

Mark 1:1-3

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'" (NRSV).

The Gospel of Mark starts with some proclamations. One very important proclamation is that Jesus is the Christ. The name Jesus and the title of Christ are cemented together as one. In our faith, and throughout history, there is no disputing this. There is no other person in all of history that gets the title of Christ. There is also the proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God. Also, no other person in all of history is identified as the Son of God. There is also the proclamation that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Two weeks ago I had a message with this scriptural reference to Isaiah - a voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." The main purpose of Old Testament prophets was to deliver the word of God to the people. The word contained four vital characteristics: the first characteristic is a reminder of the covenant, the second was a warning against breaking the covenant, the third characteristic was a caution of the consequences of breaking covenant. If they do not keep covenant they don't keep the Promised Land. This dates back to the Torah prior to their entering the Promised Land. This is the deal that God made with the people during their exodus from slavery. The fourth characteristic is a word of hope during difficult times. The concept of hope is very significant. The Old Testament prophets deliver to the people a word of hope; a promise from God that they will get back to the Promised Land and they will get a redeemer.

A very important point that all four of the Gospels make is that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. They all set out to prove that Jesus is the promised redeemer. God's people know that the word that comes from the prophets is the true word. How do they know if word of the prophets is the word of God? Because what they said actually comes true as history unfolds. They know this because it is based on Scripture - **Deuteronomy 18:22** if a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken (NRSV). In Old Testament times there several false prophets and as history unfolds their word was shown to be false and that word disappeared throughout history. However, the word of Gods prophets was proven true over time and that word is now preserved in the Bible.

Then Jesus comes to us. All four of the gospels, knowing that the word of the prophets is the true word of God, look at Jesus and see him as being the one that was promised to us. All four of the gospels proclaim that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and Jesus is the son of God. Of the four gospels, two have a birth narrative; Matthew has the story of the wise men and Luke has the story of the shepherds. The Gospel of John starts with the beginning of creation and the Gospel of Mark has the messenger that was promised as a forerunner to Christ. Before the gospels were written, the word about Jesus was spread through oral proclamation. The author of Mark takes that oral tradition and puts it in writing. Putting it in writing is very significant because it preserves the word that was written.

The prologue of the Gospel of Mark sets the stage for the ministry of Jesus. He is seen as a figure of power and authority. He summons his disciples to follow him, he confronts evil and

sickness, and he is acclaimed by huge crowds. However, Jesus is no ordinary power and authority figure. Jesus is much more important than being a great miracle worker. Jesus is the Son of God on a journey to the cross. In the narrative many people encounter Jesus that do not understand who he is or what his ministry is all about. However, as a reader of the Gospel of Mark, we know what they do not because Mark disclosed the identity of Jesus from the start. The life of Jesus was not easy; crowds were constantly pressing around him, demons resisted him, Jesus withdrew to desert places to be alone but the crowds sought him out.

John the Baptist announces “the one to come will baptize with Holy Spirit” and when Jesus is baptized the Holy Spirit descends upon him. Then we see miracles, the Holy Spirit is working through him, and Satan is not match for him. In the Gospels there is a gap between human understanding and who Jesus actually is. There are four different responses to Jesus. The disciples follow him but do not fully understand him or his mission. The crowds are interested and intrigued but they want something from Jesus. The religious authorities want to kill him in order to maintain their power base. John the Baptist recognizes who he is. So, John establishes the identity of Jesus as an agent of salvation. God refers to Jesus as the beloved Son. Therefore, this is the Son of God. While the religious leaders deny this, the demons acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God.

The title of God’s Anointed belongs only to Jesus. This is the Son of God. He has the power that is demonstrated over and over again in the gospels because he is the Son of God. He has the Word of God because he is the Son of God. And he goes to the cross because he is the Son of God. So the real story of the Gospel of Mark is a story of salvation. The sayings of Jesus and the stories about him circulated by mouth for years before the gospel was written. The Good News is a simple message of salvation in Jesus which people can take anywhere in the world.