

## **Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time**

### **The Herald of the New King**

Scripture: Mark 1:1–8

Code: 41-2

We come now to the Gospel of Mark. Open your Bible, if you will, to the first chapter of Mark. The first chapter of Mark. And we are going to read for you the opening eight verses. And then we're going to look at them this morning.

Mark chapter 1 and verse 1. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight."'"

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

"John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. And 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. I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'" Thus does Mark begin his history of the Lord Jesus Christ drawn from his time spent with the beloved apostle Peter who is the human source of his information. Of course superintended and guided by the Holy Spirit so that when he wrote, he wrote under divine inspiration.

The key word that I want you to look at is in verse 1. It is the word "gospel." The word "gospel," of course, is very familiar to us. Sometimes when we use the word "gospel," we actually mean a book, like the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Mark, Gospel of Luke, or the Gospel of John.

But in the New Testament, the word "gospel" is never a reference to one of those four books. The word "gospel" in the New Testament always refers to the message of salvation, and that's its usage here. How are we to understand, then, in the context in which Mark is writing, the usage of this word? How would first century people view its significance? There is, here, given no definition of the word "gospel." The Greek word euaggelion is the word "gospel" that appears in our English Bible.

But what did the word euaggelion mean to those who would read or hear this book read? Is it a word that is so inimitably Christian that we invented it? Is the word "gospel" our word? Is euaggelion distinctively a New Testament word?

Well, the answer to that question is no. It's a very old word. And it was a very familiar word, both to Jews and to Gentiles, long in usage and rather specific in its meaning. Yes, the word euaggelion means good news, joyous message, glad tidings. But it had a more technical usage, both in the minds of the Jews and the Gentiles as well. And remember now, Mark is writing from Rome to Roman Christians and Roman non-Christians, primarily then a Gentile audience.

It's important, then, to consider how they would understand this word, since he doesn't define it for them. But let's, first of all, wonder how the Jews would understand it. There certainly were Jews among the Christians. There were certainly Jews among the non-Christians who would read and have read and continue to read this book.

So, what does gospel mean to them? How does it connect to them? Well, it is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. The Old Testament written originally in Hebrew, but there is a Greek version of it in which the word euaggelion is the best translation of the Old Testament word. For that, I would take you back to listen carefully to Isaiah chapter 40.

Isaiah chapter 40. This is a very important chapter, by the way, Isaiah 40, because it looks forward to the coming of Messiah in the far distant future. It also looks forward in the near future to the children of Israel being released from captivity and going back to their land. That is why chapter 40 begins, "Comfort, O comfort My people. Speak kindly to Jerusalem. Call out to her her warfare has ended, her iniquity has been removed, she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Her punishment is over; it's time for restoration. That's what Isaiah is saying. And that looks in the near future from Isaiah's vantage to the return from the Babylonian captivity, and from the far viewpoint to the future coming of Messiah.

Dropping down to verse 9 in that chapter we read this, "Get yourself up on a high mountain" – and there's an announcement coming; find the highest point to make the announcement so you can be heard by most people – "O Zion, bearer of good news" – and there is the word in the Septuagint, euaggelion, good news – "Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!' Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him."

It is announcing the good news of the arrival of God. That is its usage. It refers to the ascent of God to rule, "The Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him." When you're talking about good news, you're talking about this is the best news possible. Remember now, these are people who are captive. They are being told, "There is coming a restoration. The punishment and chastisement is over; you're going back, and the Lord is going to ascend again into His throne, and He is going to rule over you."

In the forty-second chapter – or the fifty-second chapter of Isaiah, we find a similar usage of this in the same context. Verse 7, Isaiah 52, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news" – again this is the same good news – "who announces peace, who brings news of happiness, who announces salvation" – and what is going to bring happiness, and peace, and salvation? – "Say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

So, while the word euaggelion might have some broad meanings, its technical meaning was to describe the very best news possible, which was the ascent of a new King, the ascent of a sovereign to His throne over His people to produce salvation and peace and happiness. That is the way the Jews would view it, and that is the way it is used there by Isaiah.

Both passages consider, then, the return of the Jews from Babylonian exile. When they go back to their land and God again will dwell in Zion, God again will ascend to His throne. A new temple will be

built, which is like God's palace in which He dwells. And during the time of captivity, remember the temple had been destroyed, as it were. God's palace had been turned to rubble. The people had been carried away. God had dwelt with the exiles in Babylon, according to the prophet Ezekiel.

But the day would come, says Isaiah, when the people will go back, and God will go back with them and ascend to His throne. This will happen in the near future. And it did, in the great return of the Jews from Babylonian exile and the rebuilding of the temple, and God again taking His place as the sovereign over His theocratic nation Israel.

So, it is a word of enthronement. It is the word of the good news of a sovereign ruler taking His throne. And the imagery is of God, the God of Israel, the only true God, establishing His throne in Jerusalem.

In the near fulfillment, that happened in the return from Babylon. In the far fulfillment, that is the messianic promise that the King will come in the future and establish His kingdom in Israel, and set up His rule and His throne there, and that will happen when Jesus returns and sets up His millennial kingdom.

So, the word has reference to the arrival of a king, the ascent of a king in Jewish usage. What about pagan usage? How would the Romans understand that word since they didn't necessarily have any Jewish history? Well, let me read you an inscription. This is an inscription from the Roman world. The date is 9 B.C. Okay? Before Christ. This is the inscription, "The Providence, which has ordered the whole of our life" – translated into English, obviously – "showing concern and zeal, has ordained the most perfect consummation for human life by giving it to Augustus, by filling him with virtue for doing the work of a benefactor among men and by sending in him, as it were, a savior for us and those who come after us, to make war to cease, to create order everywhere. The birthday of the god Augustus is the beginning for the world of the euaggelion" - of the gospel – "that has come to men through him."

How interesting. They used the word euaggelion on that occasion, in that inscription, to describe the arrival of Caesar Augustus. Caesar Augustus is - "by the Providence," it says – the one who will bring to us the work of a benefactor, the work of a savior, make war cease, create order everywhere. It is the arrival of a god. The good news, then, is that Augustus Caesar has arrived. That actual inscription was dedicated to him, apparently, on his birthday. Then, as a technical term again to refer to the ascendancy of the triumph of an emperor.

So, the Jews and the pagans would both see that word as signifying the arrival of a new monarch, and that would signify the arrival of a new era. And the new era would be an era of order and peace and salvation and blessing.

So, Mark chooses a word that spreads itself across Jew and Gentile, and indeed, he is about to write the history of a new King. A new King. The good news is about to be told, at least this is the beginning of the good news. The story is still being written, for the King has not fully taken His throne which one day He will in an earthly way and finally in the new heaven and the new earth as an eternal King.

But Mark will begin to tell the story of the arrival, and ascendancy, and establishment, and

enthronement of the new King who is far more glorious than all other kings, and His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the new King.

This is the story of the new King who has arrived, who is about to inaugurate His kingdom and bring a new era of salvation, blessing, peace, and order to the world. One historical writer says, “The parallel between ‘evangel’” - or the gospel – “in the imperial cult and the Bible is Caesar and Christ, the emperor on the throne and the despised rabbi on the cross confront each other. Both are gospel to men. They have much in common, but they belong to two different worlds.”

So, Mark begins his historical account of the life of Jesus with language that would make his Roman readers know that the new and most glorious King has come, and He sets Himself against all other kings, including Caesar. He is the theme of this history. And this is only the beginning of His story. And what is His name? Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus identifies His human name, Yeshua or Yehoshua in Hebrew – basically, Joshua - meaning Yahweh is salvation. Yehoshua - Yahweh is salvation. That’s His name. “Call Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins,” Matthew 1:21. His title – His name is Jesus, His title is Christ. That is not a name; that is not His last name. That’s a title. Royal title. The Anointed One. That’s what Messiah means. Christ and Messiah are the same thing. It means Anointed One. It’s a royal title. His human name is Jesus. His royal title is Messiah, the Anointed One. Simply King. And his lineage? He is the Son of God. One in nature with God, coeternal and coequal.

And thus does Mark introduce us to the beginning of the history of King Jesus. The beginning of the history of King Jesus, the Son of God. Not the Son of some other earthly monarch.

In John 1:49, “Nathanael said to Jesus, ‘You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.’”

A new King with a radically new kingdom, unlike any other king and any other king, and one who sets Himself above all other kinds and all other kingdoms, one whom the Bible calls the King of Kings. This is the beginning of the good news of His ascent to His throne.

He proves Himself to be the divine King, the Son of God, by His words and His deeds in the first half of Mark’s Gospel. He proves Himself to be the Son of God and the promised King in the second half by His death and resurrection. So, at first it’s His deeds and words that prove who He is; in the back half it’s His death and resurrection that prove who He is. And in the very middle, the very summit of the book, Peter makes the confession, “You are the Christ” – or better – “You are the King; You are exactly who You claim to be.”

And so, this is a book about the arrival of the greatest King ever, the new King; the new King introducing a new kingdom and a new era for the world. And it’s only the beginning of the story, because the story will go on through all of human history and finally be consummated in the new heaven and the new earth when He will rule and reign forever and ever.

So, Mark establishes then what this book is about in his opening sentence. Now, he establishes several truths about the new King. Let me give you five of them. Okay? Truths about the new King. Number one, the promise of the new King. The promise of the new King. Verses 2 and 3, “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your

way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness, “Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.””

Those are prophecies attributed to Isaiah. It is the only Old Testament prophecy in Mark’s introduction. You will find through the book of Mark that there are a number of prophecies. In fact, they’re in bold type, or in upper case letters. So, this is the only prophecy in Mark’s introduction. This is the only one that he uses in the beginning.

What is notable about it is it isn’t particularly about the King; it’s about the herald of the King. And Mark, remember, is writing to Gentiles. He’s writing to Roman Christians – and, of course, Roman non-Christians – who will hear his history read. He is not concerned primarily about the Jews, so he doesn’t frontload his book with a lot of prophecies. He doesn’t make efforts to connect the arrival of Jesus with the Old Testament, say, by giving genealogies like Matthew and Luke are so careful to give. He doesn’t give specific prophecies about Jesus, such as the virgin birth, Bethlehem, called out of Egypt. And there are a number of prophecies that Matthew refers to and Luke refers to. None of those does Mark refer to in the beginning of his history. It is simply enough to say, “He is the Son of God.” He is the Son of God.

Mark knows, however, that if Gentiles are to look at the story of this new King and see it as sort of an authentic arrival of a new King, then they would expect that there would be some kind of authoritative, credible herald who would announce the arrival of the King, because that’s exactly the way it was in their world. No king ever arrived and said, “Hey, I’m the king, and I’m here.” The king always had a forerunner. The king always had an entourage. The king always had some coming before him to prepare the way and make the people ready, and then was appropriately introduced by someone who bore authenticity and authority to make that introduction.

So, Mark, consistent with the Gentile approach to how kings were announced, goes to the Old Testament for the only time in the beginning of his Gospel, not to find a prophecy about Jesus, but to find a prophecy about His herald, to give authenticity to His herald.

With all the Old Testament texts that connect to Jesus Christ, Mark uses prophecy not about the new King at all, but about His forerunner, the one who is to proclaim His arrival. This would be in the kind of official structure of what people in the Gentile world will be used to.

So, there is coming a messenger. That’s identified in verse 2, “I send My messenger.” And he further identifies the messenger as someone who will be a voice crying in the wilderness. This is from the ancient prophets. He’s quoting from the ancient prophets, and he labels this from Isaiah the prophet. Certainly Isaiah was well-known to even Gentile Christians because of his vast book, much of which was centered on the arrival of Messiah, the servant of Jehovah, as Isaiah identifies Him. So, he draws prophecies out of Isaiah.

By the way, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all use – all use these prophecies to label John the Baptist as the fulfillment. John the Baptist is the fulfillment of these prophecies, and all four Gospel writers indicate that. “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet” – or preferably “as it has been written.” The new King is not a new plan; the new King is not an afterthought. This is the plan that God was working out in ancient times. The plan is one culminating in the arrival of the new King, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Gentile readers need to know that the one who announced His arrival is the one prophesied by the ancient prophets, and by the notable prophet Isaiah from the Old Testament. He is an official, divinely commissioned herald for the new King. And so, he's the one being described in these prophecies.

Now, just as a note, it says, "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet," then you have a quote in verse 2, and a quote in verse 3. Verse 2 is actually Malachi 3:1; and verse 3 is Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3. This is not an uncommon thing to do, to refer to only one of the Old Testament prophets, the more prominent one, the more notable one, and tuck in another prophecy by another prophet, since it was all the Word of God.

These prophecies go together so perfectly, and both refer to the same person, so they may have been frequently used together. Malachi is the introductory one; Isaiah is the more important one. But both are general references. If you go back, they're – and this is something you need to know that New Testament writers do. Sometimes they quote exactly from the Hebrew; sometimes they quote from the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament; sometimes they make sort of a general reference to a text, and sometimes it's an interpretive reference. Because remember now, the New Testament writers are inspired by God. And so, when they interpret an Old Testament text, they interpret that in an inspired way.

So, they always give the true interpretation of the text. Sometimes you'd directly quote it; sometimes it's an interpretive quote. Here you have some interpretive quotation, certainly in the case of Malachi 3:1.

But let's look at Malachi 3:1 in the text of Mark 1. Malachi 3:1 records, "Behold, I send My messenger" - and Malachi says - "before Me." Here you have an interpretation of that, "Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way." Obviously, You and Your refers to the coming King. But before the King comes, ahead of Him comes the messenger. So, this is a prophecy that there will be one who comes before the King comes, whose job will be to prepare His way.

Like all prophets, this is a messenger. All prophets are proclaimers. He's a preacher. He will make a strong call for people to prepare for the arrival of the new King. Malachi 3:1 is a direct reference to this messenger, this herald of the coming new King.

And then, in Isaiah 40 and verse 3, we read as recorded here in Mark 1:3, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.'" Now remember, I read you earlier – right? – from Isaiah chapter 40, the opening, and then down in verses 9 and 10, Isaiah prophesied the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity. He prophesied they would come back to Israel; they would go through the wilderness, and God would lead them. And when they arrived, God would be with them, and He would ascend to His throne, and again He would rule over them.

And so, in the near intention of that prophecy, He was talking about the return from the Babylonian captivity and the ascendancy of God to His sovereign place over a reconstituted Israel. And that would require making ready the way of the Lord. God would lead them back from captivity, would

make the path for them, make the road for them, and they would head back, and God would be with them. In the future sense, one would come who would make the road ready for the new King. Make the road ready for the new King. And this, of course, is here associated with the forerunner of Jesus, namely John the Baptist. There was to come one who would herald the new King's arrival, call people to prepare for His glorious ascent to His throne and the establishment of his kingdom of salvation, and blessing, and peace.

Now, the Romans would get this. The Gentiles would get this. The Jews would get this. This is not an ordinary monarch. This is no typical King, however, because of the nature of His person. First of all, He's not the Son of some other king; He is the Son of God. That sets Him apart from all others. He is God the Son; that is to say He's coequal, coexistent, coeternal with God.

So, let's go from the promise of this new King to the person of this new King. Now, I want to show you something. What we already know is His name is Jesus, His title is King – that's what Christ means – His heritage is the Son of God. But I want you to notice how deeply this is in the text of these prophecies.

Verse 2, from Malachi 3:1, “Behold, I send My messenger” – literally, in the text of Malachi - “before Me.” God says, “I send My messenger before Me.” God is saying, “The King who is coming, the King who My messenger announces is Me.” That is a very important statement. “‘He’ is ‘Me.’ - who will prepare My way.” That is to say the King who is coming is one with God. The King who is coming is God. That's why John opens his Gospel saying, “We beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father.” “I send My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way.”

“The messenger is – the messenger is announcing Me, announcing My arrival.” And then, of course, Malachi 3 continues to say this, “And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple.”

So, He goes from “before Me” to “the Lord will suddenly come to His temple.” And you remember, when the Lord arrived, the first public thing He did was go to the temple and cleanse the temple. So, He came suddenly to His temple.

The one coming then is King. Coming as King, He ascends to His temple, His palace. He finds it a den of thieves and cleans it out. But who is He? It is Yahweh. It is God. It is God. You see it even further in the second Old Testament promise, verse 3, from Isaiah 40, verse 3, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness” – that's the messenger; that's what he does; that's where he does it. And what does he say? “Make ready the way of” – whom? - “the Lord” – o Kýrios. Again, Yahweh, God, the Son of God, God Himself. Yahweh, the Lord. Of course, verse 8, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Who else could give the Holy Spirit but the Lord Himself? The new King. The new King who is coming. The new King is none other than God. The testimony to that reality is given at His baptism. If you go down to verse 11, Jesus is being baptized, “A voice came out of the heavens” – this is the voice of the Father – “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”

Now, the world has never seen a King like this. God Himself will come to His people as God Himself came to His people when they returned from the exile in captivity. God Himself will come to His people. God Himself, God the Son will be the new King.

The good news is that God has come. God, the God of the universe, has broken into history to

provide salvation, and blessing, and peace, and His name is Jesus. King Jesus, Son of God. The new King is here. The new kingdom is here. It's a new day for the whole world. It's a new day for human history; salvation has arrived. This is the good news.

In the Greek and Roman world, euaggelion was often used in the plural. Lots of good news. In the New Testament, it's never used but in the singular; there's only one good news, for there's no other salvation except that in Christ. The new King is God come down to bring salvation, peace, order, and blessing.

Then we meet the prophet of the new King. Verse 4, here's the messenger who is the voice crying in the wilderness, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness" – there's the fulfillment of the prophecy. The word "wilderness" the same word as desert. "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching." John the Baptist. Why do you think they called him that?

You say, "Well, because he was a Baptist. He's the first Baptist. He's the original Baptist."

No, he is not the original Baptist. And that's not his last name either. Why would you call anybody John – actually, in the Greek, it's John the Baptizer. It should be John the Baptizer. Why would you call anybody John the Baptizer? Because that's the thing that's so distinguishing about him.

When you read through the New Testament, you have a Mary, and then the Mary's identified by some other name. Right? Like we saw last time. Mary, the mother of John Mark; or, Mary Magdalene; or, Mary, the mother of our Lord; or, Mary, the wife of Clopas. You've got to have some way to identify what Mary you're talking about. Well, you need some way to identify what John you're talking about, too. John's a very common name in Hebrew. And so, it is John the Baptizer, because that's what's most inimitable about him. And that would set him apart from everybody else, because nobody else did that. I don't want to get you to think that the idea is that in Israel every church had a baptistery. There weren't any churches, first of all, and there weren't any baptisteries.

The Jews didn't baptize. They had ceremonial cleansings; they had ceremonial washings and all of that. But they only had one baptism that they did, and it was a one-time symbolic event they did to a proselyte who came out of Gentileism into Judaistic religion, wanted to become a worshipper of the true God, and they put him through a proselyte baptism or her through a proselyte baptism, an immersion in water to symbolize that they were being purified from their former life and entering into the clean religion, as it were, of Judaism. This is proselyte baptism. It wasn't a common thing; it wasn't an occurrence that happened all the time. And that's why you could identify one as John the Baptizer, because that was so unusual.

Furthermore, he appears in the wilderness, in the desert. In fact, in John 3:23, it places Him about 25 to 30 miles south of the Sea of Galilee, along the Jordan River. And up and down that river he went for the duration of his ministry, preaching out in the desert, away from all the cities and all the towns and all the people. He was in that wilderness, basically, his whole life. According to Luke 1:80, he spent his life in the wilderness. He was a wilderness guy. He was a desert man.

Now, John the Baptist – there's a lot of wonderful stories about him, true, given by Matthew, given by Luke. Some things told by John. We could talk about the fact that he was miraculously conceived, because his parents were too old and had been barren. That's a wonderful story. We could talk



about the fact that he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. We could talk about the fact that he was a relative of Jesus, that Mary and Elizabeth got together, when they both knew that God had done a miracle of conception in them. We could talk about the fact that he was the culmination of Old Testament prophetic history, the last prophet, and there hadn't been one for 400 years. We could talk about the fact that Jesus said – Matthew 11:11 – “He's the greatest man that ever lived up until his time,” because he was given the greatest responsibility any man ever had: to point to the Messiah, to announce the new King. Mark leaves all that out. He leaves it all out.

He just say this about him, verse 6, “He was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locust and wild honey.” Well, you might find that a little bit strange. It really isn't. If you're out in the desert to start with, locust and wild honey would be a good way to sustain yourself, because from what we understand, there was plenty of that available. And if you lived out in the wilderness of the desert your whole life, you wouldn't care about fashion. You'd basically care about staying warm, because it can be freezing cold out in that desert.

He is a very familiar man in ancient history. Even Josephus, the Jewish historian, writes about him and says, “He was a good man who commanded the Jews to exercise virtue and piety toward God and come to baptism.”

But the only thing Mark tells us about him is his style. Now, what is this about? “He was clothed with camel's hair.” That doesn't mean hide; that means camel's hair woven. They would take camel's hair; they would make a thread out of it, and then they would weave a garment out of it. It would be a – kind of a rough garment. It was a hairy garment.

And then he had a leather belt around his waist. That's a rough leather belt. And that's what it tells us about him. His lifestyle, however, has a parallel. It says the same thing, by the way, in Matthew 3:4. But his lifestyle has a parallel. What was he trying to do looking like that?

Well, if you go back – you don't have to turn to it; I'll read it to you – but if you go back to, well, Zechariah 13, it talks about some false prophets, and it associates, in verse 4, false prophets who desire to deceive putting on a hairy robe. Now, why would a false prophet, who wanted to deceive, put on a hair robe? Because a hairy robe was associated with a true prophet. A true prophet.

When it says – when Jesus said, “Beware of wolves who come in sheep's clothing,” look, that isn't a wolf with a sheep hid over his head. That's a false teacher in wool. Again, a hairy garment as opposed to something made out of linen or cotton. That's the garb of a prophet. And more notably than that, if you go back to 2 Kings, chapter 1, you meet Elijah the Tishbite. This is what it says about him, verse 8, “He was a hairy man” – that does not comment on his bodily hair but on the garment that he wore – “He was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins.” This Elijah the Tishbite. This guy set the fashion for prophets.

If you wanted to be taken seriously as a prophet, you found a hairy robe and a leather belt, and you made sure that you conveyed that you were a prophet in the way that you looked. And even false prophets would deign to put on that hairy robe, and that leather belt to appear as if they were prophets.

Well, John was a prophet. Not only was he a prophet, but he was a prophet who came in the spirit

and power of Elijah. That's right. He was one who came with an anointing from God on his head.

Listen to Luke 1:15, "He will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will drink no wine or liquor. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. He will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him, before for the King, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

You remember that in Malachi 3, there was the promise that we just read that there is coming a messenger. A little more is said about that messenger in Malachi 4:5, "I'm going to send you Elijah the prophet." John, it says, was come in the spirit and power of Elijah. And Jesus said, in Matthew 11:14, "If you are willing to accept" – meaning Me and My gospel – "John himself is that Elijah."

However, you remember they didn't accept. They killed both John the Baptist and Jesus. So, there's another time when Jesus will return, and before His second coming, there will be another in the spirit and power of Elijah. Did John understand that? Of course he understood that. The prophecy came to his parents before he was ever born, that he would minister in the spirit and power of Elijah. He identified with Elijah from the get-go. That's why he wore what he wore. That's why he lived the way he lived. He lived against the grain of the culture. He even ministered near where Elijah did. Read 2 Kings chapter 2, verse 4 to 12.

Now, his diet was locust. By the way, according to Leviticus 11:22, that was the only insect you could eat. Good protein, good source of mineral. If you want to prepare some, here's how you do it. You yank off the wings and the legs, and then, depending on your preference, you can roast the body, boil it, dry it, grind it up and bake it in your bread with salt. It provided protein. And honey, wild honey was everywhere, and it was sweet, and it was good.

Do you notice this about John the Baptist? He didn't care to identify with the people. He cared to identify with the prophet. I think any preacher makes a bad mistake when he tries to identify with the line of the people rather than the line of the prophets. You want to stand in the great tradition of the prophet; you want to speak like a prophet; you want to act like a prophet; you want to look like a prophet.

Now, what was his message? Well, let's go to number four to the preparation. The preparation. What was he saying? What did they need to do? Back to verse 4. He was preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. That's what he was doing. In ancient times, the envoy of the arriving king would go before him, remove all the obstacles in the path; sometimes they'd carve a path; sometimes they built a road; sometimes they'd make a bridge, removing the obstacles. And then they would make sure the people were ready to receive this new King.

What was the way the people were to prepare for the arrival of this king? A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. They needed to have their sins forgiven. In order to have their sins forgiven, which God would mercifully do, they needed to repent of their sins. And to demonstrate their repentance, they would be willing to undergo a baptism. The baptism didn't bring forgiveness of sin; it only declared their intention. That's why John, as I said, was labeled the baptizer. The Jews had ceremonial washings, no baptisms except for proselyte baptism.

So, a Jew would be saying, by doing that kind of one-time symbolic baptism, “I’m no better than a Gentile. I am no better than a Gentile. I am no more ready to meet the new King, I am no more ready for God to ascend to His throne, I am no more ready for God to establish His kingdom and make me a part of it than a Gentile.” That is a huge admission, for the Jews had been trained pretty much to resent and hate the Gentiles and think of them as outside the covenant.

He’s calling the Jews to declare themselves no better than Gentiles, to turn many of the hearts of the people toward righteousness, away from rebellion, as Luke 1 put it. And to mark that repentance, that deliberate metanoia which means a turning, a genuine turning. They would need to bring forth the fruit of repentance. Do you remember how John the Baptist said that? Matthew 3:8 records it; Luke 3:8 records it. Luke says, “Bring forth fruits fitting for repentance.” Prove it. The first step would be to be willing to undergo a proselyte baptism and view yourself as if you were no better than a Gentile. Radical, radical repentance. And this was the message that came from God to John, Luke 3:2, “The Word of the Lord came to him,” and this is what He said. This is not baptism in Jesus’ name. We know that because John the Baptist’s followers were later baptized by Paul in Jesus’ name, according to Acts 19.

Now, you need to know one other thing about the context of John’s message. His preaching was judgment preaching. In Luke 3 you can read it yourself. He preached judgment. He said things to the people, “You brood of snakes, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” He said, “When the King gets here, He is going to baptize with fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand; He’s going to separate the wheat from the chaff, and He’s going to burn the chaff.”

He was a judgment preacher – fierce judgment preacher. That’s what drove the people to want to deal with their sins. The fear that when the Messiah finally came, when the new King ascended to His throne and established His kingdom, they’d be on the outside looking in. And so, he was a judgment preacher. Judgment was coming. But while God was a God of judgment, He was also a God of grace, and He offered forgiveness of sins for those who repented.

Well, everybody practically wanted to be a part of the Messiah’s kingdom. They didn’t want to get left out. They knew their own heart’s sinfulness. So, according to verse 5, all the country of Judea was going out to him, all the people of Jerusalem. They were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. This looks like a national revival.

“By making this pilgrimage” - Mark Horne writes - “to the Jordan, those who believed John’s message showed that they wanted to be visibly separated from those under judgment when the Lord come. They wanted to be members of the future purified Israel. Undergoing John’s baptism helped them anticipate that they were not only God’s covenant people, but that they would remain in that covenant after God cast others out. In order to be assured that they would be included in the future forgiven Israel whose iniquity would be removed, they needed to repent and ask for personal forgiveness now.” End quote. That’s what they were doing. So, they came confessing, being baptized.

However, this was, as good as it might have looked, pretty superficial, wasn’t it? By the time it’s all over, and the true believers are gathered in Jerusalem, after the ascension of Jesus, there’s 120 in the upper room. And here, hyperbolic language to be sure, “all” the country of Judea was going out to him, “all” the people of Jerusalem. Massive constant, steady stream day after day after day.

Why the wilderness? Why the wilderness? William Lane writes – and I think it's well stated – “The summons to be baptized in the Jordan means that Israel must once more come to the wilderness. As Israel long ago had been separated from Egypt by a pilgrimage through the waters of the Red Sea, the nation is exhorted again to exercise separation. The people are called to a second exodus in preparation for a new covenant with God.

“As the people heed John's call and go out to him in the desert, far more is involved than contrition and confession. They return to a place of judgment, the wilderness, where the status of Israel as God's beloved son must be reestablished in the exchange of pride for humility. The willingness to return to the wilderness signifies the acknowledgement of Israel's history as one of disobedience and rebellion, and a desire to begin once more. Let's go back to the wilderness, before we ever came into the land, and start all over again.”

Finally, Mark leaves the promise, the person, the prophet, the preparation, and focuses on the preeminence of the new King. The preeminence of the new King. This is the sum of John's ministry. He was preaching, verse 7, “And he was saying, ‘After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I'm not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. I baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’”

This is what is most true about the forerunner: he points to Christ; he point to Church; he points to Christ. Never points to himself. John 3:30, “I must decrease, He must increase.” This is a model for any preacher. Don't identify with the people, identify with the prophets. Don't look like the people; look like the prophets. Maintain the dignity of that office handed down. And don't point to yourself; point to Christ.

“After me the One” – literally definite article – “After me the One is coming who is mightier than I.” How mighty is He? He's the Lord; He's Yahweh; He's Kurios; He's God the Son; He's the King – King Jesus. How far above me is He? Huh.

Here's the negative. “He is so much mightier than I, that I'm not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals.” You know what? That was the lowest possible job that any servant could have. That was it. That was the bottom. If you were the servant who untied your master's sandals, you were the scum of the scum of the scum. Dirty feet.

Old quotes from Hebrew sources. “A Hebrew slave must not wash the feet of his master, nor put his shoes on him.” That's beneath the dignity of a Hebrew slave. Another one, “All services which a slave does for his master, a pupil should do for his teacher, with the exception of undoing his shoes.”

John says, “I'm below the people who do that. I'm not even up to the level of those who would untie His shoes. That's how low I am.”

Well, that's the picture, but what's the reality? Verse 8. Why am I so different? Why are we so infinitely separated? “Because I baptize you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

“All I can do is stick you in the water; He can transform you on the inside.” This refers to the soul-transforming work of salvation, being born of the water and the Spirit. This is not some Pentecostal

second baptism; this is the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit of Titus 3. This is the new covenant: purification, cleansing, transformation, regeneration, new birth.

John says, "I can't do that. Only God gives the Holy Spirit. So, the new King, He will give you the Holy Spirit." With the Holy Spirit comes salvation, sanctification, service.

So, Mark begins the language – with the language of good news. Good news means there's a new King who is God Himself, bringing a new kingdom. It's a kingdom of forgiveness, blessing. It comes to those who repent. It's the culmination of all past redemptive history and the door to all future glory. The herald has come to announce His arrival. And the rest is His story, which he picks up in verse 9.

Father, we thank You for this marvelous book, for its deep riches and encouragement to us. Thank You for the beauty of Scripture, the magnificence of it, consistency of it, integrity of it, authenticity, inerrancy, purity, trustworthiness. Beyond that, the power of it to change lives. We pray that there would be some even this morning who would say with Peter, in the middle of Mark, "You're the King. You're the King;" who would confess their sins, repent of their sins, and come for forgiveness from the King who died for them.

Father, we thank You again for Your work in our lives. We thank You that we are in Your kingdom. We thank You that we're not on the outside looking in; that You led us to confession and repentance and faith in the King; that we believe that Jesus is the King, and believing, we have salvation and life in His name. Thank You for this gift, and may You extend it to many others, we pray, for Your glory, Amen.

END

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