

Title: Let's Get This Show on the Road!  
Date: February 25, 2024  
Subject: Jesus Christ begins his ministry  
Scripture: Mark 1:1 - 13

Our text this morning is Mark 1, the 1st 13 verses. Read it in keeping with the style of the book.

Read Mark 1:1 really fast.

It seems like Mark is in a super hurry. His Gospel isn't like the others: open with an extensive genealogy, a formal prologue, a philosophical argument about the pre-existence of Christ. And no birth narratives. There's not a slow build up. Just jump in with both feet. "Let's get this show on the road."

Bible teacher and author Chuck Swindoll was a friend with former professional quarterback Ken Stabler who had a speedboat. Swindoll recalls that Stabler had 3 rules for people who rode with him. "Sit down. Shut up. And hang on." It was full throttle full speed ahead.

That's the feeling we get in Mark's Gospel. 47 times "immediately," "at once," "quickly," or "just then" mark the rapid transitions between the episodes of Christ's life.

Mark is shortest Gospel and has been referred to as a "simple, succinct, unadorned, yet vivid account of Jesus' ministry, emphasizing more what Jesus did than what he said... Although Mark records far fewer actual teachings of Jesus than the other Gospel writers, there's remarkable emphasis on Jesus as teacher" (NIV Study Bible notes, introduction to Mark).

Mark hurriedly gets to his subject – "the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He brings together the dual natures of this unique person: the man Jesus and the Son of God who came to the world and is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. The details of his life, ministry, death, and resurrection are treated as the beginning of the good news that since his record has filtered down through almost 2000 years.

There's so much more that could be amplified about the identity of Jesus at this point. It's like we want to tell Mark to "take a breath..." He does but he doesn't immediately tell us about Jesus. Instead, he takes the time to introduce the one who came to introduce Jesus.

I. The forerunner vv. 2 – 8

Read vv. 2-6

The pause for a breath gives historical context. Isaiah is a favorite of New Testament writers as they frequently dip into its richness to show how it points to Jesus. The stage for the Christ is being set by the forerunner who would prepare the way. In modern terms, we might speak of the advance person who lays the groundwork, makes sure things are set up, takes care of the behind the scenes stuff, gets out the publicity so when the celebrity or politician arrives, everything is ready.

"And so John came." The situation is matter-of-factly stated. The description of John the Baptist - clothing made of camel's hair and leather belt, eating locusts and wild honey - has led people to view him as a

wild eyed fanatic who hasn't bathed for years, who bursts on the scene, foaming at the mouth, running his fingers through his wild hair as he points his bony finger and breathlessly spews out "Repent! Repent!"

While John had lived in the desert until he publicly appeared (Luke 1:80), it doesn't mean he was a weirdo from the sticks. The desert is likely the one between Jerusalem and the northern end of the Dead Sea – a distance of about 15 miles. He was never very far from civilization and likely visited the big city.

The other Gospel accounts speak to John's celebrity status with the crowds. People came from Jerusalem, the province of Judea and the whole region of the Jordan River basin to where John was baptizing. This included religious leaders as well as those who were considered to be sinners.

John could be confrontational. He called the religious leaders like the Pharisees and Sadducees a brood of vipers. He knew they were insincere and merely wanted to cover their bases. They didn't want to get into hot water with the crowds who thronged after John the Baptist.

There was considerable discussion about the identity of John with some thinking he was the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet. John denied all of these and pointed away from himself to the one he announced as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Message. The forerunner's message is in vv. 7, 8.

Read vv. 7, 8.

John told people: "Look ahead to the one who is coming. Trust in him. Repent of your sins. Turn to God. And you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit, meaning you will be placed into the group of people who have placed their trust in Jesus as the Christ."

John knew who he was and who he wasn't. He was the advance man - a witness, a testifier, one who prepared the way for the One who was to come. He wasn't the One who would be sent by God to deliver people from their sins.

## II. Jesus' baptism vv. 9 - 11

Mark has the briefest account of John the Baptist's role and the baptism of Jesus, but not by much as Luke's is pretty brief as well. Luke is the one who informs us Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his ministry (Luke 3:23).

READ vv. 9 – 11.

Up until this time Jesus had been living in Nazareth in Galilee. It's where Joseph and Mary lived when the angel told them they would have a child and they were to name him Jesus. It's where Mary and Joseph returned shortly after Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. It's where Jesus spent his childhood, youth and young adult years. It's where he worked as a carpenter with Joseph, perhaps till the age of 30. It was home.

When the time came for his ministry to begin, he sought out John. The forerunner was at his usual location baptizing people in the Jordan River. You may remember pictures you saw from Carol Oestreich's trip to Israel. When she was there, she was baptized in the Jordan. It's muddy water.

The reason for Jesus' baptism was different from that of the crowds who were indicating a desire to repent of their sins and turn to God. The NIV Study Bible has a valuable and concise explanation of the significance of Jesus being baptized (Note on Matthew 3:15). It comes from Matthew's account: "1. The first, mentioned here, was "to fulfill all righteousness." The baptism indicated that he was consecrated to God and officially approved by him, as especially shown in the descent of the Holy Spirit (V. 16) and the words of the Father (v. 17; cf. Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 42:1). All God's righteous requirements for the Messiah were fully met in Jesus. 2. At Jesus' baptism John publicly announced the arrival of the Messiah and the inception of his ministry (John 1:31-34). 3. By his baptism Jesus completely identified himself with man's sin and failure (though he himself needed no repentance or cleansing from sin), becoming our substitute (2 Corinthians 5:21). 4. His baptism was an example to his followers."

All three members of the Trinity are present. Jesus is the perfect God Man in bodily form. The Holy Spirit descends from heaven on Jesus like a dove. God the Father speaks, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

I refer again to the NIV Study Bible as it provides the purpose for God speaking: "The voice (1) authenticated Jesus' unique sonship...(2) identified Jesus with the suffering servant of Isaiah 42:1, and (3) offered the Father's support of Jesus in his mission...This word from the Father must have tremendously encouraged Jesus at the very outset of his earthly ministry" (note on Matthew 3:17).

The words of God the Father are barely out of his mouth when Mark moves on to the next thing. "At once." Mark continues the minimalism as he presents the temptation of Jesus.

III. Temptation vv, 12, 13.

READ vv. 12, 13

Most Bible versions utilize stronger language than the NIV's translation. They say the Spirit impelled, drove, or forced Jesus into the desert. This shouldn't be understood as Jesus was reluctant or hesitant. It's more about the Spirit moving, compelling Jesus onward. Matthew and Luke simply state Jesus was led by the Spirit.

Jesus was in the desert, a wilderness, for forty days. Only Mark notes the presence of wild animals - probably lions, and no tigers, and bears, wolves, panthers, leopards, snakes, wild boars. The notation of wild animals is probably to indicate more of the difficulty and danger faced by Jesus. We're not told if the wild animals posed a threat to Jesus that he was constantly on high alert, or if the relationship with the animals reverted to what it was like the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve walking around among what would become wild animals after the Fall, or if it was it like Daniel in the lions' den where the lions' mouths were shut and they didn't hurt him?

Mark doesn't give details of the temptation, just that he was tempted. Matthew and Luke provide three specific temptations, but it seems like there were more and they took place throughout the entire 40 days.

The nature of the temptations was to get Jesus to doubt God's goodness and care for him. Satan wanted Jesus to act contrary to what he believed about God. He tried to get Jesus to presume upon what God

would do. He offered things that would take God's place. They were presented as an alternative to God's will. The devil wanted to be Jesus' boss.

Satan offered what was appealing. It wouldn't make sense to offer something unappealing. Why would people want something like that? The devil used scripture to try to get Jesus to think what was proposed had scriptural backing. It shouldn't surprise us he misquoted and twisted it since he is a liar and the father of lies.

Jesus also used scripture, but did so properly. We need to have a right understanding of what the Bible says about God, who we are in Christ and what God wants for us so we won't be fooled and tricked by the devil.

God was present with Jesus through the angels who attended him. They may have been there the entire time but were more active at the end. They didn't keep all temptation away or maybe they kept none of the temptation away. They were present to support and likely to bring food at the end of the 40 days.

Another scripture speaks of the purpose of Jesus being tempted: Turn to Hebrews 2.

READ Hebrews 2:14 – 18.

And to chapter 4.

READ 4:14 – 16.

Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every way and was tempted in every way so he could help us in every way. Jesus encountered the same kind of temptations we do – the choice to go our way instead of God's, to think of terms of satisfying our desires, submit to the urge to gain power. The difference between Jesus and us is he didn't succumb to his temptations and sin. He remained perfect.

The passages go back and forth between human high priests and Jesus as the ultimate high priest. 5:2 states that a human high priest is “able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness.”

We don't understand the whole mystery of how Jesus was God and human at the same time. How did it work when the devil brought temptation in which God can't sin but a human can? Why would the devil tempt if it wasn't possible for Jesus to stray from what the Father wanted? The temptations were real and difficult.

We're further told Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered (Hebrews 5:7, 8). Here again our minds struggle with how that was possible. It certainly wasn't as God the Son who always perfectly submitted to the Father. But as a human being empowered by God called to a new level of obedience. He lived on and by the words that come from God's mouth.

Temptation often subtly works by degrees, presenting itself as something that's minor, no big deal. Maybe a small sin, an attitude that isn't quite right, a habit we excuse or overlook as not having much consequence. Our defenses soften by accepting a little at first...then a little more and a little more.

We don't have problems with camels here but in the Mideast they can be a nuisance. The way to keep a camel out of the tent is to prevent it from getting its nose in. The tent is secured tight to the ground because if the camel can get the tip of its nose in the tent, it keeps going until the whole camel is in the tent.

Barnes' Notes (Matthew 4:1-11): "Satan never comes boldly and tempts people to sin, telling them that they are committing sin. Such a mode would defeat his design. It would put people on their guard. He commences, therefore, artfully and plausibly, and the real purpose does not appear until he has prepared the mind for it. This is the way with all temptation. No wicked person would at once tempt another to be profane, to be drunk, to be an infidel, or to commit adultery. The principles are first corrupted. The confidence is secured. The affections are won. And then the allurements are little by little presented, until the victim falls. How everyone should be on his guard at the very first appearance of evil, at the first suggestion that may possibly lead to sin!"

Our Savior knows we're only human and need help. He's the high priest who deals gently with us. We can go to him to find help in our times of need. Mercy to not give us what we deserve and grace to give us what we don't deserve. We're invited to confidently approach the throne of grace. He's merciful and faithful.

"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

When the temptation comes to speak unkindly, check out that internet site, we need to remind ourselves Jesus was tempted similarly, we aren't alone, he's there to help us at the moment of temptation and choose to stay close to God. That's often the way to escape.

Another is to remember the three temptations specifically mentioned in the accounts came to Jesus when he was vulnerable, when he was tired and hungry. We need to watch ourselves to not put ourselves in vulnerable situations and take care of ourselves spiritually, physically and mentally.

Another scripture (1 John) says if we claim we don't sin we're lying. It also reminds us that if we confess our sins he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Then comes this encouragement: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, not only for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1, 2).

It would be nice if we could be like Mark's Gospel and always quickly move away from temptation, recover from when we sinned not lingering in guilt and shame after we've confessed our sins, growing in our obedience.

There will come a day when those things will be out of mind...completely. In the meantime, remember Jesus Christ is our defender and advocate. He speaks in our defense and states that our sin has been covered by his sacrifice. He took the punishment demanded by our sins and moral crimes against God. He is present to help in our time of need. He's preparing a place where we will no longer be tempted and no longer sin.