

The Gospel Begins In The Wilderness

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[0 : 00] All right, thank you, Elliot. My name is Jesse. It's good to be here with you. Good to see you. Good to see some new faces as well. And if you are new, it's a great day to be with us for the first time.

We are launching into our new series Elliot alluded to, and we're gonna go through the Gospel of Mark. It's going to be a much longer series. What we like to do is kind of go through books of the Bible very, very slowly, very carefully.

And that's kind of our main diet. If you've been with us the past few months, you've probably been through some of our series. We went through Advent, which is kind of following more of the church calendar of recognizing the Christmas season, the Advent season.

Then at the beginning of the year, we launched into a four-part series on the way. But now we are excited to get our hands and minds and hearts around the book of Mark in a wonderful way, and we're gonna do that.

And so we're gonna start in Mark verse one. Well, chapter one, verse one. All right. It says this. 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.

[1 : 16] John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness, and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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. This is God's word. So before we dive into it and I begin teaching on this passage, I'm gonna give you some background since it is the first time in Mark, we're cracking an open, just a little bit about the Gospel of Mark.

Firstly, it's widely accepted. It was written by a guy named Mark. Isn't that amazing? Wow, you just walked away with something like, you know, something maybe you didn't walk in with. Just kidding. So this guy Mark, who was he?

Well, he was a disciple of Peter, the Apostle Peter. The Apostle Peter was an eyewitness. He lived with Jesus for three years. He was Jesus' entourage, traveled with him, was eyewitness, saw everything that Jesus did and taught, including his crucifixion, his resurrection, and then his ascension.

[2 : 41] And so Peter would, he went around proclaiming, after Jesus had ascended, he went around proclaiming this good news of Jesus and all that he had done and not all he did and all that it meant.

And Mark was there with Peter as he told all these stories and recounted all these stories. And I'm sure there was little moments around dinner tables and fireside chats where Mark would just ask, oh, tell me about that story again, Peter.

And so Mark has all this information from the eyewitness of Peter, and he's able to get all these stories and he compiles them together. And so you see, actually, Mark has this very, it's got this flavor of the Apostle Peter, right?

It's, when you read it, it's quick moving. It moves from one place to the next place to the next place to the next place, from this story into that story. It's like, there's no good segues. It's just like start and then now this, and then this happened, and then this happened.

And it's very much like Peter, just like that. Quick, straightforward, very passionate. And one thing we do kind of pick up from this is that Peter must have been quite the storyteller because there is some stories that Peter tells that's also, or in Mark's gospel, that's also in Matthew's gospel, in Luke's gospel, in John's gospel.

[3 : 52] But comparative to those, to some of those stories, Peter's is like twice as long as some of them. So like Peter loves to give more detail. He loves to give some more insight into these stories.

And so we see this kind of difference in the style that probably Mark picked up from Peter. And another thing is that unlike Matthew and Luke and the writing of their gospels, Mark's gospel is much less concerned about the proper sequencing of events in the life of Jesus.

That doesn't necessarily happen. What he is concerned about is telling the story of Jesus in a certain way. And so it follows this kind of three-act drama. And it's a story of Jesus in and around Galilee.

And as Jesus shows up on the scene and begins his ministry in Galilee, which kind of culminates in chapter eight, you see this rising tension around the person of Jesus and his ministry.

And then there's this, the second act is on the road to Jerusalem, that Jesus takes toward Jerusalem. And that opposition against Jesus and who he is continues to grow.

[5 : 02] This rejection of him continues to grow. And then this tension finally culminates and climaxes in Jerusalem at his arrest and his trial and his crucifixion, his death. And then boom, it kind of starkly ends right there.

Now the first eight verses, what we're gonna get into today, is considered kind of the preface of the story. So we're all familiar with books and there's chapter one. And then there's, if you don't like reading, it's like, oh really, do we have to read this preface as well?

Can't we just, like why do we need to add more material, you know, to this book? It's like, but the preface is there for a good reason. Often it gives background to what, before what you're gonna get into in the story.

And so this is kind of what this is, the first eight verses. It sets the stage about Jesus before Jesus even shows up on the scene. Right, verse one, it says, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God.

And every good book has a nice intro hook to it, right? It's like, you know, Charles Dickens, like it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It's like, man, that's really cool. It kind of draws you in.

[6 : 07] Ernest Hemingway had a great way of writing that kind of pulled you in right away. That's what Mark is doing here. He's trying to grab the reader's attention and he's really, he's making a very bold statement and he's kind of telling us what this book is about.

Right, it's about this gospel, but it's the gospel, this gospel is the story of Jesus and that's what the gospel is. The gospel is the story of Jesus. Now, we can kind of think and lose sight of what that means.

The gospel is a literary genre. That's what he's trying to get us into. The gospel is this Greek word, euangelion, right? And that word literally means good news, but in the way that that word was used in that time, it was an announcement.

It was a proclamation of what is. It was good news of what had happened. It wasn't about good advice. It was good news. And so you had different euangelions during the day.

One of the ones that was probably pretty famous in that time because Rome was the superpower of that day would have been the euangelion of Caesar Augustus. People would have probably heard about that and known that.

[7 : 17] It was this proclamation that went out to Caesar's subjects that's saying because Caesar is who he is and all that he has done, it means peace for you, prosperity for you, and it goes on and on praising Caesar and all that he has done.

So that was the euangelion of Caesar. And so when we read this gospel, we have to understand we are reading a type of genre of literature here. This isn't an autobiography or a biography of Jesus that we can just learn some interesting facts about him.

Like this is good news because it's good news about Jesus, not you, right? And if we were to like pick up a book in the bookstore, we would most likely be the one that says good news about you because we're all a bunch of narcissists, right?

That would be more interesting for us. Mark is not that kind of book. It's a book that is not about you and me. It's about him. And since it's about Jesus, what it does, it brings us into this good news and he attempts to do two big things.

He attempts to give us a clear Christology, a clear understanding of who Jesus is, and it attempts to give us a good understanding of discipleship, what it means to follow this guy named Jesus.

[8 : 34] So the gospel, it's good news for us, but it's not necessarily good news about us. And Mark doesn't wait to tell us exactly who Jesus is.

He starts out right from that intro. He says Jesus is the Christ. He's the Messiah. That word Christ literally means Messiah. And then also he's the son of God.

And that's the gospel. The gospel is the story of the Messiah who is God. And you know, today that word Messiah, we're probably more familiar with it and using it as a pejorative, right?

We say that like, that person, man, he's got a messianic complex. He thinks he's the savior of the world. Or those people are looking to that guy and they're just like suckers following that guy as a Messiah.

We use that pejoratively. But here's the thing. We all live with this contradiction in ourselves that we both want a Messiah and we also know that treating someone like a Messiah is bad.

[9 : 32] And there's good reason for that contradiction. There's good reason for you and me and anybody in this world to want a Messiah. We live in a broken, messed up world. We intrinsically know this world isn't as it should be.

There is injustice. There is evil. There's adversity. There's poverty. There's calamity. There's war. There's illness. All these things. And there's something inside of us that longs for justice.

There's something inside of us that yearns to be righteous. There's something inside of us that wants peace and harmony. But as we go on in life, despite us wanting those things and despite the best we can do to get those things, we fail and we fail and we fail and we look at others and they fail and fail and we realize, man, we can't fix it.

I am not the answer to this problem in the world. So then what's left for us to do? Well, we can act like John Mayer and just like give up and wait on the world to change, right? We can also look to other messiahs in hopes that like, man, maybe these people can fix the problem.

So we look to the billionaires, the brilliant thinkers, the scientists, the inventors, the spiritual gurus, the politicians. Man, maybe any of these guys or all of these guys can get things right, can fix things as we see them or as how we want them to be.

[10 : 51] And so what we do is we start to treat people like messiahs, right? During election season, one of the common signs you see, and this is like Republican signs and Democrat signs, save America, vote blank.

What are we saying? What is that sign saying? America's messed up. America's broken. It needs salvation. If you vote for this person, he's our messiah.

He can fix it. Or this party can fix it. 2,000 years ago, when this gospel was written about Jesus, the world back then was no different to the world today.

And the people back then were no different. They were just like us in every single way. It was busted up, broken, things weren't working well, things were bad, and people were looking for a savior.

People were looking for a messiah. Now, particular to Israel's history, there were prophecies about a coming messiah. It just wasn't any messiah. They're saying there is a guy coming that is actually gonna fix all the problems.

[11 : 55] But these prophecies gave insight to what this guy was gonna do and what he would be like. So first, he was gonna bring religious reform. Second, he was gonna restore the glory and grandeur of the kingdom of Israel.

Next, he was gonna defeat Israel's enemies. All the people of Israel that had been dispersed by the wars that had happened over the centuries.

They would all come back. They would be gathered in and returned and restored to their inheritance. Peace and prosperity would flow from the nation of Israel to all the nations of the earth.

They would be flourishing. They would be healing. All those good things. And the Messiah, this Messiah that was prophesied, that would belong to Israel, that would come out of Israel, and he would be king.

He would be king over all kings on the earth and Jerusalem would be the location of his throne and both the governing of the nations and the glory of God's presence was gonna reside there.

[13 : 01] And Israel, they had been waiting, longing and anticipating this Messiah's reign to come, this guy to show up and bring that reign. They had been longing and waiting for this for centuries, the fulfillment of those prophecies.

And so Mark's good news is saying that this long-awaited Messiah, all you Israelites out there, all you Jews that have been waiting and praying for this guy, Jesus came.

It's him. It's an audacious claim. You don't have to wait anymore, Israel. He's come already. And now, we can step back and it's easy for us to take it for granted.

Like, that's an easy thing to believe. Yeah, Jesus is the Messiah. Get on board, right? But it's because we know what we know. But they didn't. We have to realize that. Man, back then, a Jew hearing that claim that Jesus was the Messiah, they would immediately went to, okay, well, is he sitting on the throne of Jerusalem?

Nope. Oh, okay. There's still Roman occupation. That's a problem. There's still unrighteousness everywhere. Hmm, that's interesting. There's still hunger. There's still injustice. There's still poverty. There's still sickness.

[14 : 06] There's still Jews dispersed everywhere. That gathering has not happened. Amen. So you can see, like, man, on the face, this claim of Messiah, man, for a Jew hearing that, they would have had a hard time swallowing that pill.

They would have been like, um, where's all the messianic realities then? But Peter even pushes this even further because he says not only is Jesus Messiah, he also says that he is the Son of God.

And that would have blown the hair back of every Jew that heard that. They would have been like, I'm sorry, you said what about him? Right? It's one thing, that would have been offensive. It's one thing to claim that Jesus was the Messiah.

That kind of happened a lot. Back in those days, people were like, I'm the Messiah, follow me. We're gonna, like, restore Israel. And then that guy got killed. It's quite another thing to say that Jesus is actually God himself.

And Mark is saying that Jesus is both. And think about this. In Old Testament prophecy, when the Messiah is being talked about, it talks about him as being one upon whom the Spirit of the Lord would rest.

[15 : 13] Right? Isaiah 61, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Right? The Spirit of the Lord is gonna be on this guy. In fact, all the things that the Messiah would do and be able to do, they kind of assumed it's because God was with him.

The Holy Spirit would be on him. And that wasn't a weird thing for Israelites to reckon with because their whole history was about leaders upon whom the Spirit rested. Right? And so they kind of expected that and they were okay with that.

But Mark says, Jesus isn't just the Messiah upon whom the Spirit would rest. He's gonna be the Son of God who would be able to dispense the Spirit to God's people.

That's a different claim altogether. And actually, John the Baptist fortifies this. In verse eight, he says, I have baptized you with water. He's telling all the crowds, but he, the one who's coming behind me, he's gonna baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

John's saying, look, look, I can bring you into the waters of repentance, but I have to give way because another guy is coming who is much greater than me, who's very sandals, I am not even worthy to untie.

[16 : 18] He is going to come and he's gonna do what I can't do and he's gonna do what no man can do, what only God can do. He will bring you into the Holy Spirit. Okay?

So right away, Mark's gospel hits two obstacles. It's hard to believe, no messianic realities, and it's offensive.

He's the Son of God, right? Now what we thought was this great intro and great start, if you step into that, it's like, actually, man, that wasn't a great start, Mark. Bad way to intro the gospel. But that's the nature of the good news of Jesus.

It is offensive. It is hard to believe. It doesn't play out according to our expectations. And actually, nothing makes less sense than where the story of the Messiah begins.

In verse two, it says, 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.

[17 : 18] Make his path straight. And John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness, and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

And what this is saying is the story of the Messiah starts in the wilderness. Isn't that fascinating? Man, Jesus' good news, like John is supposed to come, and is supposed to be like this person out front proclaiming, hey, this guy is coming, this guy is coming, good news is coming, he's gonna bring all these amazing things.

He's supposed to come and prepare the way for Jesus' path. And where does that happen? You would think the best place for that to happen would have been in Jerusalem, right? Man, John, you should have been in the temple crying out doing this stuff.

You should have been in the streets where everybody was at. Where is he at? He's in the wilderness. That's a crazy place to start. And in some ways, this is a metaphor for Jesus' life and ministry, the wilderness.

And for that matter, it's a metaphor for what it looks like for us to follow him. Jesus' three years in the public eye was anything but triumphant, fancy, showy, opulent, or popular.

[18 : 32] It looked more like the wilderness. Scarce, obscure, difficult, undesirable. But I would say, on top of that, there's another side to the wilderness.

And it's this. The wilderness was a place of hope, of new beginnings. It was in the wilderness that Yahweh had met with Israel and made them into his people when they came out of Egypt.

And that's from R.T. France, one of the commentators on the book of Mark. And so what he is saying is the wilderness doesn't make sense to us.

But you know what? It's always been center stage in God's redemption plot. That's where God likes to show up. That's where God likes to do his big stuff. God brings Israel out of Egypt and into the wilderness.

It's there in the wilderness. He establishes his covenant with them to be, and he says, I'm gonna be your God. You're gonna be my people. It's in the wilderness that the tabernacle is designed and they set it up.

[19 : 35] And then the glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle. The tabernacle was literally in the center of the camp of Israel all through the desert wanderings. The glory of God was in their midst.

He tabernacled among them. It's in the scarcity of the wilderness that God daily provided for his people manna from heaven, the bread of heaven, and water from the rock.

It is in the wilderness that Israel learned to rely on God for everything. Right? And God even spoke about that time.

He spoke about that time in Jeremiah 2 kind of like the honeymoon phase of his relationship with Israel. In verse 2 of chapter 2 it says, I remember the devotion of your youth.

He's speaking of Israel. Your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest.

[20 : 31] God's having this sentimental moment reminding Israel, man, remember the good days. Remember what it was like. In God's redemptive pathway, it shows us, it brings us to places we wouldn't naturally want to go.

And no surprise, that turns out to be the way of Jesus. In verse 2, behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way. This guy's preparing the way of Jesus.

Where is that at? The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord. And it's suggesting this to us. To follow the way, to follow Jesus, you must go through the wilderness.

That's what he did. God's plan is one of blessing, yes, but we can't separate his blessing from leading us through the wilderness. He will do that.

And I would say this also, the wilderness is not a place that is devoid of his blessing. I would say the wilderness is the place of his blessing too. And some of the blessings in the wilderness are things we don't realize that we need it.

[21 : 41] It's in the wilderness that God deals with our arrogance, our independence, our self-righteousness, our doubt, our anger, our fears, our lusts. And John is out here in the barren desert calling people to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, which probably means he wasn't gonna become a megachurch, right?

But not so. Look at verse five. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him. And you would think, like, man, that message's tough. You're out in a tough place and you're preaching a tough message and what is happening?

People are flocking to that. All the country of Judea, all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan confessing their sins. Take note of that.

People were going out to him. And what did they come with? They were coming out of the places they live. What were they coming with? Nothing but their sin.

What did they have to leave behind? They had to leave behind in their towns, in their cities, in their villages, their accomplishments, their titles, their wealth, their reputation, whether that was good or bad. All of that meant nothing in the wilderness.

[22 : 52] And leaving all that behind, what they got to see is they came with the sin. They came with the real problem because those things I just mentioned, the accomplishments and titles and wealth and reputation and all those things, what those things often do is they cover up the real problem in our lives.

And when we come out to the wilderness, all that gets stripped away and exposes the real issue, the sin that we have in our hearts. Look at this. Jesus with the rich young ruler. This guy comes to Jesus and he says, man, what good deed must I do so that I can gain eternal life?

And Jesus tells him, man, well, you gotta follow the commandments and he lists all the commandments and the rich young ruler's like, done, done, done, done, done. He's like, man, this is great. I've got this. And just to be on the safe side, this young man says, Lord, is there anything else I must do?

Am I missing anything to inherit eternal life? And Jesus says, actually, yeah. Hey, buddy, go sell everything. Give it to the poor and come and follow me.

And it's fascinating because Jesus doesn't call other people in that same way. He deals with this guy in this particular way, but he's getting at something. He's getting at his heart because he sees and he's discerned this young man, he is looking for the shortcut to eternal life.

[24 : 15] He is looking for the shortcut through the wilderness. Lord, what is just the next thing that I just have to obey and then I can get what I need? And Jesus says, no, no, no, buddy, you're not getting it.

I am not gonna give you that. I'm inviting you to come out into the wilderness. And his invitation is to follow him, is to come out with nothing, to leave everything behind.

And this young man, he couldn't do it. He wanted the shortcut. He didn't want the way. And there are no shortcuts around the wilderness. There is no avoiding it, not if you're intent on following Jesus.

But here's the good news. The wilderness is where God meets with us. And I know for some of you, you are living in a wilderness right now.

This is your reality. Your life hasn't been easy. You're bearing heavy burdens. And you might take that to mean that God feels distant right now. You don't know where he's at.

[25 : 14] But I wanna tell you, actually, he's closer than ever. And God uses the wilderness. He uses these moments to draw us close to him and come close to us.

And he also uses these moments to expose our hearts. And I used the analogy a couple of weeks ago, but God uses these times. He's this gentle father. He takes our heart in his hands.

And he just knows how to squeeze it ever so gently. He's not gonna crush it. But our hearts are like a sponge. And he wants us to see what's in there. And so like a sponge, he squeezes it. And we get to see what's coming out of there.

What comes out of it. Because he wants to deal with those things. And so these people are flocking to John the Baptist in the wilderness. And they're coming with nothing but their sins. And they're coming and they're confessing their sins.

And they're finding forgiveness in their repentance. And that's the thing. It's only God can forgive sins. They knew that, right? And that's why they're coming out.

[26 : 14] They're coming out to meet with God. And when we get desperate enough for God, we will go anywhere. And we will be able to endure anything for that sake. So we go into the wilderness whenever we examine our hearts and reckon with our sinfulness and confess it.

We go into the wilderness when we follow Jesus into those hard places out of obedience. We go into the wilderness when we join others in their mess to bring the hope and the comfort of Christ.

We go into the wilderness and the various trials God leads us into. We don't avoid those things. We don't run away from them because that's where God is.

That's where God meets with us. You know, one of the realities is we think about God's grace all the time, right? And we kind of can come to this understanding of God's grace being like, it's him up here but his grace kind of hits us down here.

The whole idea of grace isn't just the favor and blessings of God, the stuff we can get from him that come into our lives. That word grace means to extend yourself towards somebody.

[27 : 20] So in relation to the person of God, his grace comes to us as he extends himself toward us, which means he is closing the gap. the grace that we get is not his stuff, it's him.

His grace is him invading our lives, coming and touching us, invading us, being with us, uniting with us and because of that we get to experience him, the fullness of his love, his goodness, his peace, his wisdom, his joy.

Those are the blessings that our souls really hunger for. Those are, and that's what meets us out in the wilderness and that's why our souls are saying, yes, I will go out there.

I will go out there. And so, it is tempting for us to think while we're in that wilderness, it is tempting us to think like, and this happens all the time to me, when things get tough, man, this isn't fair.

Why me? And you're not alone with that. I'm sure we can all relate but again, let this truth shine a light and give you some perspective that Jesus, he went through the wilderness and he did that alone so we would never have to.

[28 : 34] Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days. He had no food. He had no one with him. He faced down the devil and his temptations. He did that alone.

Jesus came out of Jerusalem into the wilderness carrying a cross and carrying all our sins. He came out of the city.

He did that alone. Out in the wilderness, he was raised up on a cross to be crucified. He faced that alone. On the cross, he was baptized into God's wrath and judgment for our sin so that we could be baptized into his righteousness and forgiveness.

He was alone in the wilderness so he could pour out his spirit lavishly on his disciples so that we would never have to be alone.

And we are never alone. God is with us. The good news begins in the wilderness, friends. As the band comes up, how can we respond?

[29 : 41] I want to say if you're here today and you are not yet a Christian, I am so glad that you're here. I'm so glad that you are hearing this message and we hope that there was a lot of tough things but we hope that you heard the good news through this and I want you to hear something.

There is a wilderness coming that every single one of us must walk through. You can live your whole life trying to avoid every difficult trial, every wilderness God might be bringing you into but there is a wilderness coming and its name is death and we all have to pass through that.

We all got to go into that wilderness and in that wilderness there is judgment. There is a judgment coming over us and for those who repent and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior we pass through that wilderness on into eternal life and for those who do not there is bad news.

The judgment still awaits and I'm saying to you man don't face that day rather believe in Jesus that he has taken the judgment on himself in your place so that you can pass through instead of facing that judgment and Jesus is calling you right now to come to him.

He's saying come come into the wilderness right now come and see where I am meet me where I am find me come with nothing but your sins and you will find forgiveness and I will be there and he will be.

[31 : 12] You can bring your sin and your shame and you can leave knowing he is with you forever. He will save you he will give you hope he will rescue you he will heal you he will give you his peace and all you have to do is put your faith in him as Lord and Savior in a moment there's going to be a prayer we're all going to pray together there's going to be a prayer up on the screen for you to pray if that's you and if you're here and you're already a Christian we are going to respond and I want to give you opportunity we're all going to take 30 seconds to quietly respond how is God leading to you to respond to this message how is he doing that and we're going to take communion in a moment which is something that believers do but before we do that the Bible commands us to examine our hearts to correct our relationship with God what is some repentance that we need to make vertically and then also horizontally and there's a dire warning for us that we need to take seriously before we do this before we take communion it comes out of 1 Corinthians 11 27 it says whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord and let a person examine himself then and then and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup for anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself and so we're about to get into communion and this is a blessing to us and it's just more than just an empty ritual

I mean this points to some mystery and power at play here I mean if you could take this thing and then if you take this lackadaisical haphazardly that you could do that and drink judgment on yourself there's something significant happening in this moment and I'm saying this because man I want us to come with greater faith as we're about to take communion but I also want to come soberly and say you know before we do that God invites us to stop and examine ourselves so we're going to do that right now I'm going to give us 30 seconds and come to him he's the father calling us into the desert and there's grace there for us let's do business with God for this Jesus, we come to you.

Father, we come to you empty-handed. We come bringing nothing to commend ourselves to you, but yet you receive us with joy, with kindness, with love, with mercy.

So we may have come empty-handed, but now we are full. And we thank you for that. Amen. Amen.