

Mark 1:1-8

The Herald

1

Introduction

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the most important narrative in all human history. The life of Jesus is recorded for us in the four Gospels. Through written by different men, they harmonize perfectly.

Last time we saw how the term “gospel” meaning “Good News” and is applied to the entire life of Jesus. From the Roman view it was used to announce the birth of a king.

Today we will look at the Herald of the King,

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Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ²As it is written in the Prophets:

“Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.”

³“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
Make His paths straight.’ ”

⁴John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

⁶Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. ⁸I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

3

The Promise of a King

Mark 1:2-3

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Having introduced his account as a royal proclamation of the divine King, Mark continues his narrative by introducing the King’s forerunner, John the Baptist. Mark’s initial focus on John is in keeping with Mark’s purpose (to present Jesus Christ as the divine King) and would have been expected by his first-century audience. Earthly monarchs in the ancient world invariably sent official messengers before them to prepare the way, announce their coming, and make the people ready to receive them. So also, the arrival of the divine King was preceded by a royal herald who clearly announced His coming.

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In order to introduce John the Baptist, Mark references two Old Testament prophecies—Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3—each of which foretold the ministry of the Messiah's forerunner.

Mark's appeal to the ancient Hebrew prophets demonstrates that the King's arrival was not a secondary plan or an afterthought. This was the very plan that God from eternity past. In keeping with that plan, the ancient prophets had predicted the coming of the King's forerunner hundreds of years before he was born.

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Mark begins by referencing Malachi 3:1, "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me."

The Lord Jesus Himself declared this passage to refer to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:10; Luke 7:27). John was sent by God ahead of the Messiah as a royal herald to prepare the way for the divine King's arrival.

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Malachi 3:1

"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me.
And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple,
Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight.
Behold, He is coming," Says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi is declaring the Deity of the coming King.

Malachi continues in the following verses to declare that
this King will cleanse His people and establish
righteousness!

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Mark's use of Old Testament prophecy continues with a reference to Isaiah 40:3, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"

The royal herald was to clear the road for the king's arrival. Rather than clearing literal roads, John sought to remove obstacles of stubborn unbelief from the hearts and minds of sinners. The way of the Lord is the way of repentance, of turning from sin to righteousness, and of turning spiritual paths that are crooked into ones that are straight and holy.

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The Prophet of a King

Mark 1:4-6

John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

John's ministry centered on the preaching of a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This stood in contrast to the righteousness of the Pharisees who saw their ritual to the law as sufficient for acceptance before God. John preached that the Messiah was coming and that there needed to be a repentance from sin.

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What was required was an internal change of the person's heart, mind, and will. The word repentance implies a genuine turning from sin and self to God (1 Thess. 1:9). True repentance involves a transformation of one's nature which requires the work of God (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). The fruit (or subsequent evidence) of that internal transformation is seen in changed behavior. As John the Baptist told the crowds, "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham"

(Luke 3:8; cf. Matt. 3:8-9)

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Nether John's baptism or any other can forgive sins. It is always a matter of turning to God for forgiveness. John baptized in the wilderness and the multitudes came out to see and hear him. To be baptized required humility and to acknowledge that they were sinners who needed to repent from their sin. This was something that the self-righteous could not do.

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Mark focuses on John's dress. He was "clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist." His dress was not extravagant like the Pharisees. He was in rugged durable clothing fit for the wilderness and pointed to him being a prophet.

The prophet Elijah wore similar attire. In 2 Kings 1:8, Elijah is described as "a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins." The reference to Elijah as a "hairy man" describes the hairy garments made of animal skin that he wore. Those garments were held in place by a leather belt around the waist just like John's.

12

The Preeminence of the New King

Mark 1:7-8

And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. ⁸ I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The entire purpose behind John's preaching was to point his listeners to the One who was coming after him. That is what it meant to be the forerunner, the herald who directed everyone's attention away from himself and toward the coming King. As John later explained to his disciples, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). He rightly understood and embraced his role as the Messiah's messenger.

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John proclaimed, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose." The Greek includes a definite article, indicating that John was speaking about the One who was coming. John's ministry did not precede just any king or monarch. Rather, he was pointing to the divine King whose coming was foretold by the Old Testament prophets.

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John states that this coming King was mightier than him. The Messiah would be greater in every respect. John did not regard himself as even being fit to stoop down and untie His sandals. Untying the master's sandals and tending his dusty feet was a task performed by the lowest of slaves. John's point, then, was that he did not consider himself worthy to be even the lowest slave of such an infinitely exalted King.

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John shows the preeminence of the coming King by comparing their ministries.

John's baptized with water. This was an outward act signifying that the recipient had repented and turned from their sin. It was an outward act declaring an inward change of perspective.

The King would baptize with the Holy Spirit. This is not talking about some charismatic experience. Rather John is stating that he can clean the outside, but the coming King would be able to clean the inside. It is the Holy Spirit that guides us into truth and is the agent of salvation and inward transformation.

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So What ...

John's ministry was to prepare the way for the Coming King.

This is a picture of our ministry today. The King will return, and everyone dead or alive will appear before Him. Every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that He is the King.

Not everyone will be allowed to continue in His presence. That depends on one thing: Did they accept Jesus' offer of forgiveness and make Him their Lord and Savior.

Like John the Baptist, we must prepare the way for the coming King. We must cry out "repent and turn from your sins for the King is coming. Turn to Jesus while you still can for when you stand in judgment it will be too late!"