

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS

Mark 1:1-15

Key verse: 1:1, “The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.”

There are four accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ which have been accepted by Christians since the time they were compiled. These gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In 2021, we will study newly the Gospel of Mark. Mark was not one of the 12 apostles, but he was well-known to Apostle Peter and St. Paul. As followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, we want to learn newly and more deeply than ever before about our Lord and Savior. We want to grow as his disciples and his children. We want to spread the message of our Lord through our words and actions. So let's dive in.

We've divided today's passage to include verses 1-15. The passage opens in verse 1 and closes in verse 15 with the expression “the good news,” also translated as “the gospel.” The year 2020 was saturated with unfortunate, shocking and confusing news, so much that I canceled my newspaper subscription. The COVID-19 virus unfortunately infected over 83 million people globally, with almost 2 million deaths attributed to it. The death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police caused racial tensions, looting and distrust of police forces. The uncertain results of the U.S. presidential split election caused confusion nationally. We may have asked ourselves, “What in the world is going on? This is craziness.” How about some good news? The gospel of Mark declares “good news” for the people of his time. Actually, it is still good news for us today, for all who accept it. Let's begin to consider why this is really good news for us and how we can be beneficiaries of this good news.

I. John the Baptist Prepares the Way for Jesus (1-8)

Look at verse 1. “The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.” Mark calls it “the beginning of the good news.” The Bible begins at the beginning of creation. God created all things. John's gospel begins with the Word, that the Word was with God, and the Word, who became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, was God. Mark also begins with a beginning: “the beginning of the good news about Jesus.” The words “beginning” imply that much more will follow. There is a progression, a story, a history. This is the starting point, like a birth. A birth is the beginning of a new life. A baby needs to grow into adulthood. It is a process. It takes time. We are at the beginning of the year 2021 in the year of our Lord. We will all by the end of 2021, if we are still here, be one year older. Will we also be wiser, more mature, more like Jesus? I

would like to be all of these things, wouldn't you? So how can we grow in this new year 2021?

May I suggest 3 ways? These are not very much like typical New Year's resolutions. In fact, I recently read that the 5 most popular new year's resolutions are usually something like this: (1) lose weight, (2) exercise more, (3) quit smoking, (4) drink less, and (5) get a new job or a promotion. I have 3 suggested ways to grow in Christian character in 2021: (1) Based on our Global UBF key verse which was prayerfully given to us through our General Director P.Moses Yoon, Colossians 3:16a says, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly..." (2) P.Ron Ward also prayerfully gave us a Chicago UBF new year key verse, Hebrews 12:2, in which it says, "...fixing our eyes on Jesus..." (3) Through the new and deep study of Mark's gospel in 2021, we may all learn more about Jesus. Actually all 3 ways require quality time in God's word. This is how the message of Christ can dwell in us richly, and it is how we can fix our eyes on Jesus. I want to encourage all of you to follow a Bible reading plan to finish the Bible at least once in 2021. Through someone's help, I have already signed up to follow such a plan this year.

Back to verse 1. "The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." Who is Jesus? For those who do not know him personally, the question is "Who was Jesus?" Some regard him as a fictional character, who was lionized in history, along with his miracles and his resurrection. Others regard him as a great historical figure who clearly changed world history, on the level of a great war hero or a great author. Mark, however, declares that he was, or rather is, not a fictional character, and much more than a hero. Heroes are people of great courage like William Wallace, depicted in the movie "Braveheart," or like, Joan of Arc, both martyrs. Jesus was indeed a martyr. But his death was much more than a display of great courage. There was meaning in his death that no other martyr could claim. But that's the end of Jesus' earthly story, and the beginning of eternal life for all who believe.

Mark declares that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Messiah is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word "Christ." Both Messiah and Christ mean "Anointed One." In Jewish thought, the anointed one was a promised prophet, priest and king whom God would send into the world to lead God's people. He would be none other than the unique Son of God, anointed to rule and deliver God's people. Mark declares that this promised anointed one is Jesus, who reigns at the right hand of God the Father and who will come again in glory to judge all the living and the dead. This is the Jesus we want to learn more about and grow more in our trust in and obedience to. Let's learn more why.

Mark mentions a prophecy, actually two prophecies, from the Hebrew Scriptures (a.k.a. the Old Testament) as follows:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”—“a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

These two prophecies which are from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 both mention a messenger or a voice who will prepare the way for the Lord. The voice will call out in the wilderness. The messenger will prepare the way by making the path straight for the Lord. Mark explains in verse 4 that these prophecies were fulfilled by a man named John the Baptist or John the Baptizer, who preached out in the wilderness. I’m not sure why he preached in the wilderness rather than in the city where many people were. But it didn’t matter since all the people came out to him to hear his message. In any case, John fulfilled the prophecies by his message and ministry.

It is significant that John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. What is repentance? The Greek word means “to change your mind or thinking.” More specifically, we know that repentance is to turn from sin to God, from wickedness to righteousness, from evil to good. John baptized people in the Jordan River as a sign of cleansing and new life. Here we see that the first step of cleansing and renewal and turning to God is to repent of sin. Those who turned to God confessed their sins and were baptized.

Confession of sin is important. No one likes to confess their sins because it is shameful and embarrassing. We want people to think that we have it all together. Christian singer Matthew West has a song called, “Truth Be Told.” The refrain says, “I say, ‘I’m fine, Yeah I’m fine, Oh I’m fine, Hey I’m fine. But I’m not. I’m Broken...So let the truth be told.” We don’t want anyone to know our dark thoughts or sinful behavior that no one else sees. But hiding our sins is lying to God. God knows all and sees all, not only our actions but even our thoughts and desires. We cannot hide from God. Proverbs 28:13 says, “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” 1 John 1:9 agrees, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Next Mark described John’s wardrobe and diet: he wore camel’s hair with a leather belt and ate locusts and wild honey. I’m not exactly sure why Mark mentioned John’s clothes and meal menu. Perhaps it was because John’s clothes were just like the prophet Elijah’s. One thing is clear: you wouldn’t find John at the local shopping mall or restaurant. John devoted and dedicated his life

and ministry to prepare the way for the Messiah Jesus. And many people responded. They could see that John was no fake or hypocrite. No one could accuse John of preaching a health and wealth gospel.

Then what was John's message? Mark tells us in verses 7-8. "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Surprisingly, John did not preach psychology, nor did he talk about himself. Rather, John kept talking about the One coming after him, the One greater than him, the One who baptizes not with or in water, but with or in the Holy Spirit. John's focus was on Jesus the Messiah, the One coming after him, the One greater than him, the One who baptizes with or in the Holy Spirit. John was a good advertiser of Jesus Christ. John shows us here how to be a good Christian. A good Christian doesn't just go to church or read the Bible or pray, although they should do all these things. Most importantly, a good Christian advertises Jesus Christ with their words and actions. A good Christian points other people to Jesus, not to themselves, not even to their church, but to Jesus. So how are you doing as a living advertisement for Jesus Christ? Do your words and actions and attitudes point to him? Do they reveal more about Jesus to others?

John was so humble. He was actually wildly popular and successful in ministry, by human standards. But that was not John's goal. And he said he felt unworthy even to untie Jesus' sandals, which would be like a butler or a chauffeur to Jesus.

And don't miss this: John's water baptism was almost nothing compared to Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit. What our souls long for more than anything else is the quenching baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Bible describes this as a purging as with fire, a cleansing as with living water, and a filling. People try so many things to be purged, cleansed and filled. They may try reading many books or trying many religious activities to be cleansed of their dirty consciences. But there's no internal transformation. They may try drugs or alcohol or promiscuity to fill their thirsty souls. But they thirst again and for more, and it's never enough. So many people run to drugs or alcohol to fill their empty souls. But it doesn't help. Rather, it destroys their lives, so that they can't function normally, not to mention, be a blessing to others.

This is God's truth. Did you know that being filled with the Spirit of God is better than getting drunk. That's what the Bible shows. When the apostles were filled with the Spirit, speaking in other languages, and full of joy, bystanders thought

they were drunk in the morning! I'm not saying that getting drunk on alcohol is good. I'm saying that being filled with the Spirit of God is way better, with better results and good influence upon others. Ephesians 5:18 agrees saying, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit..." Friends, let's be filled with the Spirit of God, not poor imitations, which only lead to regret and misery, and a hangover.

II. Jesus Begins His Ministry (9-15)

Thus far Mark has only introduced Jesus through the message of John the Baptist. We haven't even met Jesus yet. Here he comes in verse 9, hailing from Nazareth in Galilee to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. Now Jesus' baptism was not for sin, since he was without sin. Rather, it was his inauguration as the anointed Messiah. It was the start of his earthly ministry as the Son of God. In fact, Jesus' baptism was unlike any other in two distinct ways, involving a display by the Holy Spirit and a message by God the Father.

Look at verses 10-11. "Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Both the Holy Spirit and God the Father are identifying Jesus at his baptism. Who is Jesus? He is the one who lives in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. He is one with the Holy Spirit. Who is Jesus? He is the Son of God, beloved of God. God was well-pleased with him. At the baptism of Jesus by John, the true identity and mission of Jesus was declared. He came from the Father to do the Father's will in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Now, what will he do? That's the rest of Mark's gospel.

What did he do first? He faced Satan. Look at verses 12-13. "At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him." Mark does not give any details like Matthew and Luke about the temptations of Jesus. Mark simply says that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days by Satan. We remember Adam. He was tempted in the garden and failed. You and I also have failed, many times. But Jesus defeated the devil. Jesus overcame all the devil's temptations. This is why only Jesus is qualified to save us from the devil and sin. Jesus' mission was not political or military or economic. Jesus' mission was spiritual. Jesus saves us from death and condemnation. Jesus is the only One who can give us salvation from sin's power and consequences. Only Jesus can save us and give us eternal life in God's kingdom.

What did Jesus do after being tempted and tested for 40 days by Satan? Verses 14-15 tell us. "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming

the good news of God. ‘The time has come’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’”

We are now back to where we started in verse 1, where Mark introduced “the good news.” Jesus proclaimed this good news. It is the good news of God. It is the news that the kingdom or reign of God has come, here and now. That was Jesus’ message. Jesus is the King of heaven, and he brought with him the rule of God. How are we to respond?

Jesus said, “Repent and believe the good news!” There’s that word again: “Repent!” Change your mind. Turn your life around from sin and self to God. Believe it. Trust the message. Trust the messenger. And be saved.

No one can believe for someone else. Each person must repent and believe the good news of Jesus Christ for himself or herself. Parents cannot believe for their children. Children will not be saved because of their parents’ lives of faith. Each person must confess their sins and trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Then, he will give them forgiveness of sin, a new life and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Mark mentioned “good news” three times in this short passage. So where can this good news be found? In Jesus Christ, in his words and in his life. And for whom is this good news? This good news is for all who repent and believe in Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. Do you want to hear something encouraging? Some good news? In the midst of the 2020 pandemic, we had plenty of good news in our church. For one, we had eight baptisms in our church during the pandemic lockdown—baptisms of those who dedicated their hearts and lives to our Jesus Christ. That’s really good news! Also, amidst the pandemic we had four marriages in our church, all established these house churches in Jesus Christ for his purpose and glory. All who are married know that marriage isn’t easy. But it’s good news when a marriage is established and rooted in Jesus Christ! We had so much good news in our church of people coming to Jesus through God’s word and prayer in 2020. So there is still good news and it is found faithfully in Jesus Christ our Lord!

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for bringing us this good news! Thank you St. Mark, for writing this gospel so that we may hear and believe the good news of Jesus. May the year 2021 be a blessed new year of good news—of growing in our love, hope and faith in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, our Lord. Amen.