

Are You There Yet?

Mark 1:1-13

January 02, 2012

Call to Worship: Psalm 97

“The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods! Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O LORD. For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!”

Introduction

We are so thankful as we continue to worship the Lord on this 8th day of Christmas. On Friday, January the 6th, we will actually begin to celebrate Epiphany. The 12th day of Christmas will be on the 5th of January. We are so excited to continue our *Life of Christ* series on this 1st Sunday of 2012. Epiphany celebrates the day when the Magi came to the house where Jesus was. But before they got to Bethlehem, if you will remember they went to Jerusalem, because that is where they thought a king would be born. Through their witness and their questions, Jerusalem came to know

that the Messiah had been born. So on January the 6th, we will celebrate the fact that God used Gentiles to tell the Jews that their Messiah had been born. The reason we are celebrating the 12 days of Christmas is to remind us that God still uses people to tell other people that their Messiah has been born.

Scripture: Mark 1:1-13

“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.” In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.”

Mark’s Gospel

As we use Mark’s gospel as the basis for our *Life of Christ* study over the next 15 Sundays, (until resurrection Sunday) we immediately notice that Mark begins his gospel differently than the gospel of Matthew and Luke. There is no birth narrative, there is no genealogy, and there are no infinites from His childhood at all. Mark immediately begins with the baptism of

Jesus by John, and His temptation in the wilderness, and it begs the question why. Why does Mark start with the adult ministry of Jesus? The reason is because he is trying to get his readers to the cross as quickly as possible. Matthew and Luke do not actually begin the adult ministry of Jesus until the 4th chapter of their gospel. Mark, in the 14th verse, will introduce us to the adult ministry of Jesus after His baptism and His temptation. Now what you are going to sense over the next 15 Sundays is that we are in a rush. We do not even have time to slow down and catch our breath because Mark is trying to get us to Jerusalem as quickly as possible. Now once we get to Jerusalem, we will slow down and he will spend 1/3rd of his gospel discussing Jesus in Jerusalem. But he wants to get us to Jerusalem because in Mark's mind you cannot really know who Jesus is until you see Him from the foot of the cross. Mark wants to get his readers to the foot of the cross so that he can get the One that is on the cross, off of the cross. Then get Him into *them*, and then get *them* back to their community as quickly as possible so they can live out the life of the Suffering Servant, which is who He really is. So here is what is going to happen. As soon as you buckle your seatbelt in this gospel, at breakneck speed, with the accelerator to the floor, Mark is going to get us to Jerusalem so that we can view the cross. Wow...you see here is where Mark will differ from Matthew and Luke, and even John. When you study the other gospels, it is going to seem like they are actually on the dusty road of Jerusalem and Galilee with Jesus. Therefore they are going to tell us details that Mark omits because Mark is not on the 2-lane road, it takes too much time. He is actually on what we know as a 4-lane highway. Therefore he is going to mention many events, but he is never going to slow down long enough to give us much detail about those events.

In other words, Mark is kind of like some of us men. We want to get there, we want to get it, get it over with, and get back to where we were at. Since they have built the new highway 80 in our neck of the woods, if you actually live at 1204 Redbud Rd, there are many, many different ways you can get to Murray now. There is a quick way that will get you there and get

you home. There is the old way you used to take, and you will see more of the scenery of the eastside, but it will take you longer to get there and get back. I am amazed because I cannot get my wife to take the new 4-lane highway to Murray. We start out going to Murray and if I am riding with her, we pull out on our road, we turn left on Redbud Rd, we go 1.3 miles, and we hit Hwy 1551, and she still does what she used to do before Hwy 80 came along. She turns right, and she goes about 1/4th of a mile to where Hwy 1551 runs into Hwy 464. So she bears right and goes around the curve, down the big hill, across the bottoms, come up the big hill, and then turns left onto Van Cleave Rd. We start down that road and it is horrific, it is bumpy. Jim Kelly's farm is on the left, the big silo that blew down is on the right, the Riding Club is down there on the left, and then she hits Hwy 80, then she will turn right. As for me, I come out of our driveway, turn left just like her, hit Hwy 1551, but instead of going right I go left. If you go left, within 1/2 mile you will be on a 4-lane highway which is Hwy 80, and then take a right. The honest truth is that if we leave the house together to go to town, by the time she gets to Hwy 80 I am already almost in town. Just the other night we were coming home from Murray and we were in 2 separate vehicles. We were at Crider's birthday party. We came down Hwy 94, and when we hit Hwy 80 here is what she did. Instead of going on down to Hwy 1551, turning left, and then right onto Redbud Rd, she turned on Hwy 464, went past Redbud Rd, had to hit Hwy 1551 and come back in. As soon as she turned she knew what I was going to do. She knew as soon as I was in the house I would be eating my cereal and milk at the table, (my night time snack) as she was going to pull into the driveway. So when I saw her turn onto Hwy 464, I saw her do this. I saw her mash the accelerator at breakneck speed. I just keep going down the 4-lane and never broke the speed limit once. I turned left onto Hwy 1551, and now I am turning into Redbud Rd, and here she is coming 90 mph down that road. Praise the Lord I had the right of way, or she would have plowed right into me! I turn into Redbud Rd and she is now on my tail, and I slow down to about 15 mph. I made her enjoy every bit of the scenery on Redbud Rd, (even in the dark) on that 1.3 mile road. When we

got to the house and she barreled out of the truck she said, "I thought I was going to beat you this time!" I said, "You can never beat me going that way!"

Mark wants to get you there, and he wants to get you there quickly. He knows the only way you can know who Jesus is, is if you see Him at the foot of the cross. He does not just want you to see Jesus for who He is. He wants Jesus to come down off the cross, get into your heart, and change your life. And then you get back to where you are living, and then live out this life of Jesus. It will be the life of a suffering servant.

Persecution and the Suffering Servant

Are you ready to buckle your pew belts? For the next 15 Sundays we are going to be in the gospel of Mark. Now I want you to get ready for this. You see the Church was struggling. Mark is writing to the Church probably in Rome, at a time when Nero was sitting on the throne, between AD 67 and AD 70. Persecution is breaking out on the Christians. This is why he approaches his gospel differently. For you see, in Mark's gospel, he is going to paint the disciples as being really slow to get it. He is going to paint the religious leaders as not getting it. The crowds that follow Jesus are so close, yet still so far away, they just never get it. As a matter of fact, what you are going to discover in Mark's gospel is that he is intentionally doing this. He is intentionally showing us that the religious leaders, the crowd, and even the disciples did not understand who Jesus was until the cross. And at the cross, in the 15th chapter verse 39, a Roman centurion looks up and sees Jesus dying a death so differently than any other man he had ever seen crucified that he says, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

Mark says this is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. In verse 1, he tells us, the reader, who Jesus is. So while we are reading this book, we already know who Jesus is, and we just cannot understand why the religious leaders do not understand who He is. We just cannot understand why the crowd does not get it. There are a few times in the book where we just want to shake Peter! What is wrong with Peter!

This man he is following is more than a man, He is the God-man; He is the Son of God. But even Peter does not get it.

The Messianic Secret

The reason is a technique that the scholars refer to as the messianic secret. For you see Mark is writing at a time when many people are abandoning Christianity. They are turning away because of the persecution and the conflict. They are beginning to doubt the reality of their conversion. They are thinking how can they be a Christian and God let these kinds of things happen to them? I mean when you get saved, is not God supposed to change your life? Are you not supposed to be able to pay your bills now? Are you not supposed to be able to get a job? Are you not supposed to be happily married now? Are you not supposed to be able to raise godly children? Are not great things supposed to happen to people who know the Son of God? There should never be a sniffle, never a cold, or never have to wear glasses if you are truly a child of His! Mark is writing to say no. He is writing to show us the true Christ. He is the Suffering Servant. Are you ready?

You see, in the gospels, guess who the folks are who understand who Jesus is? It is the demons. Every time Jesus drives out a demon, the demon will acknowledge who Jesus is. He is the Son of God. Then Jesus will say shhhh. But in the Greek, Mark records that Jesus "rapped" the demon across the knuckle. Our ESV and our KJV bibles try to translate that with the word [rebuke](#).

Some of you remember being raised in a school system where there was actually punishment for offenses. Do you remember having one of those teachers that sat behind the desk and when you messed up, she called you in front of the whole class. You stood beside the teacher's desk and she would reach into a drawer and bring out a little ruler. She would ask you to turn your palm up, and she would take that ruler and **RAP**, right in front of the whole class! She did not worry about your self-esteem one bit, did she? Absolutely not...When you got rapped across the palm with a ruler, you

knew you had been rebuked. We got that from the Bible. In the biblical world a person actually turned their palm down and exposed their knuckles, and the teacher took a small stick and **WHAM!** She rebuked you. That is the word that is used here. Jesus rebuked the demons. Mark keeps Jesus being the Messiah a secret. The reason is because, unlike John, he does not want you to look into the miracles and see who Jesus is. No, he is going to hold you to the very end of Jesus' life. And he wants you, like that Roman centurion, to look into the face of Jesus as He was being crucified on a cross, and there see who He really is.

Gospel of Jesus Christ: verse 1

So during this study we are going to be asking this question because we are going to be traveling at breakneck speed. Kids always ask that question, "Are we there yet?" But the question here is not going to be are "we" there yet, but are "you" there yet? Hollywood has borrowed this technique from the book of Mark. Have you ever watched a show where Hollywood tells you who the killer is immediately in the 1st 5 minutes, and then the rest of the movie plays out with everyone in the movie trying to figure out who the killer is? We look and see how silly they are. You want to say, "Colombo, look!" That is the technique Mark uses. I have to point your attention to Mark 1:1 when he says, "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." The word **gospel** literally means "good news" and that is how the Church has always talked about it. But in this instance, you have to go back to the days of the Roman Empire. You have to go back to Greek society to understand this term. Yes the word gospel does mean good news. But you have to realize that when Mark uses the word gospel, he is the 1st one to call the events of Jesus the gospel. Mark is the 1st gospel written. Did you know that there was not a commentary written about Mark until the 5th century? Did you know Mark was called the half-brother of Matthew for years? People actually thought Mark wrote a shorter version of Matthew's gospel. Matthew's gospel is 1st in our New Testament because he mentions the word Church, but Mark was written 1st. Matthew and Luke used Mark to write their gospel. We did not discover that until the 1900's.

Mark had 3 words that he could have used right here. He could have talked about the life of Jesus. He could have talked about the acts of Jesus. Or he could have talked about the memoirs of Jesus, because all 3 of those were words that were used in the Roman Empire when a person wrote a great biography about a great person. But Mark did not use any of those words. The gospel of Mark is not a biography of Jesus, and it is not a diary of Jesus' life. The reason is because Mark, a companion of Peter and Paul (even though he and Paul had a fallout) heard 1st hand sermon after sermon of the great Apostle Peter. If you go back to Acts 1:22 and 10:37, on 2 occasions when Peter talked about the beginning of the eyewitness of Jesus, he always took the eyewitness back to the baptism of John. Mark did not write a birth narrative, or genealogy. He did not need one because his source of information was the great Peter. What Mark is doing is taking the sermons that he has heard from Peter and he is writing a gospel.

But the Romans would not have understood gospel as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul would talk about that later when he talks to the church at Corinth. Gospel, in the Roman Empire was a great historical event that changed the situation. It changed the way the future would be interpreted. For example, when historians wrote about Caesar Augustus, they heralded his birth as "the gospel of Caesar Augustus". The Roman world thought that the birth of Caesar Augustus changed the world. Mark says no, the life of the person who truly changed the world was Jesus Christ, because He is the Son of God. So here he is getting us to the cross. He starts his gospel, not with Jesus being born, that would take too much time. So he tells us how Jesus was baptized by John, and he shows the authority of John's baptism by tracing it back to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. Isaiah had actually prophesied about the coming One. Now here is what you need to remember when the Bible in the Old Testament talks about preparing the way of the Lord. In the biblical world, when a great person of authority, a government official, would travel to another city, the highway department would go before him. When they brought out the royal chariot, it was the department of the highway's responsibility to make

sure that all the ruts had been smoothed and covered. If there were any bumps in the road, they were to remove those bumps. So get this picture, you and I see the highway department at work, and that means the king is coming, the governor is coming, the ruler is coming. In the Roman Empire, they did not fix the road for you. You did not call the magistrate and say you have a pothole. The only way for the pothole to get fixed was for the governor to come through your road. Do you have this picture? When Israel saw John the Baptist, he was God's highway department, getting the people ready for the coming of the Messiah! It had been 400 years since God had spoken to Israel and now John shows up in the wilderness.

John's Baptism: verses 2-8

There is a theme in Mark's gospel about the wilderness because this is a new beginning for the children of Israel. Just as God led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness to get to where they were going, you must understand, as a Christian, you are going to take a same type of journey, and it will start in a wilderness. So John is a man of the wilderness. When he appears he has a camel hair coat on, and this was before camel hair coats were cool! (I used to have my "John the Baptist coat". I had a camel hair coat. I had a big leather belt that I wore under it.) When this guy stopped for a snack, he reached for a locust, and he put his hand in a beehive and pulled out wild honey. When he spoke his voice thundered a message. He preached this message not *on* the bank, but *in* the Jordan River. As people would see this man named John out in the river baptizing, he would call for them to be baptized, because his baptism was for the remission of sins. This was saying not to get in that water unless there had been a true change of identity with you, and he made Israel confess their sins, every last one of them.

Baptism of Jesus: verses 9-11

So the picture is of him baptizing, and he is telling them to be ready for there is One coming. When He comes he will not even be worthy to untie His shoe latches. Did you know that in the biblical world that a slave was

never commanded to untie his master's shoes? No matter how low a common slave was, he was always worth more than to untie someone's shoes. To untie a man's shoes was considered the lowest of acts. Do you see what John does? He says when you compare me to Jesus I am lower than a slave. I am not even worthy to untie that Man's shoes. All I can do from God is to baptize you with water, but when He comes He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. The next thing you know Jesus appears from Galilee. Mark has told us that everyone else has come from Judea and Jerusalem, and all of a sudden a Galilean shows up. He walks down into the water, and John baptizes Him. Now the other gospel writers are going to tell us that John did not want to baptize Him. There is actually a conflict between John and Jesus, and Jesus finally talks him into baptizing Him. Not in Mark's gospel...he just says Jesus was baptized by John in the River Jordan. Then Jesus saw something evidently no one else saw in Mark's gospel when He was coming up out of the water. Now Matthew and Luke say the heavens opened, but Mark does not say that. Mark says they were ripped apart! Jesus goes down into the water, comes up and looks up to the heavens and they rip apart; they tear! He sees the Spirit of God descend on Him, to anoint Him for His ministry as the Son of God. He hears the Father speak. Not *this* is My beloved Son, but *You* are My beloved Son. Son, with You I am well pleased.

What He is doing here is stating that He has a special work for His only begotten Son. That work will be to go to a cross. There on the cross, Jesus is going to accomplish what no man could ever accomplish, and that is redemption for fallen mankind. Now watch this, Mark does in 5 verses what it takes Matthew and Luke 1 and ½ chapters to do. He discusses baptism and temptation, and it is over, no details. I cannot tell you how many sermons I read this week because I always like to read what other people have said about the subject I am going to preach on. But I got so aggravated because I never found a sermon that dealt with Mark. Go on the internet and type in Mark 1:1-13, and when it comes to the temptation and the baptism, the preacher will take you to Matthew and Luke, and

when you do that, you miss it. You see Mark does not state a reason for why Jesus was baptized. But we can see the reason. The reason is for you to know who He is. He is the Son of God. Why would the Son of God be baptized? It is because in Christian baptism the sinner identifies with the Redeemer, but in Jesus' baptism the Redeemer identified with the sinner. It is all Mark thinks you need to know. Jesus comes up out of the water, and for the 2nd time we are going to see the word immediately. Immediately, we are going to see it 41 times in 16 chapters. That is how fast we are going to go through this book. As soon as Jesus comes up out of the water, immediately the heavens were torn apart. Now the voice from the Father speaks and immediately the Spirit descended upon Him. Matthew and Luke say then that the Spirit of God led Him into the wilderness.

The Temptation of Jesus: verses 12-13

Conflict

I like that, the Spirit of God leads Jesus and He follows. He is preparing Himself to go to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for 40 days. That is not what Mark says. He says the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. The literal Greek says in Mark that the Spirit of God "threw Him out of the river into the wilderness"! The Spirit of God picks up Jesus and hurls Him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan! That is a different meaning, agreed? Now this does not mean that Jesus did not want to go. The purpose is to show you conflict. In Mark's gospel we are going to see conflict between religious leaders, conflict between his family, and conflict among the disciples. How dare you believe that when you become a Christian you are to live a life of ease! Mark describes the temptation in just 2 verses because he wants you to know that Jesus has an adversary named Satan. Notice that Mark does not call him the devil. The word **devil** means "accuser". **Satan** means "adversary or opponent". Jesus, the Son of God, is getting ready to start His ministry, going to go to the cross, and Mark wants you to know that He has an opponent, Satan. There is no

victory of Jesus in the wilderness over Satan in Mark's gospel. Only if you read Matthew and Luke's gospel do you understand there is victory. Why does Mark not record the victory? It is because with Mark there is no victory in the wilderness. The ultimate victory of Jesus over Satan was not in the wilderness, but on the cross. Satan wants to prevent the cross, so there is conflict with Jesus. Mark is asking you this question, "Are you there yet?"

Conclusion

Have you been to the cross and received the One who died on the cross into your heart? Are you now back into your community living out the life of a suffering servant? Guess what...you have an adversary. If you identify with the Lord Jesus in believer's baptism, get ready, there will be conflict. What Mark tells us about the temptation that no one else tells us is what was in the wilderness. Wild beasts were in the wilderness. Why do you think Matthew and Luke leave that out but Mark mentions it when Mark is this fast paced gospel? It is because in a few years while Rome burns, history will say Nero would fiddle. He actually set the city of Rome on fire and then blamed it on the Christians. Rome actually allowed Nero to take Christians and place them as lampposts in his gardens, and cover them with pitch, and light them, while he entertained the city of Rome. They would take children from Christian parents and put them in the arena to be devoured by wild beasts. Do you think it is accidental that Mark, writing at that time to the Church, mentions the wild beasts? Not at all, because he is trying to prepare us, as the reader, for the true view of life, and it is a life of continual conflict. Conflict because you and I are trying to take the message of the Suffering Servant to a lost world. Are you there yet?