

Sunday School Lessons - 3rd Quarter 20110
August, September, October
Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Preview of Mark

John Mark is recognized as the writer of this Gospel. Although not an apostle, he served actively in the early church and associated closely with the apostles. History indicates that Mark recorded in writing what Peter shared in his preaching ministry.

The four Gospel records could be called portraits of the person and work of Christ because they present four different poses of one unique personality. Matthew presents Christ as a king, but Mark reveals Him as a servant. Luke portrays Jesus as the Son of Man, and John displays Him as the Son of God.

Consistent with Mark's portrayal of Christ as a servant, he does not record Christ's birth or genealogy. A servant's work was much more important than his genealogy. Hence, Mark immediately presents Christ as the servant introduced (1:1-8), the approved servant (1:9-13), the teaching servant (1:14-22), the ministering servant (1:23-34), the praying servant (1:35), and the compassionate servant (1:40-45). Many of these aspects of Christ's servant-hood are expanded in the rest of the book.

Mark directed his writing primarily to a Roman or Gentile audience. Seldom does he refer to the Old Testament, because the Gentiles were not familiar with it. Mark emphasizes the absolute authority of Jesus in accomplishing His work. He gives more attention to what Jesus did than to what He said. These characteristics enabled Mark's writing to communicate effectively with those who lived under Roman cultural influence.

Mark gives a fast-moving account. The key words, immediately and straightway, appear thirty-six times. Many of Jesus' lengthy discourses, such as the Sermon on the Mount, are either omitted or greatly condensed. Twelve of the sixteen chapters begin with and, indicating their connection to the previous chapters.

This Gospel records many miracles as it pictures Jesus ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of humanity. The thrust of this book is summed up in Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Lesson 1 31 July 2011

Jesus, the Servant of God

Lesson Scope: *Mark 1:1-28*

Lesson Focus

The Old Testament closes with the prophets declaring the spiritual failure and impending judgment of God's people. Mingled with these prophecies of judgment were glimpses of light and hope for the future. Mark referenced these glimpses in his opening words by quoting from Malachi 3:1-2 and Isaiah 40:3-4.

A very dark period settled over Israel as the prophets fell silent for four hundred years. God's people waited through these dark, difficult, and sometimes even dangerous times. But the light began to dawn as John the Baptist commenced his ministry.

The Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist heralded "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The Gospel continued to unfold as Jesus commenced His public ministry. This lesson focuses on some very basic truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Personal repentance and amendment of life do not appeal to the natural man.

It is important to all that we reinforce the Biblical teaching that conversion must be followed by a new life and this applies to us as well. We need to understand such truths as separation from the world, separation of church and state, nonresistance, the literal observance of the ordinances, and the permanence of marriage. In addition there is also the need for God's people to unashamedly promote these truths in outreach and evangelistic efforts, at home and abroad. Those who are convinced of the truth of the Gospel must also be convinced that these truths are for others. The Gospel of Jesus Christ continues to be proclaimed and promoted today by those who have received Christ personally and are, by God's grace, living holy lives.

Lesson Aim: To glean truths from the preparation for, and the beginning of, Christ's earthly ministry.

Theme Verses: *Mark 1:14-15.* Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Lesson Text:

The Preeminent Servant

Mark 1:1-4 ¹ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; ² As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. ³ The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁴ John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Mark 1:7-8 ⁷ And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. ⁸ I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

The Approved Servant

Mark 1:9-13 ⁹ And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. ¹⁰ And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: ¹¹ And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. ¹² And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

The Ministering Servant

Mark 1:14-28 ¹⁴ Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵ And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. ¹⁶ Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. ¹⁷ And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. ¹⁸ And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. ¹⁹ And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. ²⁰ And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him. ²¹ And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. ²² And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. ²³ And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, ²⁴ Saying, Let *us* alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Naz-

areth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. ²⁵ And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. ²⁶ And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. ²⁷ And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine *is* this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. ²⁸ And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.

Questions for Study

The Preeminent Servant

1. What attitudes about himself did John the Baptist possess?
2. What was John's central message in his preaching?
3. To what did John refer when he spoke of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

The Approved Servant

4. What was significant about Jesus' baptism?
5. What encouragements do believers receive from Jesus' temptations in the wilderness?

The Ministering Servant

6. What do we learn from the response of the four fishermen to Jesus' call?
7. Why should Jesus' servants not be intimidated in reaching out to others with the Gospel message?
8. List some ways the fame of Christ is spread abroad today.

Analyzing the Passage

In verse 7 John expressed unworthiness to perform for Jesus the duties of even a servant. He recognized the great superiority of Christ to himself. John's reference to baptism by the Holy Spirit in verse 8 undoubtedly refers to Pentecost.

When John baptized Jesus, God spoke in an audible voice. Two other times in Scripture God's voice is recorded: on the Mount of Transfiguration and just prior to Christ's crucifixion (John 12:28).

The reference to Christ's being with the wild beasts (Mark 1:13) perhaps accents the privation or even suggests that Satan attempted to add terror to Jesus' temptations. However, the companionship of the angels ministering to Him far outweighed any forces Satan could bring against our Lord.

The "time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:15) compares to "the fullness of the time" (Galatians 4:4). It also relates to the seventy weeks and sixty-two weeks of Daniel 9:24-26.

The unclean spirit of this man (Mark 1:23-24) gave an accurate testimony of Christ. The forces of evil are well aware of Christ and His work. Authority (Mark 1:22, 27) is defined as "force, competency, or mastery." Jesus' authority was uniquely different from that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Principles and Applications

The Preeminent Servant

1. John fulfilled the long foretold mission of proclaiming the coming of the earth's Redeemer (Mark 1:1-3). Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 spoke of John as the one who would prepare the way for Christ to preach the Gospel. John spoke of himself as pointing men to Christ, who would increase, while he himself would decrease (John 3:30).

2. Repentance for the remission of sins was the central theme of John's preaching and baptism (Mark 1:4). Repentance needs to be expressed to prove its validity. Not all who came to John for baptism were truly repentant, and John openly challenged them to show the fruits of repentance in their lives (Matthew 3:7-9). Today, salvation is through Christ alone and not without true repentance and amendment of one's life.

3. John preached that Jesus is central in the great theme of redemption (Mark 1:7-8). John pointed men to Jesus and the baptism of the Spirit. Evangelization must point men to the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The messengers of the Gospel must always be kept in the background. Today's entertainment-centered "worship" and social gospel do not point men to a saving relationship with Jesus that issues into true discipleship. They lead rather to a false hope.

The Approved Servant

4. Even Jesus subjected Himself to John's baptism as an example in doing all that God requires (Mark 1:9). Jesus did not need baptism as a symbol of spiritual cleansing, but He had John baptize Him as an example to His followers who needed to express that a change had taken place. Jesus' baptism was also His formal initiation into His earthly ministry.

5. The great plan of redemption is the work of the triune God (Mark 1:10-11).

The Trinity had this plan prepared even from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). The presence of each is clearly revealed in the form of the dove, the Father's audible voice, and of course, Jesus' physical body.

6. Jesus demonstrated the necessity and possibility of victory over temptation (Mark 1:12-13). Jesus was not exempt from Satan's efforts to cause

Him to fall; neither will His followers escape temptation. But, praise God, there is always "a way to escape," that no one needs to be overcome by temptation.

Verses 12 and 13 indicate that it was God's will for Jesus to go to the wilderness, and that Satan took advantage of this circumstance by endeavoring to cause Christ to fall. Whatever our circumstances and regardless how severe the temptation, we can always claim the promise of the Holy Spirit's presence and power. He will strengthen us for whatever temptation or test we face.

The Ministering Servant

7. Jesus taught that repentance and faith are essential for entering the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15). John did not specifically mention faith in his preaching. Jesus often emphasized faith in relating to individuals. Faith and repentance are inseparable. True faith expresses itself in a repentant attitude and a desire to be obedient to the commands of Christ.

Many religious people emphasize faith. But only Scriptural obedience to Christ and submission to the direction of the faithful church will satisfy God's demands of righteousness and true holiness. Those who promote faith and yet overlook unpopular doctrines of the Scripture such as separation from the world, the permanence of marriage, and the separation of church and state, have no solid basis for faith. We show our faith by our works.

8. Spreading the Gospel message is the work of many "fishers of men" (Mark 1:16-20). Jesus "began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). The work of spreading the Gospel has been committed to those who have been called by the Lord. This includes all those who have repented and committed their lives to the Lord. Those who have been reconciled to God are naturally involved in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19, 20).

9. The force of Jesus' doctrine and power is unmatched (Mark 1:21-28). Christ's teaching and the effects of His ministry were unmistakably from God in heaven. Anyone who was honest with himself and the evidence freely acknowledged this.

10. Christ's power at work results in the spreading of His fame (Mark 1:27-28). There is great power in a changed life. We may think at times that our testimony for truth is quite insignificant. But as we espouse Christ and His cause, His fame continues to spread abroad today.

Important Teachings

1. John fulfilled the long-foretold mission of proclaiming the coming of earth's Redeemer (Mark 1:1-3).
2. Repentance for the remission of sins was the central theme of John's preaching and baptism (Mark 1:4).
3. John preached that Jesus is central in the great theme of redemption (Mark 1:7-8).
4. Even Jesus subjected Himself to John's baptism as an example in doing all that God requires (Mark 1:9).
5. The great plan of redemption is the work of the triune God (Mark 1:10-11).
6. Jesus demonstrated the necessity and possibility of victory over temptation (Mark 1:12-13).
7. Jesus taught that repentance and faith are essential for entering the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15).
8. Spreading the Gospel message is the work of many "fishers of men" (Mark 1:16-20).
9. The force of Jesus' doctrine and power is unmatched (Mark 1:21-28).
10. Christ's power at work results in the spreading of His fame (Mark 1:27-28).

Answers to Questions

1. What attitudes about himself did John the Baptist possess?
He had a humble attitude, not taking to himself any credit in his preaching. He considered himself an unworthy servant. He always pointed men away from himself and toward Christ.
2. What was John's central message in his preaching?
He preached repentance for the remission of sins. He was interested in seeing men turn from sin.
3. To what did John refer when he spoke of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
He was indicating that his baptism with water was pointing and leading men to the baptism of the Spirit, the power for holy living. He was prophesying of Pentecost, which would be the birth of the New Testament church. Thereafter God would dwell within men through the Holy Spirit.
4. What was significant about Jesus' baptism?
Jesus was baptized to "fulfil all righteousness." He was an example for all believers who must "repent, and be baptized." Their baptism is the "answer of a good conscience." Jesus needed no repentance or change of life.
5. What encouragements do believers receive from Jesus' temptations in

the wilderness?

a. We should not be surprised when a spiritually stimulating experience is immediately followed by trial or temptation.

b. There is always spiritual power available for the followers of Jesus. "The angels ministered unto him."

c. Trials and temptations may have a long duration. Jesus was in the wilderness forty days.

6. What do we learn from the response of the four fishermen to Jesus' call? We should follow Jesus immediately when He calls. We should not allow material things to deter us in responding to Jesus' call.

7. Why should Jesus' servants not be intimidated in reaching out to others with the Gospel message?

Jesus' servants are in contact with the One who has been given all power. The power of Christ is able to save anyone who comes by faith to full surrender to Christ, regardless what the situation is.

8. List some ways the fame of Christ is spread abroad today.

a. By genuine conversion and the consistent living of God's people

b. By Christian schools

c. By brotherhood assistance

d. By nonresistant responses

Summarizing the Lesson

John the Baptist was a servant to Christ. In fact, he did not even consider himself worthy to fill that role for One so great as the Lamb of God.

And the Lamb? "Who, being in the form of God ... took upon him the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:6-7). He did "always those things that [pleased the Father]." "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9).

Let us confess Him Lord of our lives and we His unworthy servants.

Research Guide

1. Read the chapter titled "Redemption" in *Doctrines of the Bible*.

2. Read the references from the four Gospels on "Jesus, The Christ—Mission Of" in Nave's Topical Bible.