ReMARKable: The First Reporter (Chapter 1) Memory Verse: Mark 1:1

Jan. 12th 2025 Scripture Reading: Mark 1

**SLIDE 1**

 Today we are embarking on a great adventure into the Gospel of Mark. We are calling it ReMARKable because he has some amazing things to tell us. Mark is 16 chapters, so my goal is to take one chapter a week, which will bring us up to Easter if we include Good Friday. I am nervous, because trying to preach on a whole chapter in o ne sermon is foolish. We will have to overlook certain things as we go. We will have to take a broader overview approach. But I think there is value in keeping the big picture in mind as well. I do want to ask you to take the time to read through Mark on your own.

**SLIDE 2**

Do not listen to these sermons and expect to get a full presentation of what Mark has to offer. We will simply be moving too quickly. But take the time to follow along. Read the chapter beforehand. Come on Sunday’s already familiar with the text and with questions ready. That extra reading on your own will be a great benefit to you personally as well as spiritually. In preparation for this series, I read the entire gospel in one sitting…it took under two hours and I cannot recommend that enough to you all. If you can make the time, try to read it all the way through from beginning to end.

**SLIDE 3**

Mark is a great opportunity for us to get in on the world of breaking news in the first century. Today, we have the internet and cell phones to tell as all about what is going on in the world. But it was not too long ago when we had to read about world events in the paper. Our information was a little delayed because a reporter had to discover a story, do some research and ask questions about the story, then they had to actually write the story, then it would go through an editor and a fact-checking process, and finally the story would be published in the paper for all to read. Well, even though the news cycle has shortened in recent years, and even though we have instant access to information and even actual camera footage of what transpired, the process is still the same.

News happens and someone still has to take it upon themselves to report on the things that happen.

**SLIDE 4**

 And, let’s be clear, reporters need not be professionals. Anyone with a cell phone can deem themselves a reporter but the quality of a reporter is directly related to their desire and ability to get to the truth. That is the gist of Mark, so I will say it again, the quality of a reporter is directly related to their desire and ability to get to the truth.

**SLIDE 5**

 They have to want the truth and they have to have the means of discovering the truth. The established news media in this country is going through a bit of a reconstruction. Too many reporters have set aside truth in favor of a certain agenda or ideology. The public has largely lost trust. In fact Gallup polls reflect a strange cross-over in public sentiment. An all-time low of only 31% of people consider the news to be trustworthy, while an all-time high of 36% report having no confidence at all in the industry. The cry of the human heart, whether it comes to religion or watching the evening news, rings in all of us: I want the truth.

**SLIDE 6**

 Well, Mark comes to us as the first gospel. It appears behind Matthew in the layout of our New Testaments, but chronologically speaking, Mark was the first to break the news about this man named Jesus Christ. He was the first to report, the first to publish. In fact, many scholars have seen in Mark’s style that he very much speaks to us as like a reporter. Mark is not much worried about a flowery presentation or eloquent prose. He had a story to tell, breaking news for all to hear! He had to get it down on parchment. He had to get this news out! Like detective Joe Friday from Dragnet, Mark was interested in “just the facts”.

**SLIDE 7**

 But how can we trust this story? How do we know Mark is a good reporter? Remember our litmus test: Does he desire the truth and is he able to get to it? How do we know he is after truth and not spewing out some ideological agenda? Well, Mark does not share with us his sources in writing, but we do know that Mark served with Paul and Barnabus on their first missionary journey. In Paul’s letter to Philemon, he mentions Mark as a fellow-laborer. We also see a clue in 1Peter 5:13. As Peter concludes his letter he says this:

**SLIDE 8**

 “The fellow elect church in Babylon greets you, and so does my son Mark.” The term “son” often denoted a tight-knit spiritual relationship and not actual parentage. Mark and Peter worked closely together. Tradition has it that Peter was then killed for his faith in Christ, crucified upside down in 64 AD. And shortly after, in 65, Mark comes out with his Gospel. We understand then that Mark compiled and edited the notes and the preaching of Peter. Mark’s information is based on Peter’s witness. He worked closely with Peter, he had heard the stories of Jesus over and over again from Peter’s own mouth. He understood what the stories meant and how Peter interpreted them. So after Peter’s death, Mark has a new realization that his days could be numbered as well. He has no time to spare and he puts the account of Peter, his mentor and spiritual “father” into writing.

**SLIDE 9**

 We feel this sense of urgency as we read Mark’s gospel. He quickly jumps from episode to episode. He uses words like “immediately” and “straighaway”. Mark’s story marches. He has no time to mince words…he has news to report.

 There is a lot more to be said about the background of this amazing book, but we will dive into some of that as we go. For now I would like to turn to chapter 1.

**SLIDE 10**

 Mark 1:1 is the headline. If you were in a real rush and had not time to read the article, Mark relays to you all you really need to know right in the headline which reads: “The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God’s son.” If I read nothing else, this headline let’s me know who this Jesus is. “Christ” is the Greek word for Messiah. So right from the top we know that Jesus is the chosen Son of God. We also see here the first theme that I want to pull out and that is this idea of good news. **SLIDE 11** This is the main reason Mark writes in the first place. He is sharing good news. As readers who want to understand Mark, we are going to want to look at his writing through this lens. This is good news about Jesus, it is good news written for you and me. And, according to Mark, the coming of this good news should come as no surprise. He goes back and pulls in the prophet Isaiah as a source who talks about the voice of one shouting in the wilderness. This is where John the Baptist fits in. In verse 4-8 we see him preaching a message about repentance. People are coming to be cleansed of their sins, to repent! But John is not the main story. He is a precursor. He tells everyone that a stronger One is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Now that sounds intriguing! And here we have a second theme for Mark: authority. **SLIDE 12** We will see it come up repeatedly. John is under Jesus. He is less than, he is not worthy, he can only baptize with water. Part of the good news about Jesus is that he is the One who walks with authority.

 Now, note here the complete lack of Christmas. It’s not a knock on Mark, it just reflects his insistence to get on with it. By verse 9 Jesus is baptized and by verse 12 he is forced into the wilderness. The Greek word here is *ekballo.* **SLIDE 13**It means to be cast out or banished. Make note of it, it will come back into play. Listen to the news reporting here from Mark:

**SLIDE 14**

“He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angles took care of him.” Just the facts. This is not a novel! Moving on! Next verse Johon is arrested, by who and for what reason is not pertinent to Mark’s overall report. Jesus begins preaching in Galilee and what does he preach? God’s good news. He tells people to repent and trust in this good news. Preaching and teaching is something we will come across very often in Mark. Okay, on to the next event.

**SLIDE 15**

 Jesus sees Simon and Andrew fishing, he says, “Follow me” and they do so right away. Then he sees James and John. Verse 20: “At that very moment, he called them. They followed him…” Okay next event.

 They move down into Capernaum. **SLIDE 16** Verse 21: “Immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and started teaching.” The people are amazed because Jesus taught with authority. Verse 23: Suddenly someone screamed because they were possessed by an evil spirit. This sprit knows all about Jesus. This spirit cries out wanting to know what Jesus is up to. It understands the authority that Jesus represents. This spirit shouts out and calls Jesus the “holy One of God.”

**SLIDE 17**

Verse 25: ‘“Silence!” Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon. “Come out of him!” The unclean spirit shook him and screamed, then it came out.”’ Authority. The people who saw it happened connected the dots. They were shaken by the scene. Even the unclean spirits obey him. Immediately, news about Jesus spreads. And from here on out we will see a pattern in Mark’s news report:

**SLIDE 18**

 healing/exorcism and large crowds. Large crowds are almost the default setting of the story. This is a seemingly small fact, but it also serves as a means of corroboration.

 A good example might be the recent assassination attempt of Donald Trump.

**SLIDE 19**

While he was campaigning to be president, there was an incident that occurred in Butler Pennsylvania where in a man on a nearby roof, shot at Trump and clipped his right ear. We are all familiar with the story. And if I were to report on the event and change the location, or the outcome or the details of the way things happened, I would be checked very quicky and forced to issue a correction, because many people witnessed what had happened. We have video of what happened. My story must line up with the facts or else my story will not persist. The point here is that it is hard to lie about something so many other people have seen or experienced. So for Mark, the public nature of his overall story helps corroborate his reporting.

 After the synagogue episode, Mark moves on to another story of healing involving Simon’s mother-in-law. **SLIDE 20** She is healed of a fever and begins to wait on them, which is the same word used to describe the actions of the angels while Jesus was in the wilderness. They too, waited on, or served Jesus. Simon’s mother-in-law, by her service, join in with the angels. And by sunset people brought to Jesus “those who were sick or demon-possessed. The whole town (another crowd) gathered at the door.” He healed many and cast-out many demons. Here we see *ekballo* again. Do you remember it’s first use? Mark was talking about the Holy Sprit casting Jesus out into the wilderness. And now we see Jesus casting demons out of people. **SLIDE 22** It was in that forty day wilderness experience after his baptism where Jesus was brought to the brink of need and despair. He was starving, he was tempted, he was in agony. **SLIDE 23** But, in the end, Jesus was able to enter into public ministry fully equipped with all authority in heaven and on earth. And he used that authority to great affect.

 One of the interesting and confusing aspects of Mark’s gospel especially is something called the Messianic Secret.

**SLIDE 24**

 We saw it in the synagogue story. And here in verse 34. Jesus does not want these demons to speak out loud about who he is. They are well aware, but Jesus commands them to keep quiet about his identity. **SLIDE 25** We will look more closely into what all this means, but we will see Jesus’ insistence to keep his identity under wraps as a recurring theme.

 After healing the crowd the night before, Jesus gets up early and goes off alone to pray. Simon tracks him down, “Everyone’s looking for you!” he says. The clamor of the crowds persists. Jesus decides to move on to other villages. Mark reports that he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and *ekballon,* throwing out demons. Again, preaching and healing are hand in hand for Jesus.

 And, we got to get to the next event.

**SLIDE 26**

 A man with leprosy, or some sort of skin disease approaches Jesus and begs for healing. Now we need to understand, that in that culture, this man was untouchable. He was considered to be cursed by God and unclean. If you were to touch him, you would also become unclean. But verse 41, the CEB says Jesus was incensed. To me, this word communicates anger, while the Greek word means more like being moved deeply with compassion. And in compassion, Jesus touches this man. Instantly, he was cured. And, weirdly to us, Jesus warns the man sternly, almost with a snort according to the Greek not to tell anyone. So demons are to keep quiet and so is this man who received such miraculous healing. But he did not listen to Jesus and he goes around freely spreading the news. As a consequence, Jesus’ work is inhibited. Mark reports that Jesus was unable to openly enter into town without being mobbed by the crowds who heard about the amazing things Jesus does. Instead, he had to remain out in deserted places. Even still, Mark says, people would come to him from everywhere.

**SLIDE 27**

 Whew! That is chapter one. Mark has a lot of news to report and he wastes no time in getting it out. As we go into chapter 2, I want to just recap some of the themes established in this first chapter. One is Mark’s primary purpose. He is communicating to us good news. Secondly we see the great authority that Jesus possess. Authority to teach in unheard of ways, authority over the spiritual realm, authority to heal physical ailments. What does that mean for Jesus authority in our own lives? How far does he hold sway over me and my decisions? Going forward we will be paying attention to the crowds and this strange insistence from Jesus that his true identity be kept secret.

 Please read through chapter 2 for next week as we continue to take in Mark’s news report. Keep in mind the themes that we discussed and ask the Holy Spirit to walk with you and teach you as you read. We know already from chapter one that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. We benefit from that gift today and we read through this first gospel seeking what we expect from any good news reporter: the truth. We want the truth. And we can find it here on the reMARKable newscast. Amen.