

## Wheelersburg Baptist Church 4/25/04 Brad Brandt

### Mark 1:1-3 "Knowing the Truth about Jesus" \*\*

Main Idea: There are many false notions in the world about the person of Jesus. If we're going to know the truth about Jesus, we need to go back to **the book** about Jesus. This morning we're going to begin a study of the biography of Jesus written by Mark. In the first three verses of his book, Mark gives us three insights that will help us grasp the truth about Jesus.

- I. Mark gives us a gospel (1a).
    - A. He wrote a special kind of biography.
      1. Though historical, it's very selective.
      2. Though inspired, it's written for a purpose.
    - B. He wrote one of four inspired accounts.
      1. Matthew presented Jesus as the King for a Jewish audience.
      2. Mark presented Jesus as the Servant for a Roman audience.
      3. Luke presented Jesus as the Son of Man for a Greek audience.
      4. John presented Jesus as the Son of God for a worldwide audience.
    - C. He wrote from the perspective of Peter.
  - II. Mark gives us a picture of a unique person (1b).
    - A. We see the humanity of the Messiah in this book.
    - B. We see the deity of the Messiah in this book.
  - III. Mark gives us the beginning (2-3).
    - A. This implies the Messiah's life preceded His birth.
      1. We see Him in the prophets (2-3).
      2. We see Him in the creation account, too.
    - B. This implies there's more to the story.
      1. Mark tells us what Jesus did.
      2. The rest of the New Testament tells us why He did it.
- A Challenge: To get the most out of our upcoming study...
1. Make sure you believe in the real Jesus.
  2. Make sure you can support what you believe by the Scriptures.

It's only a novel. Or *is it?* It's certainly caused a lot of discussion, even debate, in the public arena. The reason is because this novel offers a reinterpretation of the life of someone very important to us.

I'm talking about Dan Brown's best-seller, *The Da Vinci Code*. The plot of the book revolves around a conspiracy theory supposedly once held by Leonardo Da Vinci, a theory that says the Jesus of the Bible is a fictitious character and that there's manuscript evidence for a very different kind of Jesus. The church has squelched this evidence, says Brown, for centuries.

In his book review of *The Da Vinci Code*, entitled, "Why the Mona Lisa Smirks," Marty Fields sums up this "new" Jesus:

"The members of the Priory of Sion have been the keepers of a number of manuscripts that were found beneath the remains of the old Jewish temple in Jerusalem towards the latter part of the first millennium. These manuscripts (some ascribed to Jesus) contain essential pagan teachings that say Jesus was not divine, that he was married to Mary Magdalene, that he produced a bloodline, and that the "true" religion he embraced was that of the worship of both god (father of the heavens) and goddess (mother of the earth). His marriage to Magdalene, and the subsequent offspring, is the most sacred part of the secret because she is the one to produce the bloodline. According to the manuscripts (protected by The Priory of Sion) the Holy Grail is not a cup that held Jesus' blood at his crucifixion; rather, it is the one who procures the bloodline. In

other words the Holy Grail is Mary Magdalene; she is the chalice that carries the blood (line) of Christ."

Granted, *The Da Vinci Code* presents itself as a novel, but its version of Christian history is where the problem enters. Again, Brown claims that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, had children, and ended up in the south of France. Again, to summarize, Brown suggests that the church suppressed this knowledge because it would undercut Jesus' divinity. It was the Council of Nicea who's responsible for making official the doctrine of Jesus' divinity, and that by a very close vote. Furthermore, Brown claims there were more than 80 gospels and the church picked four for the Bible in a power play around the time of the council.

You say, "That's not true. That's not the truth about Jesus." I agree. But answer this. How do we know that what Brown is saying about Jesus isn't true? The short answer is, it doesn't match *the Book*. By *the Book*, of course, I'm referring to the God-breathed accounts of Jesus' life recorded in the Bible.

But what would we do if we didn't have the Book? Please realize that erroneous notions about Jesus aren't anything new. The church faced them in the first century A.D. just one generation after Jesus died, rose again, and returned to heaven. In the 60's, false teachers were circulating heretical ideas about Jesus in the capital city of Rome. How did the church respond? As long as the apostles were around, the churches could ask the Twelve, "Is what they're saying about Jesus true?" And as eye witnesses, the apostles could say, "No, absolutely not. We saw Him. We heard Him. We lived with Him for three years. These men are teaching lies. *This is the truth about Jesus.*"

Yet by the 60's the apostles were dying off. Herod had killed James nearly twenty years prior. By 70 A.D. Peter will be dead, so will Paul, both as martyrs. How would the church protect the reputation of Jesus once the apostles were gone? The answer came when the Spirit of God graciously gave the church four biographical accounts of the life of Jesus, two written by apostles (Matthew and John) and two written by apostolic associates (Mark and Luke). Three of these, known as the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), were written between the 50's and 70's, while John wrote last in the 90's. Thereafter, when questions concerning Jesus arose, the church could go *to the Book*.

By the way, here's why we get into trouble, my friend. We fail to go to the Book! It's why so many church-goers are enamored with *The Da Vinci Code*, not to mention why families and personal lives are crumbling at an alarming rate. We are a generation who don't know what *the Book* says, especially what the Book says about *Jesus*.

It's true, many who claim to believe in Jesus don't really know who He is. By the enabling of God we're going to change that beginning today.

This morning we are beginning a new series, one I'm calling, "*Straight Talk about Jesus*," a look at The Servant through the eyes of Mark. In this expository study of the gospel of Mark, we're going to allow Mark to help us get to know the real Jesus better, examining the record paragraph by paragraph.

Let's get started. We begin where Mark began. In the first three verses of his book, Mark gives us three things that will help us grasp the truth about Jesus.

### I. Mark gives us a gospel (1a).

Notice the first verse, "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." In introducing his book Mark used a very important term. He said he was writing a *gospel*.

The term "gospel" comes from the Old English *godspel*, meaning "good story." The Greek word *euangelion* means "good news." Mark says he wrote the good news about Jesus Christ.

That's interesting. Prior to this the gospel was *spoken*. In A.D. 30 Jesus told the Twelve to go and preach the

gospel to the world. And they did, for thirty-some years. But Mark, guided by the Holy Spirit, took it a step further. He *wrote* the gospel.

What exactly does that mean? Consider three things about Mark's treatise.

A. He wrote a special kind of biography. Typically, a biography begins where? At the beginning of a person's life. It starts with his birth, says a few words about his childhood, then perhaps zeros in on his adult life, with the final pages giving the details of his death. That pattern certainly doesn't fit Mark's account. This biography is special in two ways...

1. *Though historical, it's very selective.* Unlike Matthew and Luke who give us information about Jesus' birth, Mark doesn't even mention His birth, nor His childhood or early adult life. He starts with Jesus' baptism in chapter 1 and concludes with His resurrection in chapter 16.

Don't miss that. Mark begins with Jesus at the age of thirty and devotes his entire book to the three year period of our Lord's public ministry.

But his selectivity goes even further. Of the sixteen chapters, the final six deal with the last week in Jesus' life. Mark 1-10 takes us in rapid fashion from Jesus' baptism all the way to His healing of blind Bartimaeus, but then the pace of the narrative slows way down as we walk with Jesus through the events of His passion week from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday in Mark 11-16.

What Mark wrote is historical, without question, but it's selective history. John did the same thing in his biography which he concluded by saying in John 21:25, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."

You say, "Well, how did Mark decide what to include?" The answer points us to a second very special feature of this book (which is true of every book in the Bible).

2. *Though inspired, it's written for a purpose.* In other words Mark had a reason for picking these particulars from Jesus' life. He was writing at specific time to meet the specific needs of a particular audience. Authorial intent is more apparent when we study a book like Ephesians and we tend to forget it when we come to the gospels, but it's true nonetheless.

Take Luke, for instance. Why did he write what he wrote? He tells us in his opening in Luke 1:1-4: "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so *that* [here's the purpose] *you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*" The final phrase gives Luke's purpose, to help his friend Theophilus (apparently a seeker), come to know the truth about Jesus.

How about John? John shares his purpose in John 20:30-31, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written *that* [here's the purpose clause] *you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" John wrote an evangelistic presentation of Jesus' life, so that non-believers might become believers.

What about Mark? What was his purpose for writing? We'll address that in a moment, but first allow me to pull together the relationship between the first four books of the New Testament. We need to keep this in mind about Mark...

B. He wrote one of four inspired accounts. The Holy Spirit guided Matthew, Luke, and John to record the others. All are true, yet all are different. The first three are quite similar—which is why they're called the "synoptic gospels" (from the Greek terms *syn* which means "together with" and *optic* meaning "seeing," hence "seeing together"). John's account fills in the gaps, as it were, written by the Beloved apostle thirty years or so after the others.

As I indicated a moment ago, each gospel writer had a purpose with a particular audience in mind. Of course, ultimately the Spirit intended them for a broader audience which is why they were later included in the canon and we're studying them today.

1. *Matthew presented Jesus as the King for a Jewish audience.* That's why, for instance, he includes the account about paranoid King Herod trying to kill baby Jesus. Matthew makes it clear that Jesus is *THE* King, a feature very critical to reaching Jews.

2. *Mark presented Jesus as the Servant for a Roman audience.* As you read Mark you'll notice several things that indicate he was writing for non-Jewish readers. He explains Jewish customs. He quotes few Old Testament texts. His style is brief and blunt. In fact, it seems that Mark is writing, not for the rabbi in the library but for the man on the street, particularly the streets of Rome.

Most feel Mark was writing to encourage Roman Christians who were facing two great challenges: one was the danger of teachers who were spreading false notions about Jesus; the other was persecution by the Roman government.

And what was his message? He told the truth about Jesus. He reminded them that Jesus suffered, too. The theme verse could well be Mark 10:45, "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."

3. *Luke presented Jesus as the Son of Man for a Greek audience.* By occupation Luke was a physician. It's not surprising, then, to see His emphasis on Jesus' humanity. He begins his gospel with detailed information about the birth of two babies, John the Baptist and Jesus. Throughout his account he points out Jesus' compassion for hurting people. As mentioned earlier, he wrote this for a Greek-thinking friend, Theophilus.

4. *John presented Jesus as the Son of God for a worldwide audience.* By the end of the first century when John wrote, Christianity had spread throughout the Roman Empire. John writes not merely for Jew or Gentile, but so the whole world will know the truth about the *Logos*, the Word who became flesh, the Son of God who gives eternal life to all who believe.

As Warren Wiersbe concludes, "No one Gospel is able to tell the whole story as God wants us to see it. But when we put these four Gospel accounts together, we have a composite picture of the person and work of our Lord."

A word of application. People are not the same. Lost people are not the same. When we present Jesus to someone we must consider what that person already knows (and doesn't know) about God, the Scriptures, sin, Christ, and so forth.

As we zero in on Mark's gospel, we need to keep this in mind.

C. He wrote from the perspective of Peter. Mark himself was not an apostle. His full name was John Mark, *John* being his Jewish name, *Mark* his Latin surname. His mother was named Mary, a well to do woman who lived in Jerusalem and who allowed the church to use her home a meeting place (Acts 12:12). That would indicate that Mark knew all the apostles well and was personally familiar with the beginnings of Christianity.

Mark was actually a cousin to Barnabas (Col 4:10). When Paul and Barnabas began their first missionary trip they took Mark. Unfortunately, Mark left the team early on and went home (Acts 13:13). Later, Barnabas restored Mark to active ministry.

Mark was also close to Peter, so close in fact that Peter called him "my son Mark" in 1 Peter 5:13. Toward the end of the second century a man named Papias said that Mark actually used the preaching material of Peter to form the basis of his gospel. That makes sense if you consider that that Mark wrote this gospel while in Rome for a Roman audience and that Peter was in Rome in the 60's (where he was eventually executed). It's been said that Mark got his facts for this gospel from Peter, but the explanation of this gospel from Paul.

So Mark gives us a *gospel*. People often refer to this book as "The Gospel of Mark," but that's misleading. Mark calls it, "The Gospel about Jesus Christ." This book isn't about Mark. It's about Jesus, the *gospel* about Jesus Christ.

My friend, we need this book today for we need good news. Several years ago Sherry and I met in a home with about five other couples, several in the group non-believers. The couples shared that they wanted to meet and discuss something that could help their marriages. We began to investigate the teachings of Jesus for there is no subject more life-changing and hope-giving. It's true, as evidenced by the fact that month after month the couples kept coming back. God did some amazing things in those folks' lives in the following months. It can happen in your life, too.

If you're facing struggles today—whether in marriage or parenting or whatever—I challenge you to spend time digesting what Mark wrote, for he gives us the good news, the *gospel*. In addition...

## II. Mark gives us a picture of a unique person (1b).

In the *Da Vinci Code* Dan Brown says that original Christianity believed merely in a human Jesus and that the idea of His divinity came later. What does Mark say? Verse 1 again, "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ [i.e. Messiah], the Son of God." With that simple statement Mark sets the tone for what follows, for in this book Mark enables us to make two discoveries about Jesus the Messiah.

A. We see the humanity of the Messiah in this book. Mark gives His name. *Jesus*. It's a significant name, derived from the Jewish form "Joshua" meaning "Yahweh is salvation."

Throughout this biography Mark emphasizes that Messiah Jesus, though God indeed, was also a *man* indeed. In fact, his emphasis on Messiah's humanity almost shocks us at times. For example, though Matthew referred to Jesus as "the carpenter's son," Mark refers to Jesus Himself simply as "the carpenter" (6:3). And none of the gospel writers tells us about Jesus' emotions as much as Mark does:

--Jesus sighed deeply in 7:34 & 8:12.

--He was moved with compassion in 6:34.

--He was amazed at their lack of faith in 6:6.

--He was moved with righteous anger in 3:5 & 10:14.

--He was deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts in 3:5.

--Only Mark tells us that when Jesus looked at the rich young ruler He *loved* him (10:21).

In addition, Mark emphasizes that Jesus felt hunger pangs (11:12) and could be tired and in need of rest (6:31). Yes, we see the humanity of the Messiah in this book. Also...

B. We see the deity of the Messiah in this book. "The...gospel about Jesus Christ, *the Son of God*." From the outset Mark makes it clear that though a man, Jesus was not just a man. He was God among men, indeed, the God-man.

Yet one of Jesus' most repeated statements in Mark's account seems to downplay His deity. "Don't tell anyone," we find Jesus saying over and over. After healing the leper Jesus told the man, "Don't tell anyone (1:43)." He did the same after healing the deaf mute in 7:36. Similarly, after raising Jairus's daughter from the dead Jesus "gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this (5:43)." Likewise, when exorcised demons cried out, "You are the Son of God," Jesus silenced them with "strict orders not to tell who he was (3:12)." After Peter correctly confessed, "You are the Christ" in 8:29, Mark records, "Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him (8:30)."

Why the secrecy? If Jesus was God why did He keep it low key? He did so because He hadn't come to impress. He came to die for sinners. That was His mission.

In fact, this too is a great theme in Mark's gospel. At least five times Jesus revealed ahead of time what He was going to do, namely suffer, die, and rise again:

--8:31 "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again."

--9:31 "He said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.'" (also in 10:33-34, 45; 12:12; and 14:24)

So was Jesus a man? Absolutely. Was He God? Again, absolutely. In Mark we see both the humanity and deity of the Messiah.

Know this. Satan attacks both. He did so in Mark's day as in ours. He doesn't care if people believe in a fictitious Christ. Frankly, he encourages it.

A friendly couple knocks on your door one Saturday morning and offers you some literature. They want to talk about Jesus, they say. You see the words "Watch Tower" on their materials. They're friendly folks, quite sincere. You ponder that their devotion exceeds yours since you can't recall the last time you got up early on a Saturday morning to go talk with another person about their spiritual condition. Are these visitors true Christians, as they claim? The answer is *no*. Why not? It's because they believe in a *different Christ* than the One in *The Book*. They are Jehovah's Witnesses and they deny the trinity, the deity of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the visible return of Christ, and more.

Islam teaches that Jesus was a messenger of God, not the Son of God. Mormons teach that Jesus was what we can become, a god (with a small 'g'). New-agers assert that Jesus was an enlightened guru who never suffered or died for anyone. The Bahais say that Jesus is one of nine great world manifestations, that it doesn't matter what religion you believe in since all religions are basically the same. Mary Baker Eddy taught in Christian Science that Jesus was just a pleasant divine idea. Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Church say that Jesus was a man who failed, and that Sun Myung Moon is the second coming of Jesus.

Does it really matter what you believe, my friend. Yes! To be saved from your sins you must believe in *THE* Messiah, the One who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me (John 14:6)." And who is this Messiah? He is Jesus the Christ, the God-man. And where do we find the truth about Him? We must go to *The Book*.

In addition to giving us a gospel and a unique picture, Mark gives us something else.

### III. Mark gives us the beginning (2-3).

Note the first two words of verse 1, "*The beginning* of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." What do the words *the beginning* indicate? We can take the words in a couple of ways and I think both are legitimate.

A. This implies the Messiah's life preceded His birth. When Mark begins his story about Jesus he doesn't give a genealogy, as do Matthew and Luke. The beginning, for Mark, precedes Jesus' birth. According to Mark...

1. *We see Him in the prophets (2-3).* "It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"— "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

The first quotation, the one in verse 2, actually comes from Malachi 3:1, "I will send my messenger ahead of you." That is, 400 years before Messiah came the prophet said that a special messenger would precede the Messiah and prepare the people for His arrival.

In verse 3, Mark cites another prophecy, this one from Isaiah 40:3 which predicts that the messenger of preparation would minister in the desert, calling out, "Prepare the way for the Lord."

Who was that messenger? As we'll see next time, verse 4 indicates it was John the Baptist—"And so John came." But for now, don't miss what this quotation says to us about Jesus. Mark makes it clear we see Jesus in the prophets. To see the beginning of the gospel you must go back further than Mark 1:1. You must go to the Old Testament for we see Jesus there. Furthermore...

2. *We see Him in the creation account, too.* Matthew and Luke begin with Jesus' birth. Mark begins with the prophets' predictions. How about John? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (John 1:1-3)." Yes, the Messiah's life preceded His birth.

But I see something else implied in Mark's statement that this is *the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ*.

B. This implies there's more to the story. In other words, the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection—all of which we'll see in the next 16 chapters—are just the beginning of the good news about Jesus. The story of Jesus didn't end with His ascension to heaven. His work continued on. Where? In His Body, the church.

Luke actually wrote two books, his gospel which tells the story of Jesus' ministry while on earth, and the book of Acts which tells the story of what Jesus did in the first generation of His church. To put it another way...

1. *Mark tells us what Jesus did.* With a fast pace, too. Perhaps the key word in the book is the Greek term translated "immediately" (and sometimes "at once" or "quickly"). It appears 47 times. It's also interesting to note the frequent use of the term "and" (1,331 times according to J. Vernon McGee who concludes, "It is a potent word...a word of action, and it means something must follow."

Mark doesn't include a lot of teaching, rather a lot of action. He tells us what Jesus did.

2. *The rest of the New Testament tells us why He did it.* Mark gives the facts.

If you want to see the significance of those facts you must go to Acts and the epistles for in Mark we merely see the *beginning* of the good news.

In the weeks and months ahead we're going to see some amazing true accounts of lives Jesus changed. A demon-possessed man liberated. A tax-collector set free from his greed. And so many more.

But let me say this at the outset. It's still happening. What you see in Mark is just the beginning. Jesus is still setting people free. He will set you free, my friend, if you'll believe the truth about Him, if you'll believe *in* Him, and then surrender your life to Him.

A Challenge: To get the most out of our upcoming study...

I offer two challenges.

1. *Make sure you believe in the real Jesus.* Jesus warned of false Christs. Only the true Christ can save. Make sure you believe in Him. Then...

2. *Make sure you can support what you believe by the Scriptures.* So many folks claim to believe in a Jesus they don't really know. It's time to get back to *The Book*.