

Ben Leney

Mark Exposition

I read Mark's Gospel as a whole and came to the story of the passion; when I heard Jesus' death cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' I felt growing within me the conviction: this is someone who understands you completely, who is with you in your cry to God and has felt the same forsakenness you are living in now ... I summoned up the courage to live again.¹

Who was Mark?

"John Mark, a member of a Cypriot Jewish family settled in Jerusalem and a member of the early Jerusalem church, was then in Antioch, accompanied his cousin Barnabas and Paul on their missionary journey as far as Pamphylia, later accompanied Barnabas to Cyprus, and is finally heard of in Rome, if Philemon is written from Rome, where 1 Peter also places him." Richard Bauckham, *The Gospel for all Christians*

1 Peter 5:13 "She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son."

When you look at Acts, you can see the similarity between how Peter preaches and Mark's gospel, for example:

Acts 10:37-38 "that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

When and for whom?

Mark was probably written between AD 64, which is when Peter died, and AD 70, which is the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

There are other characters who are unnamed in Mark, such as the woman anointing Jesus in Mark 14:3 who is unnamed, and revealed as Mary in John's gospel, and also the person who cuts the ear off the servant of the High Priest in Mark 14:37, who is named in John's gospel of course as Peter in John 18:10.

2 Pet 1:16 "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty."

The Heading

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

The word 'beginning' echoes both Ge 1:1 and Jn 1:1 (arche). The word 'gospel' is Old English 'godspel'. In Greek it's 'evangelion', and it was used in the ancient world for spoken announcements, e.g. victory in battle, the enthronement of a ruler. In the Hebrew 'to announce good news' it means:

'the in-breaking of God's kingly rule, the advent of his salvation, vengeance, vindication'. Cranfield p.35

The word 'Christ' comes from a Greek term 'chrio' meaning to smear with oil. The Hebrew is 'Masiah' used 45 times in the OT. The word is only used 7 times in Mark. But Paul loved it - there are 383 usages, and it also occurs a lot in 1 Peter. It's meaning in the NT in Greek is new, and it's an important word in the NT. To say that Jesus IS the Christ is to identify him as prophet, priest and king - all those OT roles. It is the crucial name Peter gives to Jesus at the hinge point of the gospel:

Mark 8.29 "He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ.""

Jesus' true identity is kept secret for most of the gospel, except after chapter 8 onwards to the disciples. But it is proclaimed openly - when? As Jesus dies on the cross:

Mark 15:39 "So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!""

It had several implications about Jesus' identity. First, particularly in the gospel of John, it shows his personal intimacy with the Father. Secondly, it shows his obedience to God's will. Thirdly, that he is unique.

Mk 1.2 "As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.""

Exodus 23:20 ""Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared."

Mal 3.1 ""Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me."

Isa 40.3 "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God."

Mark 1:3 ""The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.' ""

| Mark 1:3 "The voice of someone crying out:

| 'In the desert prepare the way for ADONAI!

| Make straight paths for him!' "

The wilderness is the place where God would once again act to deliver his people.

John prepares the Way

Mark 1:4 "John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

The word 'metanoia' is used in the OT most often in Jeremiah. 'a matter of returning to Yahweh with one's whole being and in all decisions taking Him absolutely seriously as Israel's God.'

Notice the 'remission of sins' expresses the highest hopes of the prophets, for example

Jer 31:34 "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.""

Mark 1:5 "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."

Unlike Matthew and Luke, we don't hear much of John's preaching. It's clear he was an eloquent speaker.

Mark 1:6 "Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey."

Mk 6.15 "Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets.""

Mk 8.28 "So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.""

We also get the appearance of Elijah later on:

Mk 9.4 "And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus."

Israel believed Elijah would come again as a forerunner of the Messiah.

Matt 11.14 "And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come."

Matt 11.11 ""Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Mark 1.7-8 "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. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.""

| The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary (Eschatology)

| ESCHATOLOGY. Derived from the Gk word eschatos, meaning "last" or "final," eschatology is teaching about "the last things." It refers to a time in the future when the course of history will be changed to such an extent that one can speak of an entirely new state of reality.

John was hinting at a future takeover, or event - something 'eschatological'. This

comment here is probably one reason why Herod beheaded John (except for the one given in the account in Mark 6, that is!).

Mark 1:7-8 "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. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.""

In the Talmud - a collection of rabbinic Jewish texts - it was said that a disciple must do everything a slave will do for his master, except to loose the sandal strap.

John is a powerful example of an obedient servant. The fruitfulness of obedience is very great.

Of course Jesus has come to save. This is Salvation's Plan! It's part of this.

But baptism in the Holy Spirit is echoed in all three gospels - it's the overarching goal of Jesus' coming. We need to recover this emphasis on the Holy Spirit in our day!

Joel 2:28 ""And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions."

So the shift here with the Coming One that John is speaking of, is that He will bestow the Holy Spirit on others. Today we receive the gift of the Spirit, and because Jesus is no longer with us, we also carry that ministry of sharing the Spirit with others, through the Father:

Gal 3:5 "Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

The Baptism of Jesus

So the baptism of Jesus by John features in all four gospels.

Jn 1:29 "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Mk 1:9-11 "It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.""

Karl Barth: "He became wholly and utterly one of them, not in an act of secret or even public condescension, like a king for a change donning a beggar's rags and mingling with the crowd, but by belonging to them in every way...to become one of them definitively as well as originally...With them he thus confessed His sins. His sins? If we do not say this, we question and even deny the totality of his self-giving." Church Dogmatics, Vol 4 part 4, p. 59

Rom 8.3 "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh"

Eutheus - used 14 times in Matthew, 7 times only in Luke, but 40 times in Mark - 34 times it's translated as 'immediately', 3 times 'at once' and 3 times 'as soon as'.

Sometimes we can't take this use 'immediately' literally, and implications of doing so can be a little strained, for example here:

Mk 1.21 "Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught."

"The literature designated "apocalyptic" consists of compositions that either are or purport to be divine revelations received by their authors. The revelations were usually received in the form of visions. They were recounted in detail and accompanied by an interpretation." Tyndale Bible Dictionary.

Isa 64.1 "Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence—"

Lk 3.22 "And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him"

Mk 1.11 "Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.""

Ps 2.7 ""I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'"

Isa 42.1 ""Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles."

There are only three points in the NT where the Father speaks audibly to Jesus - this is the first. (The others are the transfiguration, and Jn 12.28).

As God's special Son, Jesus receives God's special favor, including the full endowment of God's Spirit, equipping him for ministry. What we see here is the confirmation given to Jesus of who he is in relationship to the heavenly Father.¹

1 Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 75.