

The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness

Mark 1:1-8

Mark 1:1-8 – *“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² As it is written in the Prophets:*

*“Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.”*

³ *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
Make His paths straight.’”*

⁴ *John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵ Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.*

⁶ *Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.*

⁷ *And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. ⁸ I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*

Background Notes

The human author of this Gospel is John Mark. Although he was not one of the twelve disciples, he was closely associated with Simon Peter. Peter was one of the inner circle of Jesus’ disciples, and he was an eyewitness of the earthly life of our Lord. Peter called John Mark “my son” in I Peter 5:13—that is, my “son in the faith.” It’s very possible that Peter led John Mark to saving faith in the Lord Jesus. The eyewitness material in this Gospel probably came from Peter. John Mark’s mother, Mary, owned a home in Jerusalem where the early Christians met, and the last Passover meal, where the Lord’s Supper was instituted, may have been celebrated in her home. In Acts 12:12 we read, *“So when he [Peter] had considered this, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.”*

John Mark’s uncle was Barnabas. John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on Paul’s first missionary journey, but he left the team part way through the trip. We don’t know why John Mark quit, but he went home. Maybe he was homesick, maybe he was sick—we don’t know. However, we know from Acts 15 that John Mark’s failure didn’t sit too well with the Apostle Paul. As a result, when the time came for Paul’s second missionary journey, Paul would not take John Mark with him. Mark went on a ministry trip with Barnabas, and Paul took Silas with him on his second missionary journey.

But Mark made a comeback! The epistles of Colossians and Philemon tell us that Mark was with the Apostle Paul during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, and 2 Timothy says that he was with Paul during the second Roman imprisonment.

God definitely “picked up the pieces” in Mark’s life! Even though he had failed, he was chosen to write this Gospel – and maybe that’s encouraging to you! If you think you’ve failed the Lord in some area of your life, just consider the example of Mark, and how God picked up the pieces in his life.

The Gospel of Mark presents Jesus Christ as the Perfect Servant. Most of you are aware that Matthew presents Christ as the King—Israel’s Messiah; Mark presents Christ as the Perfect Servant; Luke presents Christ as the Son of Man; and John presents Christ as the Son of God. One reason for the four different Gospels is that each one has a different theme about the earthly life of our Lord.

In Mark’s Gospel the theme is Christ as the Perfect Servant, and that’s one reason why there is no genealogy of our Lord in this Gospel. There is no information about the birth of the Lord, either. Genealogies and birth records are important for kings, but they are not important for servants. What is important for servants is what a servant **does**, so in this Gospel we move right into the beginning of our Lord’s public ministry.

Mark’s Gospel emphasizes **what Jesus *did* more than what He *taught***, because the theme is Christ as the Perfect **Servant**. For example, eighteen miracles and only four parables are recorded in Mark. In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke there is a closer balance between the numbers of recorded miracles and parables.

Doctrinal Points

1. John’s baptism was not “Christian baptism.”

“Baptism” is not mentioned in the Old Testament. It arose during the Intertestamental Period, during the 400 “silent” years between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Jews began to practice self-immersion for ceremonial cleansing and purification during this time. They also began to immerse or “baptize” proselytes—that is, Gentiles who adopted Judaism as a faith and a way of life.

The baptism of John the Baptist was a “baptism unto repentance.” The startling thing about John’s new “baptism unto repentance” was that Jewish people were submitting to this baptism. In essence, the Jews who underwent John’s baptism were saying, “I know I’m a sinner, and the religious rituals of Judaism don’t cleanse and purify me. I want to repent of my sins, and I **do** repent of my sins. I want to be prepared for the coming of the Messiah.” This was the essence of John’s baptism.

Christian baptism, on the other hand, does not symbolize repentance or cleansing from sin. Rather, it is a demonstration of the believer’s identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Christians who undergo Christian baptism have **already** repented of their sins, and have **already** been cleansed of their sins, and have **already** been saved. Christian baptism *follows* salvation, and symbolizes our identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. It’s a testimony to the world to that fact. That’s why baptism by immersion is the mode of baptism which best pictures the

great truth that we are linked with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism is an outward and visible expression of this **fact**.

Acts 19 shows us that the “baptism of John the Baptist” was different than “Christian baptism.” On Paul’s third missionary journey he came to Ephesus, and there he found some believers who had been baptized with John’s baptism -- but they had not been baptized as Christian believers. So Paul baptized them again; they underwent **Christian** baptism (Acts 19:5.)

2. The baptism with the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost.

In Mark 1:8 we read that John said, *“I indeed baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* When did that “baptism with the Holy Spirit” take place? The baptism with the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost. In Acts 1:5, just before He ascended into heaven, the Lord Jesus said, *“For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”* That baptism with the Holy Spirit took place ten days later, on the Day of Pentecost.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit does not take place at some special occasion after an individual becomes a Christian. No. The baptism of the Holy Spirit took place once, at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the Church. When we become Christians, we’re brought **into** that baptized company of believers, namely, the Church or the Body of Christ. In I Corinthians 12:13 we read, *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”*

Every Christian is baptized with the Holy Spirit at the time of his or her salvation. According to Ephesians 1:13, ***we receive the Holy Spirit when we’re brought into the Body of Christ, and that takes place at salvation.*** The Church, the Body of Christ, was baptized with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. When we become believers in Jesus, we’re brought into the Church, the Body of Christ, and at that moment we’re sealed with the Holy Spirit.

To use proper biblical terminology, it’s best not to think in terms of *individual* Holy Spirit baptism. We should rather say that the baptism of the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost, and we are brought into that baptized company of believers when we become Christians.

Practical Applications

1. We can use Mark 1:3 to refute the cults.

The “bottom line” incorrect teaching of the cults is that they deny the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example, will talk of Jesus as the Son of God, as the redeemer, as the Lord, as divine, but they say He was ***not fully God***. They say He was ***not*** the “Jehovah” (or “*Yahweh*” or “LORD”) of the Old Testament.

There are a lot of Scripture verses we could use to refute these claims, and there's one right here in the first few verses of Mark. In these verses Mark was describing the witness of John the Baptist. Look at Mark 1:3: *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord. Make His path straight.'"* Mark 1:3 is a quote of Isaiah 40:3, and in this verse, Isaiah used the name of God, *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. In other words, the Hebrew word that is translated "LORD" in our English Bibles is **God** -- *Yahweh* or *Jehovah* -- in Isaiah 40!

Now it's quite obvious that the Person for whom John the Baptist was preparing the way was Jesus Christ. Thus, in Mark 1:3, Jesus is identified as God -- **the LORD** (*Yahweh, Jehovah*) of Isaiah's prophecy. The Lord Jesus is the same person as the LORD or Yahweh or Jehovah of Isaiah's prophecy in the Old Testament: *"Prepare the way of the LORD"*—that is, the LORD Jesus Christ! Make His path straight! We can use Mark 1:3 to refute the cults.

2. We need to be voices in the wilderness!

Notice that John the Baptist referred to himself as *"the voice of one crying in the wilderness."* What did he mean by that? This shows John's humble concept of himself as just the "herald" or the "announcer" of the greater One to come.

John grew up in the wilderness. He may have been raised, or spent some time, in one of the Essene wilderness communities – a community similar to Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were copied. John ate locusts and wild honey - not the food of people living in luxury, but the diet of desert people. He dressed like Elijah the prophet. He didn't wear the latest styles, or the expensive clothes of the city, or the long, flowing robes of the scribes and Pharisees - he wore a simple garment of woven camel hair. All of this added to John's image that he was just *"a voice crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'"*

John the Baptist knew that he was not the Messiah. He knew he was only a "voice" that called out to the people, "Get ready for the Messiah!" John considered himself to be so insignificant that he was unworthy to even stoop down and loosen the sandal strap of the Messiah -- the job of a servant! In comparison to the greatness of the One who was to come, the Messiah, John considered himself not worthy to even do the job of a servant.

There's a spiritual lesson here for us. Like John, **we need to be voices in the wilderness!** We need to take the humble and simple place, and simply point people to Christ. I'm glad we don't have to wear a scratchy camel's hair garment, or eat locusts and honey (well maybe I could go along with the honey, but not the locusts!) Far more important than our diet or our wardrobe, though, is our **job** as **messengers for Jesus!** Our humble and simple voices should be pointing people in the wilderness of this world to Jesus Christ.

We need to be voices crying in the wilderness!