

God's Servant Introduced

Mark 1:1-11

As you know, I love being a grandpa. I love my seven grandchildren. And often they say and do things that make such good illustrations of spiritual truths. Yet I try to be careful because I know that it is possible to speak too often of one's own children and grandchildren. As wonderful as they are to me, I know that they do not inspire the same depth of joy and interest in others. I know that it is possible to make too much of the people who are nearest to my heart.

We likely all know folks who do this. They talk too much about the things that are important to them. They talk too much about their health problems. They talk too much about their jobs. They talk too much about their hobbies. They talk about their dog or cat. They talk too much about coffee. They talk too much about the latest Dad Joke that they have heard. **I have been guilty of all these things too. So I try to be careful about the percentage of time that I talk about the matters that are important to me.**

There is one subject important to the Christian upon which it is impossible to talk too much. This subject is the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus Christ. I have never met anyone of whom it can rightly be said, **"That person talks too much of Jesus."** I am not saying that other people might not think that a Christian talks too much of Jesus. Undoubtedly, some of you have people in your life who may think you speak of Jesus too much . . . even if you only bring Him up once at Christmas time. **But I am saying that we need not concern ourselves about this because it is impossible to reach a point where one truly is talking too much about Jesus.**

Jesus is the subject of **eternal depth**. We never talk about Him to the point of having nothing more important to say.

He is the subject of **real-world enrichment**. We never hear about Him to the point of it no longer bringing profit to us in practical ways.

He is the subject of **endless interest**. The soul that is humble will never become bored with Him.

He is the subject of **immense consolation**. The soul that is hurting finds peace in fixing our thoughts upon Him.

He is the subject of necessary salvation. The soul that sins finds liberty in grasping Him by faith.

Truth: No one ever talks about Jesus too much!!! It is impossible to make too much of Him!

John Mark understands that. He is consumed with thoughts of Christ. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John Mark takes up his quill and writes an account of Jesus' life for people **in every place, in every culture, in every age to consider the Person of Jesus. Mark longs for His readers to** receive life from the Lord Jesus.

Mark likely became a follower of Jesus through his relationship with Simon Peter. He likely receives much of his information about Jesus' life from Peter. So Mark's writing is not distant hearsay, but direct testimony from an eyewitness to Jesus' Person, Words and Works.

Mark writes in a style that emphasizes the action in Jesus' life. This is the fastest moving of the four Gospels. The little word "immediately" appears 39 times in this book and underscores the quick pace of Jesus' story here on earth. **Mark begins Jesus' story this way,**

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1 [ESV](#))

Mark wants us to know that he is writing a Gospel and not a biography. The word "Gospel" simply means "Good News". Mark is not starting a discussion with his readers, but making an announcement to us. Mark's intent is not to give us facts about Jesus so much as to tell us the good news about Jesus that will bring joy to our hearts. This spiritual message is historically accurate, yet God sends this good news to us not for the purpose of satisfying our intellectual curiosity, but for the purpose of saving our souls.

The word "Jesus" is the personal name given to Him by God at His birth. Jesus simply means "The LORD saves." Mark's message is that Jesus saves us from our sin.

The word "Christ" is the purposeful title given to Him by God before He is born. Christ is the Greek word for "Messiah". Jesus is the One prophesied all through the OT who comes as the Messiah King and Deliverer. Mark's message is that Jesus is King of all Kings and worthy of worship and obedience.

The word "Son of God" is the powerful identity of Jesus who exists for all eternity past as God of very God. Mark's message is that Jesus came from heaven to earth to bring His life to us. The truth of Jesus' deity strikes any thinking heart, but more so to the Jew who learned from the Bible that the LORD

is One. **Mark wants us to know that Jesus equality with God is the foundation stone of the Good News.**

As a church family, we are at the starting line of a series that will change us if we receive it by faith. It is a sermon series where every week we are going to dwell upon the Person of Jesus . . . what potential God sets before us. I pray that we feel like people who have been given a treasure map and are taking the first steps in the journey to the cave of unimaginable gold and jewels! Are you ready to go on an adventure together?

Open your heart and let God prepare you for the arrival of His Son to your life.

Main Idea: The coming of Jesus to our lives is so significant that it requires heart preparation. Joy to the world the Lord is come! Let every heart prepare Him room! And heaven and nature sing!

God is preparing the way for us so that every day we will encounter His Son afresh and receive life from Him. How does God the Father prepare the way for His Son?

God prepares us for His Son's arrival by . . .

1. **Communicating to us ahead of time.**
2. **Choosing a forerunner**
3. **Calling us to repent.**

God prepares us for His Son's arrival by . . .

1. **Communicating to us ahead of time.**

When we have a really really important event that we want people to come to, we send out announcements way ahead of time so that people would be ready when the day arrives. So you might get a card in the mail that says, "Save the Date!" and then reads Johnny and Susie are getting married on January 5, 2032! (Well, maybe not that far ahead.). After the solar eclipse this past year, one of our office staff told us that there would be a complete solar eclipse over Hanna City on October (find the answer!)

The more important the event, the more effort is made to communicate the happening ahead of time. Mark reminds us that the coming of Jesus is so important on the LORD's calendar that He sent out announcements about it centuries prior to the event. The LORD wants all humanity to be ready!

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,’” (Mark 1:2-3 [ESV](#))

Mark is quoting from two OT prophets.

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. . . .” (Malachi 3:1 [ESV](#))

“A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” (Isaiah 40:3 [ESV](#))

Mark reminds us that God not only communicates centuries ahead of time that the Messiah is going to come but that Jesus’ coming is so important that **God even communicates ahead of time that Jesus’ forerunner is going to come to prepare the world for the Messiah’s arrival!**

Imagine that a couple send you a Save the Date announcement for their wedding 16 months in advance. You think, “*A little unusual . . . but I guess they want me to plan ahead to be there.*” But then imagine that every two weeks, you receive another “Save the Date” announcement from this couple for the same wedding! Each announcement is on different paper with different images that capture your attention. You think, “**Now THAT is really unusual.**” Six months in to this and you look at the twelve creative cards that have been sent to you over the past six months. What do you think? Maybe you think “Overkill.” **But you know that these folks REALLY REALLY want you to be at this wedding!”**

Friends, God sent written announcements about his Son’s coming to the world over and over and over for a 1000 years! Jesus is so important that God wants none of us to miss it!

Imagine you miss the wedding of your friend who sent you the many announcements ahead of time. You run into him and he asks, “**Why did you not come to my wedding?**” “Oh I forgot that it was happening that weekend.” “Oh, I did not have time to adjust my schedule.” **He knows the truth . . . he did everything to help you make it, but you were not really interested in coming.**

Application: We prepare for Jesus’ coming to us by listening to God’s many announcements about Jesus in His Book. These announcements help us to

know the priority that God places on His Son and to confirm the reliability of God's promises!

God prepares us for His Son's arrival by . . .

1. Communicating to us ahead of time.

2. Choosing a forerunner

"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and" (Mark 1:4 [ESV](#))

Who is "John"? John is Jesus' cousin. We first meet him while he is in his mom's womb in Matthew's gospel.

Zechariah and Elizabeth are a godly couple who worship and serve the LORD. But they are old and have no children. They have prayed about that for a LONG time, but no baby. They are at an age when they consider that the LORD does not will for them to have a baby.

"But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John." (Luke 1:13 [ESV](#))

Elizabeth conceives. And six months later the angel Gabriel tells Elizabeth's niece, a virgin named Mary, that she is going to conceive and give birth to a boy whom she is to name Jesus. Gabriel tells Mary that her son will be the Messiah King whose reign will never end!

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God." (Luke 1:34-35 [ESV](#))

Gabriel also tells Mary that her aunt Elizabeth is pregnant! That is such good news that she immediately travels to visit her.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:39-42 [ESV](#))

We are not told whether John and Jesus saw each other growing up as boys in the same extended family. John MacArthur imagines the conversation that may have taken place when the moms got together. **Mary says to Elizabeth, “How’s your boy?”** Elizabeth might respond, **“Odd, really odd. You know, he’s lived his whole life apart from us, he lives out in the desert. How’s your boy?”** To which Mary likely said, **“You know, he’s perfect in every way.”**

We know from Isaiah and Malachi that John’s role is to “Prepare the way” for the Messiah. This mission is emphasized twice in vv. 2-3. **But what does it mean to “Prepare the Way” for the Messiah?**

In Bible times, when a king would travel, a team of servants would go ahead of him to make the path smooth. They would remove any fallen trees, they would level deep mud holes, they would fix any problems with bridges. The point was for the King to have as smooth of a road as possible. This is what John the Baptist did for Jesus.

The rough places that needed help were not physical obstacles, but spiritual and social. The people’s hearts were hard with unbelief. The religious culture was dead with ritual. Everyone was used to living their best life right now and they were not ready to meet the LORD. So John’s ministry is to prepare the hearts of people so that when they see and hear the King, they would receive Him as their King.

How did John prepare the way for Jesus’ ministry to Israel and to the world?

- 1. He lived in a way that pointed to Jesus.**
- 2. He preached a message of repentance.**

Consider first how John lived and what his life communicated.

1. First notice, John’s location.
2. Notice then John’s clothes and diet.
3. Finally, notice John’s attitude.

John’s location: John lived and served God in the wilderness. In order to hear John preach, the people of Israel had to go out of the comfortable city and enter the Judean wilderness . . . a place nearly uninhabitable. One commentator describes this area as *“a desolation, a vast undulating expanse of barren chalky soil covered with pebbles, broken stones and rocks. Here and there a bit of brushwood appears with snakes crawling underneath”*. (Hendrickson) Another person says: *‘It shimmers in the haze of the heat, the limestone rock is hot and*

blistering, and sounds hollow to the feet as if there was some vast furnace underneath.

If John wants to draw a crowd to hear him speak, this pragmatically seems like the last place to hold meetings. It is not convenient to get to. It is hot and miserable. Yet this is the place that God ordains for His people to prepare themselves for the coming of the Messiah!

Why do you God has Jesus' forerunner living in the wilderness? We have to go back to the wilderness wanderings in the time of Moses to understand.

The wilderness symbolized God's judgment upon a people who are filled with unbelief and rebellion. God placed the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years as a judgment against their sin and unbelief. God is saying, *"When you go out to hear the one who announces my Son, I want you to prepare your hearts by thinking about your sin and remembering my judgment. I want you to dwell upon my holiness and upon your utter need for My mercy."*

You think that all is well with you spiritually. You have a beautiful Temple in which to worship. You have elaborate religious rituals. You have a priesthood who live in luxury. Go out to the wilderness and there discover who you really are!" **John's wilderness home speaks of the wilderness condition of the souls of the people.**

"And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;" (Mark 7:6 [ESV](#))"

Truth: God prepares our hearts to receive Jesus by reminding us of His judgment upon sin.

John lives in the wilderness. Notice his clothes.

"Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey." (Mark 1:6 [ESV](#))

John looks and lives like the commonest of men. **John never looks at a menu.** He eats the same food day after day. He does not spend much time preparing meals. Simple food. **John never gets up in the morning and asks,** *"Hmmm. What shall I wear today?"* He has one set of clothes and they are unimpressive. He is not "cultured", nor swayed by the elitist fashions, nor uses his external person to win

anyone's favorable attention. **He lives a life free from the love of this present world.** John's clothes and diet speak a rebuke to our natural yearning for people's approval and applause. John is not interested in receiving "likes" or positive comments on social media. **When John speaks about the Messiah, he does not want anyone thinking that John is the cool one.**

John's everyday life choices illustrate the message of repentance that he preaches. His clothes and food reveal **a life of continual repentance from worldly desires.** In every detail, John embodies God's message.

Truth: God prepares our hearts to receive Jesus by confronting our vain desires for the world with its temporal pleasures and its empty approval.

We have noted John's location and his lifestyle. Let us learn now from his attitude.

"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.'" (Mark 1:7 [ESV](#))

John knows that Jesus is so far above him in priority, in importance, in worth, in position, in authority, in glory. John feels unworthy even to act as Jesus' servant.

Truth: God prepares hearts to receive Jesus by showing how much more important He is than we are.

God prepares us for His Son's arrival by . . .

1. Communicating to us ahead of time.
2. Choosing a forerunner

3. Calling us to repent.

"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (Mark 1:4 [ESV](#))

"I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:8 [ESV](#))

If John were our pastor, he would rotate three subjects to us. He would speak about repentance to convict our soul. He would then speak about forgiveness to give us hope. And finally, he would teach about Jesus' power and saving work. To this day, we need to hear often about these three subjects. They are never far

from the heart of one who is near to Jesus. We focus this morning on “repentance”.

When people came out to hear John preach, they do not not hear a humorous and motivational message that makes them feel good or that helps them with their finances. John’s message is one of God’s holy judgment upon sin. John uses God’s law to reveal the righteousness of God, the depravity of their lives and their need for repentance. Remember that most of these people are “morally upright” by human standards. Yet John opens their eyes to their unreadiness to meet God.

Truth: Repentance prepares our hearts to receive Jesus and all the good that He brings to us. Without repentance, our sins blind us to His glory and harden us to His tender mercies.

After the message, John calls the people into the river for a baptism of repentance. The baptism is a symbol of their need to be washed by God on the inside. Baptism is a public confession of a wicked heart before the LORD and a belief in God’s promise to make them clean on the inside.

Baptism for the Christian church has become normal over the last 2000 years. But in John’s day the practice of baptism is new and radical for the Jews. The baptism that the Jews of John’s day knew was baptism for a Gentile who wanted to become a Jew. In that baptism, the Gentile repudiates his identity as a Gentile and declares his desire to become a Jew. **For a Jew to be baptized meant that the Jew confesses he/she is as unclean as a Gentile before the LORD!**

*“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.**” (Mark 1:5 [ESV](#))*

What is repentance?

Repentance is a turning from self-rule toward submission to God. Repentance is a discovery not that man’s sin is a bad, terrible, soul-destroying thing. **But repentance is personal. Repentance is the discovery that MY SIN is a bad, terrible, soul-destroying thing.**

Repentance is an active response of my soul to God and His righteousness. Repentance knows and feels the heavy guilt and dark evil of my own sin.

Repentance quakes under the recognition of the penalty of eternal torment I have merited by our sin.

Repentance is a turning away from my own sin in fear, in disgust, in despair, in shame, in sorrow.

Repentance is more than saying "I'm sorry." Repentance is more than emotional remorse over our actions. Repentance is a deep conviction of the evil of our sin and a longing for practical righteousness. Repentance on the inside leads to life change on the outside.

Repentance is a plea for God to meet us where we are. Repentance understands that we are not where we should be and that we cannot meet God halfway. Repentance despairs of drawing near to the LORD in our own merits. **Repentance relies upon God in mercy to fulfill all that is required to reconcile us to God.**

Repentance is a trusting hope that Jesus atones for the wrongs we have committed against Him. Repentance acknowledges that the LORD must judge our sin with the punishment that is due to it. Repentance knows that the debt we owe to the LORD's righteousness cannot be repaid by our guilty hands.

Repentance does not lean on repentance for forgiveness of sin, but repentance leans wholly on God's mercy.

Repentance sets aside the ideas that we can make up for our wrongs by doing more rights, or by shedding more tears of contrition, or by the passing of more years of time. Repentance falls helplessly at God's feet, asking Him to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. **Repentance flows from a heart broken over our own sin.**

Friend, is your heart broken over your own sin? The natural man's heart breaks over the sins of others. But the Spirit of God produces in us a repentance that crushes our spirit with the weight of our dark thoughts, words, attitudes and behaviors. **Is your heart broken by your own sin?** If so, you are on the path that prepares you to receive Jesus when He comes to you each day.

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance. Martin Luther's First Thesis posted on the Wittenberg Door.

What sins do I need to repent from? Open your Bibles and begin to read. Read about resentment, read about sexual impurity, read about greed and covetousness, read about drunkenness, read about corrupt talk, read about

worshipping other gods, read about taking the name of the LORD in vain, read about hypocrisy, read about hardness of heart, read about stubbornness, read about self-righteousness, read about lying and deception, read about unclean thoughts, read about the praise of men, read about the desire to get rich, read about anger, read about slowness to hear, read about coarse jesting, read about golden calf worship, read about refusal to forgive someone who wronged you, read about conflicts and divisions, read about tolerance for evil, read about revenge, read about false doctrines. What sins DON'T I need to repent from?

Next week we will discover that repentance is not only the focus of John the Baptist's gospel, but also of Jesus' gospel.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15 [ESV](#))

Friends there is hope in repentance. John did not only preach judgment. He also preached the Good News that God is making a way for us to be made new on the inside. **He is proclaiming the mercy of God in Lamb of God who is coming to take away our sins from us.**

Truth: Repentance is the key that opens door of God's forgiveness. We can only be free of the punishment our sin deserves through the forgiveness that repentance brings to us. We can only be cleansed of the stain and filth of our sin by the forgiveness that God gives when we repent.

*"Be ashamed when you sin,
don't be ashamed when you repent –
Sin is the wound, repentance is the medicine.
Sin is followed by shame;
repentance is followed by boldness
Satan has overturned this order
and given boldness to sin and shame to repentance."
St. John Chrysostom, AD 357-407*

Question: Have you repented of your sin?

Truth: No one is ready to meet Jesus and benefit from Him until they have met their sins and become undone by them.

"I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:8 [ESV](#))

John is not pointing us to himself, but to Jesus. John cannot save anyone. We need Jesus to be made whole. Only Jesus can forgive our sins. Only Jesus can stand with us on the Day of Judgment. Only Jesus can atone for our sins through His blood. Only Jesus can impart the gift of the Holy Spirit. Only Jesus can cleanse us. Only Jesus can give us power to defeat Satan. Only Jesus can open heaven's doors. Only Jesus can invite us into God's family.

My soul, sit down and recognize that a just God is bound to punish sin; then consider how that punishment all falls upon the Lord Jesus, and fall down in humble joy at the feet of Him whose blood has made atonement for you. It is useless when conscience is aroused to trust in feelings and evidences for comfort; this is a bad and sorry habit. The only cure for a guilty conscience is the sight of Jesus suffering on the cross. C. Spurgeon

Question: Have you prepared your heart to receive Him? I ask that of those who have never trust in Him as Savior and Lord. I ask that of those who have trusted him as Savior long ago. Are you prepared to receive Him? We need Him every day. He knocks on the door of our heart every day.

Look at the pains God made to prepare us to receive Him daily! He gave us many advance announcements! He sent a forerunner to tell us to repent!

Conclusion:

Main Idea: The coming of Jesus to our lives is so significant that it requires heart preparation. Joy to the world the Lord is come! Let every heart prepare Him room! And heaven and nature sing!

Prepare Him Room by Paul Baloche

Who is man
That you would care for us
You clothed yourself in flesh
To draw us near

In sinful man
You've made our hearts your home
To make your glory known
Your redemption clear

Let every heart
Prepare him room
For nothing else
Compares with you

Restore the joy
Of our salvation Lord
Prepare our hearts
For more of you

No greater love
Has anyone than this
To sacrifice the gift
Of your only son

So we lay aside
All the earthly things
And all that comes between
This great divide