOT the instrument Jesus baptizes with. Jesus' baptism is the act of the Holy Spirit Himself baptizing or placing the believing sinner into Christ and His body then empowering them for the work He has called them too. That is what we need today!