

Mark | The Making of Christ Followers

02 An Effective Witness

August 20, 2017

I. Introduction

Imagine if you can that you are hearing these things for the first time. By the time Mark's gospel is being read, surely some have been captured by the news of Jesus but we cannot assume that all reading Mark's gospel know all the ins and outs. Try to read as if you don't already know all you know about Jesus and then maybe you can appreciate Mark's unfolding here in his prologue (1:2-13). He is strategically unfolding the story of Jesus all the while picking up OT imagery to firmly place Jesus as the long awaited Messiah. Jesus as the one scripture had been pointing towards.

Read Mark 1:2-8

II. Establishes John from OT

- A. The quote is from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Mark has played his hand already in telling us that this book is the gospel about Jesus Christ. Now he quotes a passage about a messenger that would precede the Lord, that is what the text says, precedes the Lord. The prophecy from the OT establishes that a messenger would come before the Lord announcing the arrival and preparing the way for Him. So Mark is saying the day has come, one has come to prepare the way...the messenger who was to signify the Lord is coming has done his job. He has declared the Lord is here.

Who? might be what the current crowd gathered around listening to Mark's gospel is thinking...perhaps they are thinking, "Who is he and how has he told us that the Lord is here? I thought you were telling us about Jesus...oh wait

a minute. Is Jesus the Lord, is he God in human flesh!”

There is no way to understand this prophetic word given by Malachi and Isaiah than talking about Jesus. This is how we have to perceive these people are hearing Mark’s gospel open. Jesus has come and gone by this point but the revelations of who he was is steadily flowing as God leads his people through the Holy Spirit to understand more of the God-man.

Mark’s prologue is strategic on many fronts. He wants to evoke many images from OT to bring about the realization that Jesus is God and he is the long awaited Messiah who was foretold of from long ago. He takes many elements and applies them to Jesus. Even down to him in the wilderness, which in a couple of weeks we will unpack further. But here he introduces the messenger who was foretold to prepare the way of the Lord, who is Jesus. His Name is John...John appeared! Right off the heels of OT scripture Mark waste no time telling us who the messenger was...

III. Here’s John

A. His message

1. *baptizing in the wilderness* (clearly linking John to the OT prophecy just mentioned, mentioned 6 times in Ch 1) *and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin* (4)
 - a) a baptism that has something to do with repentance.¹ It would seem that repentance precede the baptism. That this baptism is showing repentance, a symbol if you will. One piece of

¹ Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 80.

John's preaching/his message is repentance. He is not willy nilly dunking folks but has a clear message that precedes the baptism. Which is for the forgiveness of sins. How is this repentance for the forgiveness of sin? How does this repentance, that the baptism symbolizes, grant forgiveness? We get more specifics as the section progress and verses 7-8 is the other mention of John's preaching...

2. He says, *after me comes one who is mightier than me... I baptize with water, he will baptize with the Holy Spirit* (7-8)
 - a) Remember according to the the prophetic word about John he was to prepare the way for the Lord. He was the one crying in the wilderness. He was only a messenger who preceded the Lord. A long standing belief of the people of God. So part of John's preaching was directing others towards this one who is mightier than he. Whom John is not worthy to untie his sandals. A task reserved for the lowest of servants and John says I don't deserve even that position before this mighty one who comes after me.

I can only baptize with water, but he will baptize with the Holy Spirit. He will dispense the third part of the trinity to wash you a new. His baptism is much fuller and one that truly brings repentance and sustains. "Baptism in the Holy Spirit' refers to all that the Holy Spirit does at the beginning of our Christian lives."² This mighty one brings greater

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) and Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology: Third Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013)

power, John was only to prepare the way through preaching a baptism of repentance, which is fully realized in the mighty ones washing us through the dispensing of the Holy Spirit. John says I give you a car wash but he gives you a paint job. I came to bring attention to him to prepare your hearts for the forgiveness of sin found in the mighty one who can renew you from the inside. See John's baptism was with water, a literal dunking under water, where as Jesus, the mighty one, through the Holy Spirit metaphorical baptizing you inside out. We are not to understand this as the same literal dunking of water that John did, that the HS is a pool or river that we get dunk in, but Jesus actually cleansing of our sin through the HS! The bible often uses liquid metaphors for the work or the coming of the Spirit, such as pouring out. This is not too uncommon in making points—using concrete images to make something understandable. Much like an athlete who can dunk a basketball with power and grace might describe someone who speaks with power and grace by saying, “I dunk basketballs, but he dunks with words.” A person cannot literally dunk words but the point is made that they speak in a way that is powerful and graceful. John is saying my baptism is dependent on His baptism. Mine is physical His is spiritual and of greater importance. Not only was Jesus baptism necessary for actually forgiveness of sin—which certainly makes Him mightier than John—but it was a long standing belief that God would pour out his Spirit upon his people. “The outpouring of God's Spirit was a significant feature in OT expectation (Is 32:15, 44:3

/ Ezk. 36:26-27, 39:29 / Job 3:1-5).”³ So not only is Jesus going to cleanse us from our sins but also work as YHWH and pour out the Spirit, mighty indeed. But we need to be cautious here and not understand this as a second baptism that comes after conversion. The contrast in between John’s baptism and Jesus work of salvation through the HS.

B. His success (5)

1. He is an effective witness
2. What a growth plan...
 - a) Preach repentance
 - b) Exalt Jesus
3. Confessing their sins!! Things are happening, no one dare these days to confess their sins out loud. But the message of John had so gripped them that they willingly confessed their deep need for Jesus. Jesus truly is mighty to bring men to repentance. It is hard to get people to acknowledge their sin, let alone confess it...but when as John, and all who follow him, point people towards the mighty one, well it has affect, it changes them. Our only hope of change is through Jesus, who through baptizing, washes us with the HS cleaning us of our deepest need, forgiveness of sin.

C. His attire (6)...once again evoking wonderful rich imagery from OT belief. John was a man of the wilderness, eating a steady diet of wilderness food, but this description is almost word for word 2 Kings 1:8, ... *“He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist.” And he said, “It is Elijah the Tishbite.”* Therefore intending to present himself as a prophet. John was preparing the way like a

³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark, NIGTC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p 55.

prophet, sounding forth that God was coming. And not just any prophet but Elijah. Mark is so helpful in his structure here to give these details in order for the people to see that John was a prophet, so listen and repent, and also Elijah. Why Elijah? The last book of the OT Malachi, that has already been quoted, ends with...

1. Mal 4:5-6, *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers...”* Mark is connecting, and perhaps John himself with what he is wearing, to Elijah who would turn hearts towards the father.
2. Luke makes plain what Mark has intended to evoke... Luke 1:16-17, *And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”*
3. John comes in the power of Elijah and turns hearts towards the father, by exalting Jesus!

IV. Therefore...

- A. How are you preparing the way for Jesus to work in the lives of those around you? Is your life a model of gospel central living? Understand this, you are in some way preparing the hearts of the people that are close to you, whether in proximity or relationally, to be open to the gospel or completely closed off.
- B. What are you proclaiming/preaching with your lips and life?
- C. In the footsteps of John, I must ask, are you right with the father? John came preaching about a mighty one who

would turn hearts towards the father. John pointed people towards Jesus.