

**Prepare The Way**  
**Mark 1:1-8**

It's a joy to sing of our Savior and to, immediately after that, fall into looking at what God's Word says about our Savior as we begin the gospel of Mark this morning. So, as you're turning there, I'm just going to read some other introductions to other books that have been written, and if you're a reader - you like classics or novels or something like that - you might recognize some of these. There's "...a bright cold day in April and the clocks were stark striking thirteen..." George Orwell's *1984*; or "Call me Ishmael..." from *Moby Dick*, 1851; or "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife..." Jane Austin as you guessed, *Pride and Prejudice*; or perhaps "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epic of belief, it was the epic of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair..." from Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*. Countless classics have been written, obviously, and their own plots, their own story lines, making them classic for a reason and their introductions contributing to those factors.

Obviously, as the church, as God's kind of body here on this earth, we have in our hands, in our own language, the greatest classic book - piece of literature - ever written. The greatest story ever told really, and so we have the privilege of reading that for ourselves and going through it, Sunday after Sunday, studying it, teaching it, understanding it, applying it, doing what God's Word says. So, I'm excited to be able to turn to a significant portion in the Word of God, a biography about our Savior Jesus, in the gospel of Mark. So, let's look at the first eight verses and see the introduction to this gospel, Mark 1:1-8, and I'll be reading from the English Standard Version; "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 before your face, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' John appeared baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his

waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, ‘After me comes He who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’ ”

So, this is the introduction to one of the four gospels we have in the Bible, recorded as a biography of our Savior Jesus Christ. So, to begin looking at this, go ahead and divide this up into three sections, and the first verse that we really see is kind of functioning as the title or almost the purpose for this book - kind of the purpose for this book. Verse 1; “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Well, before I get into that, let me just give you a couple background items, not a lot; I won’t do a full exhaustive background of the book of Mark, but these things will come up over time as we go through the book - but just a few things to help you understand the background of this actual book in the Bible and when it was written and why. So, as you can tell, it’s written by Mark. He’s also known as John Mark in other places in the New Testament, like in the book of Acts as we’ve seen. And you might ask, okay, is Mark qualified to write a gospel? Was Mark one of the twelve disciples? That would make sense, right? One of those people that hung out with Jesus a lot, they could write a biography about Him. Well, Mark was not, he was not one of the twelve. And so we ask the question, why is he writing, right? Why does he write a biography about Jesus’s life that’s in the Bible for us? Well, as we’ve seen in acts, Mark knew a lot of people, like apostles, that were interacting with Christ in His life on earth, and most specifically, Peter. Mark was like the understudy. He was basically learning everything from Peter - spent a lot of time with Peter. Peter was his mentor. And so Peter didn’t write a gospel, but most say that if Peter did have a gospel, it would be Mark because of Peter’s influence upon Mark. So, Mark’s gospel comes not because he’s one of the twelve, but because of his association with those men and his ability to recount what happened in Christ’s life.

As far as who this is being written to, it doesn’t say it clearly up front, but we can have some conjecture here that, more than likely, it was written to Rome, probably the church in Rome. So, probably written to primarily Gentiles, but also Jews that were in and a part of the church in Rome. So, the church in Rome was established. They had preaching from Paul. They had preaching from Peter. They had some doctrine. They had some

understanding of the gospel. And Mark particularly wrote this gospel, wrote this book, for those believers in Rome so they could have the historical background and, really, foundation of what they believed - the historical foundation of Jesus Christ who they had hoped in. And so Mark aims to, really, address these people; and so throughout his gospel, we'll see, it's short, it's quick, it's to the point because he's writing to people that are Romans and probably Gentiles and might not have a whole lot of understanding of Old Testament times and culture as Matthew does and elaborates on in his gospel.

So, Mark writing to the church in Rome, influenced by Peter and his writing, giving the historical foundation of Jesus Christ, and also, as we'll see later on in the book, also writing for the purpose of encouraging the church in Rome. Because the church in Rome went through a series and waves of persecution because of different emperors that came onto the scene. You might think of names like Emperor Nero and some of these other guys that come onto the scene in first century AD. These were terrible people. They hated Christians. They killed them for sport. Right? This was just a joke for them, and so the church in Rome has to deal with this persecution, this suffering; and so Mark, in this gospel, writes about some of the teaching of Christ and how He Himself suffered. So too, also, we as His church must suffer and follow after Him in discipleship. So this will come up as we go through the book, but for now, suffice it to say, that Mark is writing to both Jews and Gentiles saved in Rome alike.

And it's with this context that we look into this first verse here, the title, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Now this beginning might not strike you as very significant. It might seem almost like a little dull or boring even. Like, okay, of all the other intros we read of "...best of times ... worst of times..." and "Call me Ismael," and things like that, this seems like here I go, the beginning of what I'm about to say, but actually there's some significance to this. Mark probably was actually thinking through why he put these words together; and I'll give you two reasons why. One is because of the Roman background in which he wrote this. So, at the time we've already alluded to, there were Roman emperors. They were the leaders, and histories were being written about these Roman emperors. These Roman emperors obviously wanted good things written about them. So, they had historians that would write these high and lofty kind of basically eloquent displays of what they did and how great these

emperors were in reigning over all the Roman Empire, and so, in these histories that were written, there was a phrase that kind of came up fairly often, and it's a phrase that we actually see here in our verse. And it's this phrase here, "The beginning of the gospel..." That phrase, "The beginning of the gospel..." That same phrase was used in several of these histories written about Roman emperors, saying the beginning of the good news, the beginning of joyful tidings about Roman Emperor Octavius. For example, I'll read this one from 9 BC, right at the same time here. Emperor Octavian - this is what it said about him, "The birthday of the god was for the world the beginning of the good news which have been proclaimed on his account." The Romans had such a high esteem, it was basically emperor worship. They didn't just think the emperor was the ruler of the kind of Roman empire, but they put them on such a high pedestal that they were basically divine, and so in these histories that were written about them, kind of like saying a legend was born on this day, they go beyond that, and say when this Roman emperor was born, it was the beginning of good news. It was the beginning of the gospel for the world because Roman Emperor Octavius changed the world.

And so, here's Mark combatting that in a time where this was clearly understood and known and how people perceived the Roman Empire and the leaders, the emperors. And what does Mark say? The true beginning of actual good news coming from no Roman emperor, but Jesus. All right. The people, the church, in Rome would have received this and right away understood there's a polemic here. There's this idea where Mark is kicking against the typical norms and customs of the day. It's almost like throwing down the gauntlet; he's challenging. He's challenging any Roman emperor, and saying there's someone better, Jesus, whom I present to you. So in one sense, this is significant introduction because he's saying Jesus is greater than any Roman emperor you can put up against him, but in another sense, it's significance because of it's really Old Testament Jewish background. I mean, if you just look at this, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The word gospel kind of cuts both ways, not only was it used as good news in the terms of kind of the Roman culture and context, but the term gospel comes up in the Old Testament often, and in the Old Testament when that term gospel comes up, good news in the Old Testament, those prophets are using it to speak of a day in the future, a day of good news to come. Right? How blessed "...are the feet of those who bring good news!" When that day will come when someone brings good

news and tells us about the Messiah has come. The war is over. The kingdom is ready to be established. Those were some of the prophecies from the Old Testament, so when they thought of good news they associated it with the Messiah.

So, here's Mark saying the same thing. This is the beginning of the good news. This is it guys, all of history leading up to this, right here, the good news, presented in whom? Jesus. Jesus Christ. And even the title given to Jesus - sometimes people mistake and think Christ is like a last name or something, like Jesus Christ born of Joseph and Mary Christ. No, it's not a last name. This is a title. This's a title that's attributed to Jesus. I mean, if you want to help yourself kind of escape that, you say the gospel of Jesus the Messiah. Christ literally means Messiah. Christ is just the Greek term for the Hebrew one that is Messiah. So, Mark is saying I have the good news of Jesus the Messiah. This is it. Listen up. So, Mark comes out with a punch in this gospel saying I found one that is greater than any Roman emperor that we've had or will. And the fulfillment of these Old Testament writings that we've anticipated, this Messiah, this is the beginning of that good news concerning Jesus the Messiah. And He's not just some man. He's not just some guy that came and taught well. He's not just some guy that lived a very moral life. He is "...the Son of God." As he says, that last phrase there, "...the Son of God." So, just as they tried to make the Roman emperors divine, a deity of some sort, here is Mark accurately presenting Jesus as divine "...the Son of God." He's no simple man. He is truly the hundred percent God, hundred percent man, God-man, dwelling on this earth, accomplishing the work. So, this is the good news. This is the gospel. This is the way that Mark chooses to introduce this life of Jesus Christ.

And so, it makes us ask how do we understand the gospel? I mean, it's always a good test to ask yourself - to ask someone else - what is the gospel? Summarize it for me. If you could, explain it to me. What is really the essence of the gospel? Because we get so confused, and obviously, we're in a day and age where a lot of people are writing books, and there's blogs, and there's all kinds of things going out there. There's gospel centered parenting, gospel centered preaching, gospel centered driving, gospel centered... There's just gospel, gospel, gospel, gospel, and so people throw this term out there, and it's a great term, and it sounds good; but then it just kind of becomes Christian jargon, and it's almost like what does gospel mean? If we could just come back to the simplicity of what is the gospel - I think Mark

defines it for us in this verse. The gospel is the good news concerning Jesus Christ. It is the good news about who Jesus is and what He did; just make that the gospel. The gospel's not so much connected to a certain message of how many points you might hit, it's more importantly connected to a person, to the Messiah Jesus Christ. That's the gospel. It's Jesus. Jesus is the gospel.

And so, that's what Mark's going to lay out for us. He's going to present Jesus as the undeniable, qualified candidate to be the Messiah who does the work that the Messiah must do and suffer and go to the cross. The gospel is Jesus Christ. This is huge. It's vital that we get this. If we don't get this, then it really does just disrupt our life big time; because if we don't understand what the gospel is, then what are we calling other people to? What are we talking to unbelievers about? What are we saying? Are we calling them to a higher standard of moral living? Is that what we're calling people to? Are we just calling them to be a part of a club, a community, where we feel really good? What are we calling people to? If we understand the gospel as Jesus, then we know we're calling people into relationship with Jesus Himself. If we miss that, then what's the point of our evangelism? If the gospel isn't centered on Jesus for ourselves, then what are we banking our life on? What is our foundation? What're we building upon? How do we even fight sin? There's no power. There's no strength. It's going to come from some other outside source or reason, but if the foundation of the good news is Jesus Christ, then there is power, then there is understanding. There is relationship with the God who is over all things and who can do far more than we ask or think or even imagine. We have to get the gospel right. We don't get the gospel right - we have no ability to pass something of substance on to our children; we can't teach accurately in our adult Sunday school and our growth groups. We're missing the mark completely. It's like you're laying the foundation of the building, and if the foundation is off, the building will be off. We have to get the gospel right, and so, don't complicate it. Don't read a book and get confused and start to call the gospel something it isn't. Just let the gospel be Jesus.

So, that's what Mark tells us; the good news is who Jesus is and what He did, and that's what we're going to see when that is your fixation, when that is like all that you can think on and that is just on the front of your mind, then you'll be able to say with a clear conscience, "On Christ the solid rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand." And your philosophy of ministry - the way you go about what you do - you won't be so concerned with this

kind of clever ideas of man or how to kind of negotiate with people. You'll just simply be fixated on Christ and His work just like Paul was in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2. This was Paul's approach to ministry, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." It was good enough for Paul; don't unnecessarily complicate things. Let the gospel be "...Jesus Christ and Him crucified." His work - what He did - that is what we stand upon, that is what we call other people to, that is what we proclaim for the sake of equipping and building one another up and encouraging each other - the gospel. We have to get this right. So, that's what we get, the privilege of seeing over the next several weeks in this book, the book of Mark. So, this is the purpose of the book, to present the beginning. This is it, the beginning of good news about Jesus the Messiah who is the Son of God. This is the purpose.

Next we see the prophecy of preparation - the prophecy of preparation. So, Mark now turns his attention towards something that's even before Jesus as we'll see here in these two verses. Verses 2 and 3; "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,' " So, Mark quotes from these Old Testament prophets; so, this is dipping even further back than the time of Mark himself. He's going further back into the Old Testament, six hundred years, seven hundred years, to people like Isaiah, and quoting not just prophecies regarding Jesus, but now we're talking about prophecies regarding the people to come before Jesus, a messenger. This is a prophecy regarding a messenger to come.

And we get three main things that this messenger does if we just look at verses 2 and 3; three simple things this messenger will do. The messenger will obviously go before the Messiah. It's a forerunner. The messenger's a forerunner. He goes before the Messiah preparing the way for this King. And this makes sense because when you have royalty, when you have king kind of coming into a town, coming into a city, coming into a building or a venue, you basically prepare the people there so they understand and get ready; and this is what they did back in their day, and this is still what people do now. When the President's coming, the secret service sweeps the area, informs the people of what's to come, and so in the same way, we see this

messenger will be that envoy to go before and prepare and get people ready for the King to come. He prepares - goes before the Messiah.

Secondly, the messenger will work or minister in the wilderness - in the wilderness. And if you're like me, you're kind of thinking that's not exactly what I would've picked for this. Right? If I'm thinking of the messenger coming and preparing for the King, he's going to go to Jerusalem, the capital, the temple. That's where he'll go. Yeah, he'll go to Jerusalem, stand on the temple mount and cry out, your King has come. But no, we see that this messenger is going to be in the wilderness. He's going to be in the wilderness crying out in the desert. Interesting. And so, we kind of start to think in our mind, I wonder why? Why is he going to be in the wilderness? What's the point of that? And as we'll see in verses to come, the primary role and function for this minister is not to get people physically ready for the Messiah. It's not to get people to adorn themselves and to get a show ready for the Messiah to come. It's for them to internally prepare themselves, to transform their hearts, to get right with God before their King comes. So it's more than just a physical, outward, external display; it's an internal change that needs to happen.

And thirdly, not only the messenger will go before the Messiah, work in the wilderness, but the messenger will, "Prepare the way of the Lord..." He will "Prepare the way of the Lord..." And that's seen twice in our verses here at the end of verse 2; "...who will prepare your way..." and the end of verse 3; "Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." So, that's what the work of this messenger will be, preparing "...the way of the Lord..." And as we seen, as we mentioned, we will continue to see in verses 4 through 8 that this preparation is not a typical preparation of external, outward display, but internal transformation.

So, we see this prophecy. And it's just interesting to note here another aspect here of the gospel, not only is it connected directly to Jesus Christ who He is and what He did, but the gospel is something that's been in play. It's been established. It's been the message throughout history. I mean, unfortunately, there's some scholars and historians out there that think that really, what Christianity is, is a conspiracy that was kind of brought together in the first century AD with these disciples, and then it worked. The conspiracy brainwashed people, and they kind of bought into it, and they just multiply and multiply, and now you have this monumental religion. Well, the truth is

that the gospel, the good news about Jesus, has really been around long before Jesus. I mean, just in this prophecy we had Isaiah, seven hundred years before this, expecting the forerunner, the messenger for the Messiah. And we could cite several other prophecies in the Old Testament about Him being born in Bethlehem, about Him being born of a virgin, and so, you have the Old Testament expecting this good news. I mean, we could go all the way back to the book of Genesis. We could go back to that tragic day when Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden completely just failed and plummeted mankind into sin, and it just seemed like all hope was lost. And so, God came, and He pronounced the curse upon mankind and on this earth, but with that in Genesis 3:15, God pronounced an amazing promise, a promise of hope, of blessing, of someone who would come and crush the head of Satan the serpent. So, we go all the way back to Genesis 3 and see that the gospel has been this message that is all throughout time. This has been redemptive history seen. This is not some conspiracy that caught on and worked by chance. This is the exact working of God invading mankind with His presence, and Mark is simply showing that by quoting and saying this is what I'm talking about. This is the good news that didn't just start now; it's been expected, and here it comes. It's arriving. This is amazing, amazing news. So, this is the prophecy of preparation.

And as we go on, we get to see the details of how this is fulfilled in our following verses. So next we see the prophets, the prophets of preparation - the prophet of preparation in verses 4-8. So, as we know, this messenger is John the Baptist - John the Baptist. As we see in all the other gospel accounts as well, they make mention of him in some way as the messenger going before Jesus; so Mark is in line with them. And so we see three things specifically about John the Baptist in these verses about this messenger. The first we will see is his ministry in verses 4 and 5 - his ministry in verses 4 and 5 - his work - what will he do? What does he do? Start in verse 4; "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." So, notice this first, we've already said how he would be in the wilderness, and we get a little more specific understanding of where we're talking about in the wilderness; so as you look at this map, you can kind of start to see a zoomed in picture of Israel. And so, when you look at this, if we were to go north and up off the map a little bit, you'd have the region of Galilee and the Sea of Galilee. And as you

come down, you run into Samaria, that kind of middle region, and the final southern region is Judea. Judea was the big deal because in Judea, you had Jerusalem; you had the temple, so a significant region in all of Israel. So, if you kind of look at it, you can even see some color there. So if you start from the Mediterranean Sea and you start to come in, you see it's really green and lush and nice. Right? You have this kind of moist region there, and it's obviously lively, but as you go and start to get up into the hills and into the mountains eventually, and then, past the mountains, it just turns into dry, arid, desert wilderness. So, Jerusalem is up in the mountains, and as you continue to go, you go east, and as you would go down, go towards the Dead Sea as you can see there, you would run into Jericho. And so, at Jericho, you have this kind of culmination of a dry place that's right there at the Jordan River. And so the Jordan River is that kind of green strip that's coming down running into the Dead Sea.

And so, we have John the Baptist and his ministry, he's out in the wilderness, baptizing people in the desert, in the Jordan River. That river right above the Dead Sea, this is where he's at in the region of Judea. So you might ask, okay, well, if you're trying to get people's attention that's probably not a good place to go. Right? If you're trying to, really, like, get people to listen, like I said, I would think something like, you know, Jerusalem would be a good spot, but he goes out to this wilderness. But what are we finding in verse 5? "...all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him..." Apparently, he was effective. Apparently, this ministry was catching on. Apparently, people were actually taking note of this. It was spreading, and people were going out to him; and notice that people weren't just going out to him and then dismissing him or going out to him for the show and go, wow, that guy's, you know, he's really charismatic. It's really fun to hear him talk, but, yeah, I don't want to have to do anything with what he says. No, people are going out to him, and they're responding. That's what the text says. He says he was baptizing people. He was proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and as we see, people were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

So, this reemphasizes once again, what is the primary role of his work and his ministry. It's not to get things physically looking good and to kind of remodel the temple before Jesus comes. His work and his ministry is at peoples' hearts. He's getting people to identify and see the unrighteousness in their life, the wickedness that they need to turn from. I mean, and that's

really the nature of the word repentance. It's a U-turn. You're going in a path of unrighteousness; you need to completely turn from that and pursue righteousness. And that's what these people are coming out to see. They're coming out; they're hearing John the Baptist's message, and they're actually responding to it. They're actually listening to it, and then they're doing this amazing thing, they're getting baptized. And you think about this concept of these people coming and getting baptized in the Jordan River and you think, is this a normal occurrence? And if you read the Old Testament, not really. Baptism wasn't something that was happening all throughout Old Testament Israel at all. I mean, really, I mean, what you had is when people were unclean they needed to be cleansed, and they would go through this bath type of thing, and that was basically it, but it wasn't baptism. You weren't going to a river and dunking in it. It was kind of this foreign concept really, the only time that it's really mentioned happening before this is when Gentiles, people that were not Jewish, wanted to worship Yahweh the God of the Jews. When these Gentiles came and actually wanted to be a part of Israel, they would be baptized, and it was significant because it showed I am no longer associating with the gods of Baal or the gods of Canaan or whatever, and I am now associating with Yahweh the God of Israel, the one true God. It was a complete change. It was repentance. It was confession of sin.

And so here, too, you have the people; Jews, all right, they're not Gentiles. These are Jewish people living in Judea, and they're recognizing the error of their ways. They're recognizing they're believing John that the Messiah is coming, and they're recognizing they need to be changed, and they're confessing their sins. They're completely speaking publically and confessing their sins, being baptized. So this is not just some craze that people do once a year in Israel; oh yeah, let's all get baptized, that'll be great. No, this is something that was actually foreign, but this is how serious of a message it was. People were listening. They were actually going out to listen to John, receiving his message and committing to change, repentance, and confession of their sins. So, this was a pretty big deal for the time, for people to actually go out, listen to this crazy guy in the desert, and get baptized. So, this is his ministry of work, preparing the people inwardly, internally, in their hearts for the Messiah.

We also see his appearance - his appearance. So, in verse 6, we get this description, "Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather

belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.” So, you heard me mention already that he’s a crazy guy, not just because he’s hanging out in the wilderness and staying there, but because of how he’s dressing. Right? Look at this, he’s got this description of wearing camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist. And so you think it’s a little random, but actually it’s very specific because this is what Elijah wore. Elijah who was a prophet to Israel; Elijah wore this in 2 Kings 1:8. They describe him as wearing “...a garment of hair, with a belt of leather around his waist.” And so you think, why Elijah? Is that just John the Baptist’s hero? He just always looked up to Elijah. He had posters of Elijah in his home and stuff like that? No. All right. There’s some significance here because there’s other Old Testament prophecies that describe this messenger more than what we’ve already seen. Other Old Testament prophecies like in Malachi - it talks about this messenger that’s going to come before the Messiah, and how he will be Elijah. He will come in the spirit of Elijah, and so this is John the Baptist dressing like Elijah, helping the people make the connection, helping the Old Testament, you know, kind of Jewish expectations and prophecies sink into their mind as they go, here’s a man that’s telling us to get ready for the Messiah, and he’s dressed like Elijah. This starts to connect dots for the people, and they realize he’s not just being a crazy person, he’s actually the prophet. He’s the messenger. He’s getting us ready for the Messiah to come.

Well, what about his diet? Why would you eat this stuff? Why would you eat locusts? Why wild honey? Once again, what’s the point here? The point is actually very simple. It’s just to say, rather than John the Baptist being a fraud, one of those guys who lives in Jerusalem in a really nice house, then he goes out and pretends to be a crazy guy in the wilderness and radical, and all these people come and there’s a lot of sensationalism and then goes back to Jerusalem and sleeps all nice and comfortably, he actually lived in the wilderness. He was actually a desert-dwelling wilderness guy, and this is proof because this is what he ate. He ate stuff that you find in the wilderness. He had a desert diet. All right? This is who he was. He was the real deal. He was sincere. He was authentic in his ministry. So, he’s connecting the dots, being the Elijah to come, the messenger to come, and truly being sincere in his ministry. So, this was his appearance, and it’s not just random. It’s to help people connect these dots and to realize the Messiah is coming.

Finally, the last thing we see in verses 7-8 is his message - his message. Verses 7-8; “And he preached, saying, “After me comes He who is mightier

than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” So, here is John making a very significant move in teaching this. At this moment, John has a massive following. There’s a temptation here, right, for any person to start to think this feels good. This feels kind of nice. I got all these people coming out to me. Right? I’m popular all the Judea’s coming out; more and more are streaming out to me. I’ve got more baptisms than anybody else. Right? He could start to feel this and start to desire more of it; but he’s so clear with his message, he helps people realize it’s not about me - there’s still something to come, and this is how he says it, “After me comes He who is mightier than I...” He’s not ashamed to declare it boldly. The Messiah coming is way greater than I. He’s mightier than I. In fact, I’m not even worthy to stoop down and untie His sandals. That’s like the most basic job of any Hebrew servant. Just to be a servant and untie His sandals - John the Baptist says I’m not even worthy of that, that’s how mighty and great this Messiah is, this One that’s coming after me. I have no right to be on the same plane as Him. He says it beautifully in John 3:30. If you were to see that as well, he summarizes it perfectly. He says about Jesus, “He must increase... I must decrease.” And it’s just a perfect lesson in humility.

John the Baptist remains in his role. He knows how God has set him up in his role for this ministry. He’s done his part in preparing the people, in bringing them to a place of understanding, repentance, confession of sins, and then he rightfully says it’s not all about me though. Just you wait; a mightier One is coming, and I’ll turn your attention to Him. This is a big deal for John to say this, because this is what Jesus says of John in Matthew 11:11, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.” That’s a high compliment for Jesus to say that John the Baptist was greater than anyone else born of woman. That’s a high compliment, and yet here’s John the Baptist saying it’s not about me; you need to look for the One that is mightier than I. I’m not even worthy to associate with this One.

What else does he say about this Messiah? In verse 8, John the Baptist goes on to say, “I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” There’s this significant, significant, difference in ministry. John the Baptist does a great job of helping people to prepare their hearts, to get right, to identify these things internally, to root them out. But Jesus will come, and He will give life. He will give His Spirit. He will cause people to

be born again. He will do something that is beyond - beyond what any man has ever done. He will start the train of reversing the curse; the terrible plummet and downward spiral that mankind has been in because of Adam and Eve, Jesus will reverse completely. Because He alone can give the Holy Spirit who will then create life. He will take the heart of stone from the unbeliever and give them a heart of flesh. The Old Testament in Ezekiel 36 prophesied this, that God would put a new heart into His people. He would put His Spirit into them.

And today, when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, this is exactly what happens. His Spirit comes within us, takes up residence inside of us, indwells us. This is the process. We are literally... we're baptized into the Holy Spirit. We are completely dumped into God's presence - Himself. 1 Corinthians 12:13 states it this way, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit." We have all received this new heart because of the Spirit that has come - indwelled us. This is the process. This is what's happened once you've believed; as Ephesians 1:13-14 states it, "In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory." This is the promise that John the Baptist said they can look forward to, and this is the promise that you and I are inheriting to this day. We're a part of this. We're in this train of people that have now seen the Messiah, put our faith in Him, and received His Spirit - the Holy Spirit inside of us - causing us to be born again, to come to life, to be renewed. This is truly good news. This is amazing news. This is great news. This is a complete changing point in all of history as Mark is writing this. This is the turning point.

The constant downward spiral of sin has now been reversed because there is good news through this Messiah, through the Son of God who came and changed it completely. This is the gospel. This is what we ought to cling to; that's my prayer. My prayer is that all of us would just draw near to this good news of who Jesus is and what He did. It's only through Him and it's only because of Him that we are born again, that we have new life, that we can call people, call one another, to this standard of holiness and righteousness, that we can give hope to a dying world that's lost, that we can actually instruct one another, that we can actually live in righteousness, no longer in wickedness. This is good news, and we get to discover this

throughout the rest of Mark's gospel as we continue to be in awe of who Jesus is and what He's done.