

March 13, 2011 - Gospel of Mark
Dim the Lights and Raise the Curtain

Reading: Mark 2:1-11

In your bulletin you will all find one of these, a little treasure map, if you will. So if you want, you can all pull that out.

So, we're starting a new series here this morning. We finished up our other one a couple weeks ago and now we're starting on a new series and we're going to enter into the Gospel of Mark. And really, this morning, all I really want to do, I'm going to keep it very simple and hopefully a little briefer than normal. But really, all I want us to do is kind of set the stage, if you would, set the stage for what's coming in the Gospel of Mark, set the stage for what we're going to be doing in the next seven or eight weeks as we go through this series. One of the things I've found is, I love studying in the Gospels and I love when we share together on Sunday morning studying the Gospels together. I think that's a good thing and I think we should pour our time into that. What I find is, sometimes when we come to the Gospels, they're familiar. You know, we heard a lot of these stories a lot of times and they become kind of common to us and so, what I hope to do this morning is kind of put a little bit of freshness into the Gospel story for us this morning and have that kind of set the tone as we go into the Gospel of Mark in the next several weeks ahead of us.

So, we've been through this before but I just wanted, as we go through this real quickly again, the word Gospel means....Good News! And so, really this should be called the "Good News of Mark" but where it gets confusing is in that word "of" because in English, that word "of" can mean several different things. It can mean, by, or it can mean, about, or it can mean, belonging to, and so, sometimes we could read this and see the Gospel of Mark and think that the story is actually about Mark as in, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, well that story is all about Huckleberry Finn, but in this case that's not so much the case because the story of the Gospel of Mark, really has almost nothing to say about Mark. Mark may show up for about two verses, possibly, in the whole Gospel. And so, the story is really not about him, the story is about... Jesus. Yes. So this is really, what we're looking at is The Good News About Jesus. And that what this whole book is about and that's what we're going to be talking about over the next several weeks and it's all been written down by Mark and that's why his name get's put on the title.

And so, what I want to do this morning as we begin, is to look at Mark, himself, and lots of times as you are trying to study a book or a piece of literature you will examine the author and sometimes by examining the author, you can get some insights into the work itself. Sometimes, that goes too far. I remember I was watching a documentary on the Lord of the Rings and it was talking about Tolkien and it had a lot of little interesting things in there but I remember this one part especially, where it said, you know, it showed this kind of country lane with the big trees, where the branches were hanging over it. They said "this lane is close to

where Tolkien once lived as a boy”. And it is possible that he may have walked by here at some point. And so, we think this is likely the lane that he had in mind when he wrote this certain scene of the book. And I thought, you guys are stretching it here a little bit to do that. So we don’t want to go quite that far in our analysis this morning but we do want to learn a little bit about who the author was. Who Mark was. And I think that might give us some insight into, not so much what he writes, but how he writes and what he’s trying to communicate as he puts this work together.

So, this morning, we are going to talk about Mark. Now, this is not really Mark. It’s a Mark, but it’s not Mark who wrote the Book of the Bible. But as I thought about it, you know, aside from the suit and the hair gel, he probably looked as close to the real Mark, as this guy does. I think sometimes we use these kind of stylized pictures and paintings of our Gospel players and so sometimes it loses the realness to it. So, for just this morning, I concede that this is not the real Mark, and these are not the real people, but I want you to feel like they are real people. To feel like they are everyday, ordinary, people who you might see on the street.

So, let’s talk a little bit about Mark. Mark had a cousin whose name was Barnabas. And you might remember, Barnabas because Barnabas was the first guy who befriended Paul. You remember Paul, who used to be Saul, and then he kind of switched sides and went from persecuting Christians to proclaiming Christ and Barnabas was the first guy who said “you know what, I’m going to go out on a limb here and I’m going to trust Paul and I’m going to befriend him as a Christian now. And Barnabas and Paul, later on, they decide they’re going to go this big mission trip together, and Barnabas said, well, let’s take Mark along. And so Paul said, “Okay, let’s do that”. So they went on this big journey together and about half way through, or somewhere, Mark bailed and went home. Paul wasn’t really happy about that, but Barnabas and Paul continued on their journey. Later on Barnabas and Paul got together again and said “Well, let’s go on another journey” and Barnabas said “Yeah, that’s great, let’s bring Mark along with us” and Paul said “No, I don’t like that idea”. And so Barnabas and Paul actually had a fairly sharp disagreement about it and Paul went his way and hooked up with a guy named Silas, which you might remember, a familiar name from the Bible in the Book of Acts. And Barnabas and Mark, they went off and went their way, as well. But, don’t fear, the rift did not remain forever, because when we read later in the Book of Philemon, we find out Paul is actually in prison in Rome and he lists out all the people who are there with him. He says, “one of the guys who is here with me and helping me out is Mark.” And he actually writes later, he writes to his friend Timothy the second time he’s in jail in Rome and he says “Timothy, one thing I want you to do, find Mark and tell him to come because he is of great help to me.” And so, Mark and Paul are a little rocky at the start of their relationship but eventually they kind of patch things up and they spend a lot of time together and Mark actually develops a very good relationship with Paul, down the road.

Now, here’s a few more things that we need to know about Mark. First of all, he was young. Well, he was younger. He was younger than most of the other people we normally talk about in the Bible. Most people predict that he was probably a teenager when Jesus and the disciples

were going around Israel and Jesus was teaching. So, he was probably at that time, half the age, or less, than the rest of the Apostles and Jesus, who were probably in their 30's or maybe a little bit older. So, he was a bit of a younger guy than the rest of the people we typically talk about.

He was a Jew. He was born to Jewish parents but his parents were also Romans. And so, this is why you will often hear Mark referred to as John Mark. Same guy. Given two names. And the reason for that is, John is his Hebrew name, as in the Apostle John or John the Baptist or any of those type of things. And Mark, is his Roman name. Like Mark Anthony and Cleopatra, kind of thing. And so, that's why he carries two names. Sometimes you hear him called Mark, sometimes you hear him called John Mark.

He lived in Jerusalem. We read in Acts 12, verse 12, that while Peter was in prison, you might remember this story. Peter was in prison and then the angels break him out and when he gets out he decided to go to the house of Mark's mother and so he goes there and you might remember the servant girl comes down, sees it's Peter, freaks out, and runs back inside and leaves Peter standing out on the street and eventually they come back and they let Peter come in. And it says that the Christians had gathered at Mark's mother's house to pray. And so, we deduce from that, that Mark lived in Jerusalem, at least his parents did for a time.

And so, scholars somewhat speculate that perhaps it was Mark's parents home that contained the "Upper Room" where the Last Supper was held. Now, some of this is conjecture and speculation and they are kind of piecing things together, but partly from that story from Acts, I mean, if the Church is going to meet somewhere to worship and pray and share communion every Sunday, what better place than the Upper Room where they had been on the night of the Passover.

Also, there's this verse, these couple verses in Chapter 14 of Mark and this is just after the last supper has taken place, and Jesus and the Disciples go from the Upper Room out to the Garden of Gethsemane. And there's these two little weird verses in Chapter 14 and they basically say that there was a young man who followed Jesus wearing nothing but his pajamas and when the soldiers come to arrest Jesus, they grab him and they grab his clothes and the only way he gets to get away is he slips out of his clothes and runs away without any clothes. Now, people suspect that that young man was Mark and the reasoning is that Mark was the only one of the Gospel writers who bothers to mention that little incident. So they figure, he is the only one who knows and that's his little by-line in the story and so, you add that together and you think, why would he be following them and you think maybe he was coming from the house and maybe that was his parent's house where the Last Supper took place.

So, when you look at all that and think, he's young; he wasn't one of the disciples that travelled with Jesus; and so, how is this guy going to write a whole story about the ministry of Jesus, when he only came in contact with Him, perhaps at the very end of His life? How is he going to tell this story that he wasn't actually a part of? The answer to that question is found in a man

named Peter. The Apostle Peter, actually connected with Mark along the way as well, in fact, Peter refers to Mark as “my son”. So, they had developed a very close relationship. In our modern terms, we would say that Mark was Peter’s Administrative Assistant. That is what he did. So, he was Peter’s helper and he would do things for Peter and assist him and one of the things in particular that Mark’s job entailed was to write down all the things that Peter said. And so really, when we come to study the Gospel of Mark, the full descriptive title of it should really probably technically be “The Good News about Jesus, According to Peter, Written down by Mark”. And that is kind of the summation of what’s going to happen in the following pages of the Gospel of Mark.

I need four volunteers. All you have to do is stand. I won’t embarrass you, but I need four volunteers. Just sit down in those four chairs there. Look at Mark here. Just to start out, what struck me as I was looking into the history of Mark, the person, his biography; I was surprised to see this young guy who is intimately connected with Paul, with Barnabas and with Peter. I don’t know if there is any other character in the New Testament, who is so deeply tied to so many of the main characters of the New Testament story from Acts, onward. So, Mark has some things to say to us in his Gospel because of those connections.

Mark is believed to be the earliest Gospel, the first one that was written and it is, by far, the shortest of the Gospels, it’s only 16 chapters long. But it is not the only Gospel. Now there are four of them and I need you to do this in order because my technology is limited, but can you name the other three. Matthew, Luke and John, okay. So we have these four different Gospels and there’s four different ways of telling the story. So even if I got Roy and Arlene and Samuel and Barb and I said “I want you to tell the story of the Roughrider season last year. Each of you is going to tell the story in a different way. Some of you may say “well I don’t really know, so my story is, they played football and I think they won some and I think they lost in the end”. And that would be your story. Someone else might come at it and say “well, here are all the statistics of their season. They did this and they did this and they did this and they did this”. And some of you might say “Well, the whole story is the drama of how they were in the Grey Cup the year before and the too many men penalty and they lost and it’s all about redemption and all of this stuff through the whole year.” So everyone would tell the story in a different way. When we come to our Gospels, the Gospel writers each of them does the same thing. It’s the same thing, it’s the same Jesus, it’s the same events, but, they each have their own little different way of talking about it.

So, we’re going to really quickly go through the different ways of talking about it, the way each of them does it. So, we’ll get Roy to start. Roy is going to be Matthew, except I didn’t have room to write Matthew, so he’s going to be Matt this morning. Matthew, his Gospel was written by a Jew to the Jews. So you can see as you read through the Gospel, that was the nature of it. That’s why the whole first chapter is this long, long, list of names that so and so begat; so and so begat; so and so begat; so and so begat; and for most of us, we just say “Okay, just bring on Chapter 2 and let’s move on with the story”. But, if you were a Jew reading that, that first Chapter is critically important. Because anyone claiming to be the Messiah had to be

able to trace their lineage back to Abraham through David and if you couldn't do that, then we're not even going to give you the time of the day in your claim to be the Messiah. And so, that's why that's so important. Matthew, more than any other Gospel, quotes the Old Testament. And when Jesus is teaching, He quotes the Old Testament more than any other thing. And He often refers to prophesy and prophesy being fulfilled. He'll say "And Jesus said this, to fulfill what was written in Isaiah". Or this happened to fulfill what was written in Ezekiel. And so, it is all geared towards that and so, Matthew in his Gospel, Jesus is the King of the Jews. The Messiah. And that is the picture of Jesus that Matthew paints. And so, really, Matthew is looking back in a sense. He's looking back to all the prophecies and everything that the Israelites have been told so far and said you know, all of these things that we've seen in the past, Jesus is the fulfillment of it. And so, Matthew, come over here just a little bit, look to the PAST.

Next Luke. Arlene, do you want to be our Luke? Now Luke was a Greek, he was a doctor a Greek doctor, a very schooled and trained person. And so Luke wrote to the Greeks. And in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is painted as the perfect man. That's who Jesus is. He's the perfect being. And so, in Luke's Gospel, everything is directed towards this idea that following Jesus will lead you to the ideal life. The ideal human experience will come by following Jesus, who was the perfect man. The perfect being. And so, that's why in Luke's Gospel we have a lot of these things that show the human side of Jesus. That's why Luke's Gospel has the longest account of the Nativity Story. Of Jesus being born and Mary and Joseph and travelling to Bethlehem and the Wise Men and the shepherds and all of that. Cause it shows that human side. And Jesus being taken to the Temple as a little boy and being taken to the Temple when He was 12, as well. And it tells us about John the Baptist, who was Jesus' cousin. Familiar relationships. And Mary going to visit Elizabeth, who was Jesus' aunt. And so, it kind of focuses a little bit more on the human side of Jesus and in the whole Gospel, the point that Luke is trying to make is that, following Jesus, is going to be the path that leads you to the ideal life. And so, Luke is really looking FORWARD. He's looking forward to what can be. You start with Jesus and here is what can become. Go ahead and look FORWARD.

And so, number 3. John. And I'm going to get Barb to be John. Now John, John is it's own self-contained epic story. John, for you Star Trek fans, John is outside the space time continuum. It's just its own thing all in and of itself. And that's why he begins with epic verses "In the beginning was word and the word was with God and it was God and it was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made and without Him without him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness just doesn't get it. The word became flesh and we have seen the glory of the one and only Son sent down from the Father." It's just this grand picture that John is trying to paint that "I am going to tell you a story that is just going to blow your doors off". And so, in the Gospel of John, Jesus is not defined by the past or the future or anything, Jesus defines Himself. He says "Here is who I am" he says "I am the bread of Life. I am the light of the world. I am the Good Shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way the truth and the light. I am the true vine. Jesus says "here is who I am in

the context of this great story”. And then, in the very end, just in case you weren’t convinced, John ends with this line: “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose even the whole world would not have room for the books that would have been written.” And so, John, as he tells the story, it’s just this big self-contained epic thing. And so, John, you’re going to go down there, all on your own cause you’re your own thing, perfect.

Okay, so now we get to Mark which is where we want to start. Samuel you come up here. You can be our Mark for today. Now Mark is written by a Roman Jew to Christians who are living in Rome. And Mark is not looking to the past, not looking to the future, Mark, you are right here, dead centre, in the middle. As you read Mark’s Gospel, he is going to try and put you in the now. Right in the moment. If any of you used to watch that T.V. show “24”. 24’s big thing was that it was shot in “real time”. So, if you watched 10 minutes of the show, 10 minutes passed in the plot of the story. That’s what Mark is trying to create as he writes his story. He wants you to feel the story of Jesus in real time. He doesn’t want you to be the audience down there looking at what happened up on the stage, he wants you right dead centre in the middle of the action. It’s the original virtual reality machine is what the Gospel of Mark trying to become. If you read the Gospel of Mark and you don’t come out of it with dust on your feet, then you haven’t read it right, cause that’s where Mark wants to put you. It is a Gospel of action. If you read Mark, there are things happening constantly, constantly happening, things happening. There are more miracles and healings and exorcisms and resurrections, per page, in Mark, than in any other of the Gospels. And there’s this pace, this tempo, this urgency, the right here, right now, this is what’s going on, kind of thing to Mark, a sense of anticipation. Mark has two favorite terms as he writes his Gospels; one is immediately, the other is, as soon as. That gives you the sense of what Mark was feeling as he was writing this. Those two terms occur 18 times in 16 Chapters and so, there is very little talking and teaching, like we don’t have, in Matthew we have three chapters that’s the Sermon on the Mount that’s just Jesus talking and teaching. But in Mark we don’t have that. Jesus doesn’t teach very much at all and usually when he stops to teach He does it in a parable which is a story, where there are things happening, because that’s the way Mark wants to tell his story. It’s more about works than words. More about miracles than messages. More about actions than articulations. The key kind of thought of the Gospel of Mark, comes from Chapter 10, when he says:

“Not so with you, instead whoever wants to become great among you, must become your servant. Whoever wants to be first, must be slave of all for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

And so, Mark paints this picture as Jesus as the servant of God and Jesus has come here to do the work of God. So Mark’s Gospel is filled with Jesus, doing, doing, doing, serving God as He was commanded to do.

Okay, thank you to you guys for illustrating the four Gospels for us.

Some time ago, we received, I think it was for a birthday present, one of those DVD/VCR things where they're all in one and you can actually take your old VHS tapes and record them on to DVD's so they'll hopefully last longer. We had it for a long time and never used it cause I had no DVD's, but at Christmas, I got DVD's. So, now I've been recording all our old VHS's onto DVD's and for better or worse, a lot of our VHS tapes are James Bond movies. So, I've sat through a lot of James Bond movies over the last couple of months watching them get recorded onto DVD's. What I've noticed, is that, every James Bond movie starts out the same. It starts out with a car chase, or a boat chase, or a car that becomes a boat and chases or a boat that becomes a car and chases, or maybe a hovercraft chase or a ski chase or a fighter plane battle or something. Definitely has a big explosion in it and that's how every one of them starts out. Every one of them starts out with this big dramatic opening sequence, which is then followed by a psychedelic series of scenes splashed across the screen and all synchronized with some seriously strange songs and the credits roll for what seems like 15 minutes after that opening part.

Well, aside from the credits, that's what Mark tries to do with his Gospel. He wants to start off with a bang and not slow down until he reaches the end. And so, as we get to Mark, Chapter 1, if you just glance at it in your bible, you'll see that Mark just starts out and he starts off running. He starts out and he says "well, John the Baptist came and he said 'prepare the way for Jesus', Jesus came and He was baptized and then He went out into the desert and was tempted, and then He called His disciples" and that's up to verse 20. In the first 20 verses, Mark covers everything that Matthew and Luke take four or five chapters to go through. And Mark says 'I just want to get to the action'.

And so, I'm going to do something that I don't normally do, I'm going to read a fairly long section of text all at once and the other thing I don't normally do, is, I'm going to encourage you to close your eyes if you would like to. I just want you to feel the story move and picture it in your mind as Mark begins to tell the story about Jesus. Mark 1:21-45:

"They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!'

'Be quiet!' said Jesus sternly. 'Come out of him!' The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching--and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him' News about Him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who He was.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for Him, and when they found Him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'

Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.' So He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

A man with leprosy came to Him and begged Him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.'

Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' He said. 'Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 'See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priests and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.' Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could not longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to Him from everywhere."

And as I read that, I pause there and I catch my breath, Mark you've thrown a whole lot at me right off the start is that opening sequence that just boom, boom, boom, one thing after the next. Immediately, as soon as, demons and lepers and healings and all this stuff, just Jesus, Wow! And you're almost blown away by that opening scene. But all of that is there simply to set up the climax of the opening scene, which is the story that Brad showed us through earlier.

Mark Chapter 2, starting in verse 1: Jesus is in a town and He's in a house and so many people are there that there is no room left, not even outside the door. Place is packed. Sardines, shoulder to shoulder, elbow to elbow, outside the door, you can't even find a window to look in. And so, these four friends come bringing a paralytic. They want to get him in to see Jesus but they can't get him in because the crowd is just so huge around the house and so, what they do is they climb up on top of the roof and they start chipping their way through the clay that was on the top of the roof. I assume that they didn't bring shovels with them. I assume that wasn't their plan "A". So, I envision them up there kind of clawing away at the clay with their hands

or a stick or whatever they could find to kind of break their way through the roof and they would cut through twigs and branches and things that were used as kind of a primitive rebar and they would be breaking those about and the people who are down beneath, big chunks of plaster are falling down on top of them and they'd like to get out of the way but they can't because they're packed in there there's nowhere else to go and so they're just kind of all cowering and eventually the roof opens up enough and they can let this poor guy down. And they let him down all the way to the ground and place him at the feet of Jesus.

And Jesus initially says to him "Son, your sins are forgiven" and immediately He knew that people were upset with Him for saying that and so He asked "Why are you thinking these things. Which is easier to say to the paralytic 'your sins are forgiven' or to 'get up take up your mat and walk.' But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up and take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God saying "We have never seen anything like this."

And that is the tone Mark wants to set for his story. He says "I am going to tell you a story in the next 15 chapters and when you get to the end you will shake your head and say 'I have never heard anything like that before.'" And what Mark wants to do for his readers is exactly what the four friends did for the paralytic. To carve a path through all the noise and distraction. To break through the barriers that are standing in the way. To drop us right into the middle of the story, right in the heart of the crowd, right in the centre of the action. To place us in the presence of the Messiah. To carry us to the feet of the Christ. To bring us eye-to-eye with Jesus. And if we are willing to take that journey with him, we will walk away amazed and say "We have never seen something like this before."