

Mark 1:1-11 Series: The Gospel of Mark

Introductory thoughts shared at time of Gospel Lesson. I've added vs.1-3 to the Bible Lesson appointed for the Baptism of our Lord. Here are a couple notes:

- If you'd like a theme for the book of Mark, a theme as good as any can be pulled together from the opening line: "the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" ... Jesus means: he saves. Christ tells: He is God's appointed/anointed one, the promised Messiah. He is God, God the Son, come to rescue us. That is gospel – the good news.
- You'll find here the only OT quote you'll find in the book of Mark. This indicates: Mark's original recipients were most likely people from other nations besides Jewish descent. They were probably largely Roman. Mark, in the coming chapters, will explain Aramaic terms and Hebrew customs along the way.
- Instead of added Old Testament quotes for support/proof – the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to fill this gospel account with Jesus' actions in rapid succession. Proof from Jesus' own mouth and hands of who he is and what he came to do.

Mark 1:1-11

1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"-- 3 "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" 4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." 9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Mark 1:4-11 Series: The Gospel of Mark Sermon 1

I pulled out my old high school/college trunk not too long ago. Many of you know how we got Simeon ready to go off to high school recently. We tried to prepare him. We talked about different things from our high school years. Eventually I went to dig something out of the trunk to show the kids. (We found that my first couple yearbook photos were as awful as I remembered.) I had to move stuff in the trunk, in order to get to the books. I came to... some track medals, varsity letters and various certificates - athletic / academic. Even though I hadn't thought about this stuff for years - and they're no longer something I feel a need to keep - why did I hang onto them for so long?

Why do we? Why do we keep around such hardware and scraps of paper? Is it because they're something tangible that reminds of accomplishments? Maybe. Maybe there's something deeper though: more than wins, or a class rank. They may remind us of the approval we saw on the faces of parents and coaches, teachers and peers.

Think of this basic truth: we yearn for acceptance and approval from those we respect, those we care about.

That's still true in our grown up world, right? To hear our boss say, "Well done!" – To have our spouse offer, "You really made my day" – to receive thanks or appreciation from a friend... we crave such approval.

Let's get to the most important relationship for each of us: our relationship with our Father in heaven.

Were you to win all the awards the world has to offer, would it even be enough to gain the approval of our God by your own efforts? Our verses this morning hold the answer: "how does one receive the approval of God from heaven?"

Search the world, and you'll find many answers offered to that question. But how much validity do they hold? The answer to that is going to be sorted out by how they handle sin. Do they dismiss it? downplay it? deny its presence, or acknowledge its presence but deny the depth of the impact?

"Opinions vs. the Facts" was the title of an article printed in the Fayetteville Observer (Dec.3, 2014; page 11A). A quote led me to save the page: "You're entitled to your own opinion but you're not entitled to your own facts."

The article was about a hotly debated social issue. The author's point was: no matter what side of the issue you're on, when it comes to facts, they remain facts whether you like them or not.

The same principle applies when you come to the spiritual.

If you don't call sin a "sin," it is still sin. And it's damning.

I read somewhere else a quote from a self-help author and motivational speaker: "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change" – Wayne Dyer, Bottom Line Personal Nov.1, 2014. Did you catch that? Read it again and see if you agree. Sometimes that might be true. But not always.

People have tried to do that with sin and its guilt time-and-again. But that course of action has never rendered a change. The sinner still remains with their sin... and its guilt. One can try to look at sin from the angle of "it's not that bad." Or, how about "it's not really my fault..."? Or, the ever common: "God must understand – he surely won't punish any of us – well, maybe the worst people, but not you and me." But try all you like, the facts remain: "*if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves – we make God out to be a liar*" (1 John 1) - "*for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God...*" (Romans 3). And the depth of the impact is: "*If we are guilty of breaking God's law at just one point, we are guilty of breaking all of it*" (James 2:10) & "*the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). Sin can't be ignored. Sin can't be wished away or reasoned away. Our holy God cannot allow anyone with sin into his eternal presence. One needs to be holy to have God's approval.

Where am I going to go for a solution to sin – to be rid of its real guilt? I don't want excuses, because when they are exhausted I know I'll only end up walking away empty, unsatisfied, left longing for approval. "God, what's your answer?"

There's a reason a mass of humanity went streaming out to see John the Baptizer. Realize, this was no 20 minute drive in their day. Those in Jerusalem would have made a 20 mile trek on foot, across pretty tough terrain – down and uphill along the way. This meant precious hours away from completing business deals. People were giving up days that otherwise could have been spent relaxing.

Why? Why did they go? There was a need, the deep need of the soul. And John's message from God addressed it. Listen:

“John came preaching.” The heart of his message was: “repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

“And all sorts of people from the Judean countryside and from Jerusalem journeyed out to him.

They confessed their sins.”

First key truth: take responsibility for sin. Take God's Word about what is right and wrong, and admit the failures in your own life.

What does that look like for us today? Repentance, confession, is an ongoing activity. Why? Our sinful flesh rages. The devil works to entice us. We fall for sins – ones which we might try to excuse. Instead of gossip we're tempted to call it “gabbing”; but when the conversation gets to our neighbor and it is false, either a lie or something that is true enough but not intended for their good (but rather to harm them)... it's sin. Kids, instead of “disrespect” you may want to call the way you put down your teachers or gripe about parents “just kidding around.” It's sin. As we get older, the temptations shift but don't go away. For “course joking” & “unwholesome talk” we might apply euphemisms like “adult humor.” Instead of searching for “Whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is admirable” to think about, if we merely follow culture along to whatever is most appealing, realize: Whatever leads to lustful thoughts or hatred or covetousness is sin.

That's just some examples. You can take personal inventory. Call it sin, when that's what it is.

“We're guilty.” “We confess it.” “How could we ever have the approval of our God now?”

People streamed out to John to hear his message. Mark recorded it for us to hear. It is the news of: *repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

“Now what's this about forgiveness of sins?” & “What's this about the Lord coming?”

Mark tells us from line one of this Bible book to expect good news. And before the ink is fully dry on line one, Mark takes us out to the Jordan, to see this event, which confirms who Jesus is and stamps God's approval on Jesus' work. Let's see why this is so good!

Now, I've heard a lot of confusion expressed about Jesus' baptism. Jesus' baptism is different from the baptism God gives us, where he washes away our sin. The Bible is clear: Jesus didn't have any sin at any time in his life. So what was Jesus' baptism about? Let's look closely at what God himself does and says at Jesus' baptism.

The heavens parted. The Holy Spirit made his presence known. And God the Father spoke from heaven: “with you, my Son, I am well pleased.”

Don't deny the fact: Jesus was tempted his whole life long. He was tempted like you and me in every way. He had neighbors, like we do. He was a student. He had parents placed over him. And the neighbors and the teachers and the parents and the peers weren't perfect like him. Imagine the temptations he faced to bad mouth, to gripe. But he never gave in. As one of you mentioned in Bible Class last Sunday, some of the mediums have changed with the technology at our fingertips, but there were the same kind of temptations around back then as now. But he never did lust or hate or covet; never did an unwholesome word ever leave his mouth.

He's already 30 years old on this day as he stands in the Jordan. And all you really need to know about every day of those 30 years is summarized in God's Word from heaven: "I am well pleased."

What does that mean for us?

I asked you in one of the survey questions this week to finish the thought: "Jesus is..." One of you answered: "Jesus is Holy." Yes! You are assured of that very fact at his baptism.

And why is that so important and comforting? He lived his holy life for you and me: in your place, and in my place too.

Another one of your replies to "Jesus is..." which I liked so much I included it in our opening video snippet, was: "Jesus is Love... and hope."

Love is spoken from heaven on this day at the Jordan. "You are my Son whom I love." Hang on to this "I love you."

When you see God the Father right after this send Jesus to face head on attack for the 40 days in the desert... hear the echo: "But I love him." When you see the Father send Jesus on to a painful end, like no other living being has felt – when you hear Jesus scream out from more than the physical pain of the cross, when he is left by the Father to feel the abandonment of hell... do not lose sight of the Father's words: "But I love him." And if you say, "Ok, I'll take your word for it that you love him, but why then send him to all that?", hear God answer: "Because I love you too! And this is the only way I would ever be able to say of you, 'This is my son, with him I am well pleased. This is my daughter, with her I am well pleased.'"

"God made him who had no sin – Jesus – to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." – 2 Corinthians 5

This is the good news of Jesus. "Everyone who believes in him has forgiveness of sins" - (Acts 10:43). "Through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" – Ephesians 3:12. We have the answer – the only answer – to how to have God's approval from heaven. The answer is: Jesus. Remain in him. Trust in no other way.

Do you want to know by far the most common answer I received from you to finish the statement: "Jesus is..."? Jesus is... Savior - my Savior - my Savior from sin. This is the news we hear and see to begin our journey through the Bible book Mark. Amen.