

Prepare the Way

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[0 : 00] My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you this morning. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats but because we're following Jesus together as one community and as we follow Jesus together we become convinced that there's no one so good.

They don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it which is why we come back week after week Sunday after Sunday to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're starting this morning a new series in the Gospel of Mark.

In the Gospel of Mark as all the Gospels simply tells the story of Jesus. It's the story of His life and His death and His resurrection. And we talk about Jesus. We are not talking about an abstraction or an idea or a construct but at risk of saying the obvious we are talking about a historical real man. We are talking about someone who was born in the first century in Bethlehem. Bethlehem was five or six miles south of Jerusalem. And we're also talking about someone who grew up in Nazareth which is 64 or 65 miles north of Jerusalem.

[1 : 11] And I mention that to remind us all, while it may seem clear, Jesus takes on all kinds of different ideas from all kinds of different people. We are talking about a real man who lived in real time and real space.

And as we come to this book, the Gospel of Mark asks two simple questions that we're going to be asking as we go through it. And it's going to be our questions this morning which are simply this. Who is Jesus and how do we respond to Him?

Who is Jesus and how do we respond to Him? Now that second question, you could rephrase it. If you don't consider yourself a Christian, maybe you're not interested in responding to Jesus. You could ask it a different way.

Why would you follow Jesus? Okay, so how do you respond to Him or why would you follow Him? And I use that word because Jesus does. He invites people later in the Gospel of Mark to follow after Him.

And so we're going to jump right in. Mark's known for repeating over and over the word immediately because he moves quickly from scene to scene. This is in fact the shortest of all the Gospels.

[2 : 11] And so in answering those questions this morning, we're going to see two things. First of all, the Savior. And second of all, the sick. We're going to see the Savior and the sick. And so it's with that I invite you to turn with me now to the beginning of the Gospel of Mark.

You can turn in your Bible. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. God tells us that His word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

In other words, God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark. But instead, He has given us His word to show us the way to go. And so that's why we read now, starting at Mark 1, verse 1.

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 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. John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[3 : 21] 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. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

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.

I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word.

Our Father in heaven, we praise you again that you have not left us alone as orphans in a merciless universe, but instead you speak to us, and you speak to us clearly in words that we can understand. We ask that you would do that this morning by your Holy Spirit, that you would open our minds and eyes and heart, that we would be able to see Jesus in this passage, that you would cast a spotlight on him, that he would be more beautiful than we expected or realized, and that you would shape us and change us as a result of it.

[4 : 35] We thank you that we haven't earned these things or deserved them, but instead we simply ask them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. If you have seen Star Wars Episode I, The Phantom Menace, you know that getting into the film, maybe in the middle or maybe three quarters of the way through, you get to see this meeting of the Jedi Council.

And Qui-Gon Jinn is coming before the Council to speak to them, and we find out during this meeting that there's been this prophecy from old times during the Jedi that there's going to be a chosen one who's supposed to come.

And this chosen one is supposed to balance light and dark. He's going to balance the Force, and he's going to end the Sith. He's going to balance what has not been balanced before. And what Qui-Gon Jinn is convinced of that the Council is not is that young Anakin is the one that they've been looking forward to.

He is the one who's going to balance light and dark. He's the one who's going to bring the Sith to an end. And he has reasons for believing this. Qui-Gon Jinn doesn't just make this up. He interacts with Anakin. He realizes that he's especially strong in the Force.

In fact, remember the scene where they measure the midichlorians in his blood, and they're shocked to find out he has 20,000, over 20,000 midichlorians. And as he says, even Master Yoda doesn't have a midichlorian count that high.

[5 : 58] It's not just his midichlorian count, though. Remember when Anakin is sort of flirting with Padme, he tells her he's the only human being who can compete in pod racing.

We find out that's because of his skill in the Force. And finally, when Qui-Gon Jinn is trying to convince the Council that this is the Chosen One, he tells them, look, I sense a convergence in the Force.

In other words, there's a centrality of the Force around this individual that's not there with others.

There's this high concentration of energy. And so Qui-Gon Jinn is trying to convince them.

He's insisting this is the Chosen One, despite the skepticism of those in the room. Now, you might wonder why I'm bringing up Star Wars in the midst of the beginning of the Gospel of Mark. And the reason is this.

There's a connection in this story. Qui-Gon Jinn is trying to say there's a connection between what we have been expecting and looking for in the past and what is now in front of us in the future.

[6 : 52] We've been anticipating this. I think it's now here in front of us. He's the one we have been waiting for. Mark here with John the Baptist is making the same point.

There is a prophecy being fulfilled. Now, don't carry this too far, right? Star Wars is filled with Eastern religion. We're talking about Christianity. But he's saying there's this thing that we've been looking towards for years that has been prophesied that is now before us right here and right now. We see this first of all, verses 2 and 3. He quotes the prophet Isaiah. He's actually quoting Isaiah and Malachi here. Typically, in the New Testament, when someone quotes an Old Testament prophet, they only mention one of them, even if they're quoting multiples.

And he's saying this prophecy, by the way, it's just about God returning to his people after the exile. God giving his people his presence once again and bringing his salvation fully and finally.

This prophecy from Isaiah and Malachi is being fulfilled right now. The thing that you've been waiting for, the thing that you've been longing for, the fact that you've never been fully restored since your exile in Babylon, God's presence, which never returned to the temple, it is finally here.

[8 : 07] The prophecy is being fulfilled. This is the one we've been looking for. And we find here a specific portion of this prophecy that we're pointed to. It's not just that God is returning finally with his presence to his people, but we know from these prophecies that there's meant to be a messenger who comes to prepare the way.

That's the point made in Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3. And Malachi put together as part of what we read earlier this morning. And he is telling us here this messenger that's meant to prepare the way for God is in fact John the Baptist.

That's why we find out in verse 4, we're told John appeared immediately after we're told that this prophecy has come. John is coming as the one who's meant to prepare the way.

He's the messenger that the Old Testament predicted, and so God's salvation is almost here. It's right around the corner. His messenger has shown up to announce and proclaim his presence.

He tells us more just in the fact that John has appeared, though. We'll come back to this repentance for the forgiveness of sins, but we find out John's location. By the way, in Malachi chapter 4, verse 5, we're told that this messenger who's preparing the way for God is going to be Elijah again.

[9 : 30] Remember Elijah, an Old Testament prophet. He's been long dead at this point since the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, and yet Elijah's the one they're looking for to appear again, and that's what he's getting at over and over in these verses.

So first of all, John appears. We have to trust him that John's supposed to be Elijah because he's coming right after the fulfillment of the prophecy, but he gives us reasons to believe. It's not just that Qui-Gon Jinn believes that Anakin's the chosen one, but he has the midichlorian count to back him up.

He has his power in pod racing to back him up. John also brings his evidence here. He is appearing in the wilderness, the same place where Elijah disappeared. So he's reappearing the last place Elijah was seen.

He's also wearing clothes here. Verse 6, camel's hair and a leather belt. That is meant to remind us of Elijah. Not only is he appearing in Elijah's place, he looks like Elijah.

And he's coming here, giving us what we've been looking for forever. We've been looking for the promised return of God. And so this appearance of John the Baptist is meant to build our excitement up, our anticipation that God's return, which has been waited for for centuries, is finally coming.

[10 : 45] We find out about another prophecy fulfilled too. It's not just that John is coming here, but John is coming to prepare the way, right, for the Lord. Lord, this one who is coming, verse 8, is going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

This comes as a fulfillment of prophecies in the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel that talk a lot about the day when God is going to come and finally pour out his Spirit on his people. And so it's not just that God's presence is coming, but his power is coming as well.

When we think about the Holy Spirit in the Bible, there's all kinds of things we could talk about, but the Holy Spirit comes bringing God's power to change hearts and lives. That's what these prophecies in the Old Testament talk about.

And so this one, baptizing with the Holy Spirit, is coming and going to bring that power finally that they've been longing for and looking for that's been promised for centuries in the prophets. The Holy Spirit is going to be able to change hearts and minds.

It's the Holy Spirit that allows us, that causes us to finally be able to admit that we're wrong. It's the Holy Spirit we find out in the New Testament that helps us to understand the truths about God that we would not be able to understand on our own.

[11 : 59] It's the Holy Spirit that changes our affections and our loves. The Spirit has power. In other words, this God is going to come and save his world, and he has the power to do it.

This great and powerful presence that we've been waiting for for so long is finally here. Now I'm going to pause for a second just to explain to you all the difference between baptizing with water and baptizing with the Holy Spirit might seem strange because water and the Holy Spirit don't seem like opposites, and it might also be strange because there's all kinds of people who have all kinds of theories and thoughts about what's meant here, and I want you to think about it simply in this way. The difference between baptism in water and baptism with the Holy Spirit is the difference between the nurse and the doctor. Now if you go and you visit your doctor, you go to the doctor's office, which I know doesn't happen quite as often anymore.

People are just texting their doctors or doing telehealth, but if you actually show up to the office in person, what's going to happen first? Well, you're going to get checked in by the receptionist, right? Then you get called back to the room.

When you're in the room, the nurse is going to come in and talk to you, and what's he going to say? He's going to ask you, what's wrong with you? Why are you here to see the doctor? Now I always

find that to be a silly question because I never set up doctor's appointments without already telling them why I'm there, but for some reason, we have to go through this charade where they ask me why I'm there, so I tell them.

[13 : 31] I am admitting in that moment that I have a need, right? I am saying, I need help. Here's why I'm here. This nurse is helping me to admit that need.

And the nurse can't help me, right? The nurse does not have the power to prescribe. The nurse is not there to diagnose. We might say the nurse is there to prepare the way for the doctor.

And so it's important. I have to admit my need, but my need's not going to be solved by that. What I need, what I'm waiting for is the doctor to show up. And what's going to happen? Well, after my temperature has been taken and I've been weighed and I've admitted my problem, the doctor is going to show up.

She is the one who is going to be able to prescribe and administer and diagnose. She is the one who actually has the power to make things right again. That is what we're talking about here when we look at the difference between baptism with water and baptism with the Holy Spirit.

John is preparing the way for Jesus. He is getting the patients ready, admitting their need, knowing that they need someone greater and more powerful who can bring the Spirit to change them.

[14 : 40] And so they're ready when the doctor shows up. He is getting them ready so that Jesus can come and actually bring real healing and power and transformation.

And so the point is this, that we look at the very beginning of the Gospel of Mark. The world is sick and the one who can save it and heal it is finally here.

The world is sick and the one who can save it and heal it is finally here. Help is on the way. This is not a drill.

That's how Mark begins his Gospel. And so you'll remember I had two questions. Who is Jesus? How do we respond to him? First of all, who is Jesus?

We learn here, he is not just a man. He's also God. These Old Testament passages speak of God's return, his presence. Jesus is the one fulfilling that return.

[15 : 39] He is not just a good teacher, although he does have good teachings. He is divine. He is fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies even if it's not in the way you might expect.

Not only is he not just a man, but God, he also is coming with real and true power. He is coming to provide the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

He's going to use that power to actually save us. A few weeks ago, I referenced Charlie Brown, which if you're old like me, you'll remember.

Remember Lucy always has her booth. It says psychiatric help, five cents, and she has this sign that says the doctor is in. Mark is telling us, finally, after centuries of waiting, the doctor is in.

He is here to save the world. He's going to be the one who comes and brings to an end all shame and sin and disease and death and alienation and wars. And it's important that we see this at the very beginning.

[16 : 41] Mark's giving us an introduction here to lay the groundwork because Jesus' power, that kind of power, we're going to see at work throughout the rest of the gospel. And so keep this introduction in mind as we see Jesus' healings and his teachings and his miracles.

He is a God. He is the God. He is God coming with true and real power to heal this world. And so that's our first answer in the gospel of Mark to who Jesus is.

We'll see more answers as we continue. Mark, though, is calling us not just to look at Jesus but also for a response. If the doctor is here, then what?

Well, we see in verses 2 and 3 that there's meant to be a preparation here. I will send my messenger who will prepare the way and then there's going to be the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord.

And then we find out in verse 4 what this preparation looks like. John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[17 : 45] Now, baptism is this water cleansing as we know that represents God cleansing us from the dirt of sin. We find out here that John's giving a baptism here that requires repentance. He is requiring people to admit and confess that they are sinners in need of help, that they need God's mercy and without it they deserve only his judgment.

And so that simply is how John the Baptist is preparing the way. It goes back to my illustration earlier. John is the nurse getting people in the rooms. He's getting them ready.

They've already admitted that they have need. They've already told this person that they're sick. That is his preparation for Jesus so that when Jesus shows up they are waiting and ready. In fact, Jesus is going to tell us later in the Gospel of Mark in chapter 2 that he is coming as a physician. He says, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners. So Jesus is coming only for those who are willing to admit and confess their need. And there's a challenge here in John's baptism because typically baptism at this point in history in biblical history was only for those who were non-Jews becoming Jews.

[19:00] And yet John here is requiring it of Jews as well. In other words, he's saying your pedigree, your religious background doesn't matter. I don't care if you're a Jew or not. I care if you are able to admit your need.

On top of that, baptism at this time was typically self-administered. It was done by the person being baptized. John, however, is the one performing the baptism, right? They're being baptized by John and so he's telling them not only do you have to admit your need, not only do I not care about your background, you can't help yourself.

You need something outside of you to cleanse you and save you. And so the question for us, brothers and sisters, is how do we respond? How are we preparing the way for Jesus?

How are we prepared for him to come and heal? And the answer is simple. We also have to admit our mess. We can't find healing unless we're willing to admit where we need it.

Imagine how ridiculous it would be if I showed up to the doctor's office, the nurse comes in, she asked me, why are you here to see the doctor? And I said, honestly, it's been a long time since I've seen him and I just really wanted to catch up.

[20:14] You know, I don't know what his kids are up to. Are they still playing baseball? Have they shifted to volleyball? I mean, I have questions. What would the nurse do?

I probably wouldn't know what to do. You're at the doctor's office. Okay, why are you here? What do you need? If you want to be healed, if you want him to help you, you have to be honest and upfront. And so, as we are coming to the gospel of Mark together, the price of admission to this gospel is admitting your need. We are not here as an intellectual exercise.

I am not here to simply give you some kind of insights into this text. We are here to be saved. We are here for Jesus, this great physician to come and to help us.

I want you to think about it like this. If you've been in school, you know there are two ways to take a class. You can take it for credit or you can audit it. If you take it for credit, you have to do all the work, right?

[21:15] You buy the textbooks. You do the reading. You write the papers. You turn in the assignments. Maybe if there's a curse upon you, you have to do some group work. If you audit it, you get to skip all of that, right?

You just get to show up for the lectures. You just get to hear some things. You don't have to engage it very much. You can gain some new ideas. You don't have to do any work. The only problem is that, of course, you don't get any credit for the class.

Brothers and sisters, if we do not admit our need for Jesus, we are only going to audit this class.

Our hope, our goal as God's people is that we would not audit but we would take it.

And if we're going to take it, we have to do the work. It's tempting to believe if we're someone who's been a Christian for a while that we've arrived, that repentance is mainly for other people who have not been around as long as we have and yet we learn here in this gospel we're going to see over and over that the people who see and meet Jesus and receive his healing more than any others are the ones who are going to admit their need.

And so the same is true for us. If we want to take this class, if we want to see real, true joy and healing come from our Lord Jesus to us through his gospel, then we have to admit as well that our marriages might be messier than they look from the outside.

[22:43] The pictures on Instagram might not match the reality behind closed doors. You might have to admit, yes, I struggle with pornography. I have an addiction of this sort or another sort.

I'm someone who's tempted by gossip that's fueled by insecurity and it's torn up my family and my community. I have a tendency to try to control other people rather than to love them.

I'm a salesman. I lied my way to the success I experience now and I'm deathly afraid that I'm going to be found out. I work hard but I do it to make others owe me and so it's a form of deep

manipulation.

The question for us is this, do you truly think you need Jesus? Are you willing to do what John is asking for here to engage in repentance for the forgiveness of sins?

That is who Jesus is coming for. That is who he's bringing his healing for. I know some of you here in this room have experienced over the last couple years real and deep and powerful change.

[23 : 59] We've seen in various circumstances the true power of God at work and you have only experienced that power at work if you have had the humility to confess your need.

In fact, I can't think of anyone who has experienced deep and real and true transformation without the humility and confession that comes with saying I need help.

Things here are not what they need to be or should be. There's powerful things going on right now in our band of brothers Bible study, our men who meet on Saturday mornings.

The reason that God is at work in such a powerful way is because there's deep honesty and humility. That's what gospel transformation requires.

It's the willingness to admit our problems and our need that leads to joy. We're going to talk about this more in Mark chapter 2. I'll simply say this.

[24 : 58] When Jesus talks about the fact that he's come not for the healthy but for the sick, we'll see everyone is actually sick. It's just that some people are willing to admit it. Others are not.

Everyone is actually sick. It's just some people are willing to admit it. Others are not. You can't get help unless you ask.

It's true in this life. It's true as we start this journey with our Lord Jesus in the gospel of Mark. And so as we ask these two simple questions, we've seen just the beginning answer this morning.

Jesus is the man who is also God. He comes with real and true power to heal and to change. We respond to that.

We experience his power and his change as we admit and confess our need for it. You can't get help unless you ask for it.

[25 : 57] in his autobiography About Face, Colonel David Hackworth who became famous for his involvement in the Vietnam War tells about his time in Korea and Vietnam.

And in between that time he spent some of his service in the army and stationed in Germany. And while he was stationed in Germany he had all sorts of interesting things happen to him.

A variety of boring things happened to him. And at one point he had this visit from this man who was very prominent at the time named General Yabakovsky. And Yabakovsky was the chief of the Soviet army in East Germany and he came to inspect their battle group.

And so as you would expect they needed to prepare for this great general to come and so they had a variety of creative ideas. First of all they repainted some of the walls on their barracks except they only painted the sides of the walls that you could see from the plane as it landed.

They needed to worry about the other sides the plane wasn't going to pass those. On this air strip where his plane was going to land there were some large patches of dirt. So they thought well if you're looking down from the airplane and you see these large patches of dirt how about instead of them being brown they're green.

[27 : 05] So they took some green paint and they painted up the brown dirt so it would look like grass when you were coming down. And then since this man was a Russian general they pulled all the Russian speakers they could find and they put those as the people who were on that day.

And so they wanted this man to come in and think wow look at this army every single one of their soldiers from the top to the bottom speaks Russian. These Americans are amazing.

So they pull out all the stops to cover up reality. They want things to appear greater and better than they actually are. And that's our intuition that's what we want when a great person comes and visits.

We want to prepare the way. We want things to appear better than reality. We want to clean up.

John the Baptist tells us someone great is coming.

God himself is on the way coming with his power except he, this king is the one who comes to clean up. He requires us not to paint over the dirt with green paint.

[28 : 12] He requires us on the other hand to actually show him our mess. It's not that we clean for him but that we show him how dirty and broken we are and he cleans for us.

Instead of looking good we admit that we're not. That is our introduction and our pathway into the gospel of Mark. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven we thank you that you send us your Lord Jesus and that you speak to us about him even now. We ask that you give us the hope and encouragement that comes from knowing that he is showing up as God himself with your presence and power. We ask that you would give us the humility and courage and joy to admit our need that Jesus would be able to help us clean up that we would be able to prepare the way. We ask these things grateful that we don't have to pretend things are better than they are but instead we can simply ask them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.