

## **Bible Study Guide: Week of 11-30-2020**

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### **Mark 1:1-8**

<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup>As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;

<sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’”

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

### **<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

As is typical of Mark’s gospel, the opening of the story here is quite abrupt. In Mark’s gospel, things happen “immediately.” Here, Mark spends no time or words on any backstory whatsoever. There are no shepherds, no angels, no wisemen, no Mary, no birth narrative, no genealogy. For Mark, the beginning of the Gospel is the ministry of John the Baptist. Yet despite its sparseness, Mark makes powerful claims in this one sentence: Not only is this Gospel—“good news”—but it is also the good news about Jesus Christ, that is, the Messiah or anointed one of God. And not only is this Jesus the Christ or Messiah, but he is also claimed here to be the Son of God. Mark does a lot with a few words, to be certain.

<sup>2</sup>**As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,**

**“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;**

**<sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:**

**‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight,’”**

Although the beginning of the Gospel comes for Mark with the ministry of John, John’s ministry is inseparable from the Old Testament, particularly the work of the Prophets. Here, there is a narrative link between John’s work and words and the work and words of Isaiah. Oddly, Mark misattributes the first part of this quotation. Vs. 2b is actually a reference to Malachi 3:1—the messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord’s messianic servant who would reform and refine the people of God. Vs. 3 references Isaiah 40, which was originally a passage of hope spoken to the exiles living in Babylon that God would indeed form a new road through the wilderness to lead the people back to Jerusalem. Here, that message is interpreted in the context of preparing the way for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. Importantly, this Gospel begins in the wilderness—a place of desolation to be sure, but also the place of God’s salvific activity (think about, for instance the return from the exile and the Exodus wilderness wanderings). God’s salvation comes about yet again here in the wilderness.

**<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.**

Again, typical of Mark’s gospel, John simply “appears” in the wilderness. From Mark we know nothing of John’s origins, family history, early life, or call. All we know from Mark about John’s origin is that he “appeared in the wilderness” and that he was sent by God (“I will send my messenger ahead of you to prepare your way.”) John’s message apparently attracted quite a following. His baptism was a symbolic washing, preparing those who heard John’s message to receive the one who was to come (i.e. Jesus).

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

John’s clothing description is reminiscent of the description of Elijah’s appearance in 2 Kings 1:8. According to Malachi 4:5-6, God would send Elijah to usher in “the great and terrible day of the Lord.” Thus, Mark underscores the similarities between John and Elijah. Mark makes this connection more explicit in Mark 9:13.

In terms of John’s food, there is a possible connection with Daniel 1:8—Daniel refused to eat meat or drink wine; God managed to sustain Daniel on only water and vegetables. John’s abstention from typical foods and reliance on the atypical locusts and wild honey may serve to validate his role as a true prophet in the same way Daniel proved that God was with him. Also, locusts call to mind the plagues and other biblical allusions to swarms of locusts. These are symbols of desolation and destruction. Honey, on the other hand, brings to mind the image of the Promised Land as a land of milk and honey—a Hebrew idiom meaning a rich and fertile land. Honey, then, can be a symbol of richness and abundance. John represents both the destruction of sin and the old ways of things, as well as the abundance and richness God plans to bring through Christ.

**<sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”**

The one constant in John’s ministry is his stubborn insistence that he himself was not the “main attraction.” John came only to point others toward Jesus and prepare the way for Jesus. The baptism of John paled in comparison with the baptism Jesus came to bring about—the gift of the Holy Spirit.

#### **Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. Why do you think Mark omits any details about John or Jesus prior to John’s preaching in the wilderness?**

2. **How do you think John's baptism was similar to or different from our Sacrament of Holy Baptism in the church today?**
3. **How can you, like John the Baptist, point others toward Jesus in your daily life?**