

Finding the Way [Mark 1]
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INTRODUCTION

1. I like maps. Ney, I love maps. I'm not exactly sure when it became an obsession of mine.
 - a. It could be that I played the role of navigator on our family vacations.
 - b. It could be because of the organized art that maps can present, scientific beauty.
 - c. I believe the true reason is that I love knowing where I am and where I'm going.
2. And while I'm very in favor of emerging technologies, a GPS can sometime deceive you.
 - a. I've heard of people with a Garman clueless about where they really are.
 - b. The power of the map is placing yourself with a space so you know your location.
3. This evening, we begin a new book of the Bible: the New Testament book of Mark.
 - a. Of the many themes of this book, the one that we will observe is "FINDING THE WAY."
 - b. Introducing the book, we're only examining the first 3 verses.

VERSE 1

"The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

1. The opening sentences of a book are definitive in literature.
 - a. Charles Dickens wrote, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."
 - b. Jane Austen wrote, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."
 - c. Herman Melville wrote, "Call me Ishmael."
2. The first verse of Mark might not be impressive to you.
 - a. But within these simple words is the legend of this roadmap.
 - b. They are a means by which we can understand the rest of the book.
 - c. Let's first parse out the words that form this first sentence.
 - 1) BEGINNING
 - a) An allusion to **Genesis 1:1**—the Christian narrative with powerful implications.
 - b) "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*"
 - 1) This verse binds everything in the universe to the Lord's authority.
 - 2) And it's how we first read about God's movement in the Lord.
 - c) For Mark, this sentence is encapsulated by the word "beginning"
 - 1) The beginning of the book, of Jesus' life, and of God's redemptive plan.
 - 2) And the word choice establishes this as God's master plan.
 - 3) His fallen creation would, through Jesus, see the opportunity for re-creation.
 - 2) GOSPEL
 - a) This word has become popular Christian vernacular.
 - 1) Evangelium or Euangelion (Eu = good, angelion = message)
 - 2) But while we think its origin is Christian, it really isn't.
 - b) In the time of Mark's writing this, the word "gospel" was connected with Rome.
 - 1) It was used first in the acclamations of Caesar Augustus, Roman emperor.
 - 2) Dates back to 9BC, describing peace brought by Augustus.
 - 3) In the same inscription, Augustus is also called "Savior."
 - c) Mark's use of the word gospel is an attempt to reclaim how people thought of it.
 - 1) Mark is claiming that true good news isn't centered with the emperor.
 - 2) The good news was actually found in an unknown rabbi from Galilee.
 - 3) Through his death and resurrection, world peace would truly reign.
 - 4) The good news is that the true Savior of the world died for his people.
 - 3) JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD
 - a) As we've mentioned before, the name Jesus means "God Saves."
 - 1) Not to disappoint you, but Christ wasn't his last name. It was a Jewish term.
 - 2) Meaning "anointed one," is implied Messiah (J.C. only used 5x in gospels).

- b) Title "Son of God" is traced to the O.T. but was used in Greco-Roman world.
 - 1) Alexander the Great believed he was a son of Zeus Ammon.
 - 2) Caesar Augustus referred to himself as a son of a God.
 - 3) If a regular person claims this, they're declared insane.
- 3. SO WHAT DOES THE FIRST VERSE INFORM US?
 - a. This book would be a story of good news for all people.
 - b. Usually it's the powerful that own history, but here an obscure rabbi is focus.
 - c. The gospel was not written exclusively to Jews, it's going to be a universal.

VERSES 2,3

It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"— "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

- 1. Before we get sidetracked, note that these words quoted in Mark 1:2-3 are a composite
 - a. These words are found in Exodus 23, Malachi 3, and Isaiah 40.
 - b. Why was the quotation vague? Because Mark is a book for the masses.
 - 1) Jews would be concerned exactly about citation.
 - 2) Its importance isn't from Scriptural authority but from narrative beauty.
 - c. This harbinger story would resonate far beyond Jewish storytelling.
- 2. This text sets up the description of John the Baptist.
 - a. This morning we're examining these words because of a specific word.
 - b. Twice here, the word "way" (SYNONYM: ROAD) is used here. It's deliberate.
 - c. Mark uses the term, "way" or "the way" about a dozen times throughout the book.
 - d. This is notable because this was an early church abbreviation for Christianity.
 - e. **John 14:6** "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
 - f. ROADS FACILITATE JOURNEYS MAKING THEM POSSIBLE.
- 3. We will discover that one of the major themes of the book of Mark is journey.
 - a. People's mobility greatly increased during the life of Jesus.
 - b. The Roman Empire created a network of organized land routes.
 - 1) The Roman Road system comprised of over 63,000 miles of paved roads.
 - 2) It connected government centers, towns large & small, from Spain to Iran.
 - 3) While the road system enabled the Empire to expand quickly, it also served as a means for Christianity to expand.
- 4. The book of Mark is about journey. It's about FINDING THE WAY.
 - a. Jesus is always traveling from here to there with no discernable destination
 - b. It doesn't come into focus until the text hones in at the cross.

TRANSITION: To better understand this concept, we need to know more about Mark

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- 1. Although nothing in the book identifies it, early church tradition all points to John Mark
 - a. He was a cousin of Barnabas, a major player in the book of Acts.
 - b. He was a child during Jesus' life (perhaps a kid) and not an eyewitness.
 - c. He was a close confidant of the apostle Peter.
 - 1) From external/internal evidence: We believe Mark wrote Peter's thoughts.
 - 2) It's a retelling of the Jesus story from the perspective of another.
 - 3) So this perspective is youth through the lenses of youth
 - 4) Mark is likely integrating his narrative into the gospel telling.
 - d. EXAMPLE: Later, Mark became a leader in the early church: a young leader.

2. THE WANDERINGS OF MARK'S IMMATURITY: Acts 15:36-39

"Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.' Barnabas wanted to take John, also called

Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left."

3. THE PATH TOWARDS MARK'S RESTORATION

- a. **1 Peter 5:13** "[She] sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark."
- b. **2 Timothy 4:11** "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry."
- c. Mark started taking the cross seriously and his journey became more corrected.

4. MARK'S MINISTRY REACHES ITS DESTINATION.

- a. He likely ministered in Rome, and other places before ending up in Egypt.
- b. We have information from a 1,000 year old Coptic Christian history book [Ch7]
"In 68 AD . . . while the Christians were celebrating Easter . . . the pagans gathered to kill Mark. It was too much for the pagans to see many of their own people were converting to Christianity . . . the people together with authority moved swiftly against Mark. The crowd attacked the church at the time Mark just completed [communion]. They pushed away the congregation and arrested him and they put a long strong rope around his neck, they pulled him along the streets and the roads of the city. With extreme cruelty they kept pulling him over the rough rocky surface of the streets that his flesh was cut into pieces with the blood all over the roads. Mark thanked God who made him worthy to suffer in His name."
5. Do you see the irony? Mark's gospel and life were defined by a journey.
 - a. And he ended up dying on a road.
 - b. Mark's journey through his own immaturity is discovered and conquered in Jesus
 - c. He found THE WAY and then he found HIS WAY

CONCLUSION

1. A lyric from the band Aerosmith: *Life's a journey, not a destination.*
2. Over the next weeks, as we study the gospel of Mark, I want you to think of your journey.
 - a. Where are you at now and where would you like to be?
 - b. I want to encourage you to move towards even greater Christian maturity
3. We'll see that the gospel of Mark is about **action, movement—what Jesus did.**
 - a. Similarly, we need to be progressing in our journey towards him.
 - b. So my simple message for you this morning, Church: grow-up.
 - c. Age is not an indicator of maturity, so all of us have a move to make.
 - d. **1 Corinthians 13:11** [The Good News Bible]
"When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am an adult, I have no more use for childish ways."
 - e. Are you struggling to FIND YOUR WAY? Grow up