

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 5/2/04 Brad Brandt

Mark 1:4-13 "Preparing for Someone Special" **

Main Idea: In Mark 1:4-13 we see two acts of preparation that set the stage for Jesus' public ministry. If there's anything this account teaches us, it's that Jesus is somebody special.

I. John prepared the people for Jesus (4-8).

A. He turned people away from their sin (4-5).

1. Repentance involves confession.
2. Repentance involves a choice to change.
3. Repentance involves concrete action that pleases God.

B. He turned people to Jesus (6-8).

1. God's kind of minister focuses on the Word, not his opinions.
2. God's kind of minister exalts Christ, not himself.
3. God's kind of minister promotes God's kingdom, not his own empire.
4. God's kind of minister helps people face their sin, then get rid of it.
5. God's kind of minister gives people hope.

II. God prepared Jesus for the people (9-13).

A. He used Jesus' baptism (9-11).

1. The Spirit came upon Him.
2. The Father commended Him.

B. He used Jesus' temptation (12-13).

1. The Spirit led Jesus into enemy territory.
2. Jesus faced Satan's assault and won.
3. From this time on, Jesus would rescue others from Satan.

A Personal Question: Is Jesus special in *your* life?

1. Get serious about your sin.
2. Get serious about knowing Him.

He's the greatest person who ever lived. That's no exaggeration. Indeed, if anything it's an understatement. No one has had a greater impact on this planet than He did. Today nearly one-third of the earth's population professes allegiance to Him. Countless books have been written about Him, His teachings, and His influence. There are movies about Him, songs about Him, with more coming out all the time. There are hospitals, schools, publishing houses, and recording studios in existence today, again all because of Him.

In His brief thirty-three year earthly life He healed the sick, preached hope to the hopeless, and raised the dead. He Himself conquered death and returned to life, a feat unmatched in human history.

I'm talking, of course, about Jesus Christ. It's obvious that I haven't even scratched the surface when describing His influence, so great it is.

When it comes to the subject of Jesus, where do you begin? In the Bible there are four biographies of His life, and they each begin from a different launching point. Matthew, writing for a Jewish audience, begins with a genealogy that shows His connection to King David. Luke begins with two birth narratives, that of John and Jesus, for he wants to demonstrate the Messiah's humanity for a Greek audience. John begins with a creation account, emphasizing that the Son of God was present in the beginning, indeed, that He created everything in the beginning. And Mark, well Mark begins in a very different fashion, as we began to see last time. Mark gets right to the point. There's no genealogy, no birth account, just a short Old Testament prediction and boom, He's an adult launching His public ministry!

There is no greater pursuit than to get to know Jesus, and if we know Him, to get to know Him better so that we might make Him better known to others. That's why we began a study last week, with Mark as our tutor, entitled, "Straight Talk about Jesus."

In the passage before us today, Mark 1:4-13, we see two acts of preparation that set the stage for Jesus' public ministry. If there's anything this account teaches us, it's that Jesus is somebody special.

I. John prepared the people for Jesus (4-8).

Verse 4 begins, "And so John came." Note that Mark takes no time to introduce his audience to John, assuming apparently they knew about him. Remember from last week's study, Mark is writing about thirty years after Jesus returned to heaven. Until now the gospel has been preached. Mark wrote it. The reason for this writing was twofold. One, there were non-truths about Jesus being circulated in the Roman world, false ideas that were hurting the church terribly. Two, there was persecution against Jesus' followers. Mark wrote this gospel, as directed by the Holy Spirit, to address those two problems by writing the truth about Jesus, particularly that He suffered too. Mark wrote for a Roman audience, presenting Jesus from the perspective of Peter.

Following the introduction, he began with the spotlight on John the Baptist. Actually, he began with one of his favorite words, "and." In the NIV there are 583 appearances of "and" in Mark, with "and" beginning sentences over 30 times. This is a fast-moving, action-packed presentation of Jesus' life.

And so John came. In fulfillment of the prophecies by Malachi and Isaiah stated in verses 2 & 3, John came. According to Mark, John came to fulfill a ministry of preparation. John prepared the world for Jesus by doing two things.

A. He turned people away from their sin (4-5). "And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."

How do you turn people from their sins? John's methodology was pretty simple. He did it by baptizing and by preaching. In fact, the method he used became his nickname, John *the Baptist*. We need some background to appreciate this.

When a Gentile became a Jewish proselyte he had to do three things. One, he had to be circumcised, for this was the mark of the Jewish covenant community. Two, he needed sacrifice to be made for him, for only blood could atone for his sin. And three, he had to undergo baptism which symbolized his cleansing from sin and his shameful past.

That's what happened to Gentiles who wanted to get right with God. But John staggered his Jewish audience. He told them, "You need to do what you say the Gentiles need to do. You need to get baptized. Why? Because you think you're right with God just because of your religious background and religious connections. You're wrong, dead wrong, and it's time to face the facts. It's time to *repent*."

My friend, if you want to meet the Messiah you must first get serious about your sin. You cannot love Jesus and coddle your sin at the same time. John preached a baptism of repentance.

What does that mean? By definition, repentance (*metanoia*) means "a change of mind." Repentance, as seen here, involves three things.

1. *Repentance involves confession.* Mark says that scores of people made the trek to see John. If it was fascination that brought them, it quickly turned to conviction. They *confessed their sins*. To "confess" is *exomologeō* and means "to agree, to consent, to admit, to acknowledge." In other words, they got serious

about their sin and they did something verbal about it. They used their mouths and *confessed* it, both to God and to appropriate others. I include the latter because Luke says John gave very specific instructions to those repenting about their sins (he told tax collectors to stop ripping off people, and soldiers to quit using their position to take advantage of folks). We don't turn from sin with generalities. We must make specific confession of specific sin to those we've sinned against, including God and others.

2. *Repentance involves a choice to change.* Having confessed their sins, they were baptized. Baptism says this is no mere emotional decision. It takes a person beyond mere talk to a concrete, draw a line in the sand, public action. It says, "By the grace of God I am turning from my sin. I'm under new ownership."

You say, "If God knows the heart, why make it public?" The short answer is, if something's real in your heart, you'll want to make it public. John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. If repentance is genuine it involves a choice to change.

3. *Repentance involves concrete action that pleases God.* When people left John to return home, they left with the realization that change wasn't optional, but mandatory. John told them so, again as seen in Luke's account. *No more hypocrisy*, he told the Pharisees. *No more ripping people off*, he told the tax collectors. And so on.

I'll be blunt. Many people come to Jesus because *they* aren't satisfied with their lives. So they add Jesus until once again *they* are satisfied. Then they put Him on the shelf until they need Him again. My friend, true repentance is different. The issue isn't that you aren't satisfied with your life (that's secondary). It's that *God* isn't. That's why we need Jesus. To repent is to say I want my life to please God from this point on.

John was an in-your-face kind of preacher. The words "user-friendly" don't apply to John. He wasn't interested in attracting self-focused seekers. Even the pulpit he chose made that clear. Mark says the people of Jerusalem *went out to him*, out to the desert. Jerusalem is at least twenty miles from the Jordan River and about 4,000 feet above it. The trip to hear John would take you through the rugged Judean hills and the return trip home would be even harder, all uphill.

The philosophy these days is, "If you want to reach lost people you need to make it easy for them to come. Entertain them with music they like. Give them comfortable facilities. Assure them you've got quality programs for their kids. And by all means don't talk about commitment and don't preach very long. Seekers don't like commitment and long sermons.

I don't know if John would laugh or cry if he saw what's happening today in America. For John there was no music, no padded pews, no air conditioning (and remember he preached in a desert!), no shuttle bus from the parking lot, no nurseries for the kids, and certainly no sugar-coated sermonettes.

Rather, there was preaching—and I mean *preaching*, preaching that condemned sin and called for immediate change and warned of eternal consequences for those who refused to do so.

Besides preaching there was baptizing—and not some sentimental ritual, either. To call for people to be baptized was to call them to sign on the dotted line. It was to say, "It's time to do a 180, no more playing games. It's time to change. Are you in or out?"

And guess what? By the grace of God multitudes said, "We're in." Maybe we'd see more lasting results these days if we took sin seriously, both confronting it and then showing people how to get of it.

You say, "How do I get rid of my sin? I've tried but can't." There's the problem. *You* can't. Here's the answer. Look at what John did.

B. He turned people to Jesus (6-8). We can't change ourselves. John didn't preach self-reform. He

preached Messiah-reform.

Notice verse 6, "John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey." I don't get the impression that John cared too much about popularity. He didn't dress for success, not as defined by Madison Avenue. He dressed to point people to God—that's *true* success. In fact, his attire and even his diet reminded his audience of the Old Testament prophets, particularly Elijah.

He wore a plain outfit (made of camel's hair) and ate simple food (locusts and wild honey). In case you're wondering, people were known to eat locusts either raw or roasted and seasoned with salt or prepared in other ways.

If John's mannerisms captured the people's attention, his words captured their hearts. Verses 7-8—"And this was his message: 'After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'"

Of John Jesus would later say in Matthew 11:11, "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist." There's much we can learn from The Baptist, particularly about how to help people get right with God. From John's example we learn that five things are true of God's kind of minister.

1. *God's kind of minister focuses on the Word, not his opinions.* "Thus saith the Lord!" was the drum John beat over and over. People need God's Word, not our ideas.
2. *God's kind of minister exalts Christ, not himself.* "I'm not worthy to untie His sandals," John said. In that day sandals were simply leather soles fastened to the foot by straps passing through the toes. To remove sandals was the task of a slave. Compared to Jesus that's how John saw himself. He is worthy. I'm not even worthy to be His servant. Is that how you view yourself?
3. *God's kind of minister promotes God's kingdom, not his own empire.* John pointed people to Jesus. In time he would actually turn people away from himself so they would follow the Master. "Behold, the Lamb of God!" was his theme. And people did.
4. *God's kind of minister helps people face their sin, then get rid of it.* Ministers today don't like to talk about sin. We re-label it (we call adultery an "affair") and allow blameshifting (it's your parent's fault you lose your temper). John confronted it and so must we, in our own lives and with others.
5. *God's kind of minister gives people hope.* "He's coming!" John said. "I can baptize you with water, but He will do something far better. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Water cleans up the outside. He will clean up the inside!"

Yes, John turned people from their sin and turned them to Jesus. He prepared the people for Jesus. Mark presents next a second act of preparation.

II. God prepared Jesus for the people (9-13).

How did He do it? He used two events.

A. He used Jesus' baptism (9-11). Verse 9—"At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan."

Mark begins with the words, "At that time." The year was probably A.D. 27. Jesus was thirty years old. After having spent His first couple of years in Bethlehem and Egypt Jesus lived in the Galilean village of Nazareth

throughout his childhood, adolescence, and early adult years. But *at that time* Jesus headed south to Judea. At what time? During the time John was preaching in Judea.

It's hard for us to fathom this since we know the rest of the story, but keep in mind that Jesus was basically unknown at this point. He had a common name, Jesus, the Greek form of Joshua—and there were probably several men named Joshua in Israel. He had a very common background, a carpenter from an obscure village in the outpost district of Galilee. For years now He'd been making yokes and ploughs and building furniture. There was no halo around His head, no glow that accentuated His countenance. He was an ordinary man living an ordinary life. Or so the people thought.

But public perception was about to change, and here's where it began. It started the day Jesus traveled from Nazareth and was baptized by John.

Hold on. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. When people came to John they came to confess their sin and express their desire to change. When they entered the water with John it was to proclaim their intention to turn from sin to righteousness. Why then did Jesus come to John? After all, Jesus was (in the words of Hebrews 7:26) "holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners." Of Him Peter said in 1 Peter 2:22, "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

So why did Jesus come to John for a baptism of repentance? Mark doesn't tell us. Matthew's account says that John actually protested against baptizing Jesus: "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me (Matt 3:14)?" But Jesus proceeded and joined with the sinful multitude in this baptism of repentance.

And why? In Matthew's account Jesus said it was to "fulfill all righteousness (3:15)." But why would the Righteous One go through a baptism that signified repentance? Paul gives us a clue in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." There is why Jesus came. There is why He did what He did throughout His ministry, from His baptism to the cross and the empty tomb. The Righteous One identified with the unrighteous so the unrighteous could become righteous.

When a person joined John in the water it was to indicate his repentance. But of whose sin could Jesus repent? His own? No. He had no sin. But He had come to earth to bear sin, *ours*. J. D. Jones explains, "He made confession in Jordan of your sin, my reader, and mine. For when Jesus entered our humanity, He so utterly and entirely identified Himself with us that He made our very sin His own."

Don't misunderstand. He never sinned. He did come to earth to identify with us and then, while on the cross, to bear our sin and give us His righteousness in exchange.

Two things happened after Jesus was baptized.

1. *The Spirit came upon Him.* Verse 10—"As Jesus was coming up out of the water [note that baptism is no mere sprinkling of water on a person's head, but an immersion in water], he saw heaven being torn open [Mark uses very strong language to speak of this heavenly entrance] and the Spirit descending on him like a dove."

Some cults say Jesus became God at His baptism. They don't understand this event? Was Jesus God before this? Absolutely. What happened then? In the Old Testament when the Holy Spirit came upon a person it was to inaugurate a new ministry (and so the Spirit came upon kings and prophets). Mark says that *Jesus* saw the Spirit's arrival. This was to encourage Jesus, to say to Jesus, "It's now time to break the silence and begin your public ministry."

Mark says the Spirit came "as a dove." Elsewhere the Scriptures compare the Spirit's work to cleansing fire that burns and mighty wind that blows the undesirable away. Those are symbols of violence.

But a "dove?" In the Scriptures this image speaks of gentleness, harmlessness, and humility. The poorest were allowed to bring a dove as their offering for sin. How fitting for the One who when reviled did not retaliate, for Him who was a friend of tax collectors and sinners, for He who did not come to be served but to serve!

2. *The Father commended Him.* Verse 11—"And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'"

The world today often ignores Jesus. In the first century the world rejected Jesus. But what is heaven's assessment of Jesus? Listen to the voice. The voice reveals His identity—"You are *my Son*." The voice reveals His relationship with the Father—"whom I love." The voice also emphasizes the Father's appraisal of Him—"with you I am well pleased."

Here's something to think about. God the Father said verbally that He is pleased with Jesus. Are you? Are you pleased with Jesus? Have you told Him and are you showing Him?

God used the baptism to prepare Jesus for His public ministry. In the three years to come Jesus would face rejection and ultimately crucifixion. He begins with the commendation of His Father—"I am well pleased with You." Indeed, we see all three persons of the Trinity here.

Then came a second event to prepare Jesus for the people.

B. He used Jesus' temptation (12-13). "At once [the Greek term *eutheos* is translated as "immediately" 35 times, "straightway" 32 times, "forthwith" seven times, and translated miscellaneously six times; right after His baptism this happened *at once*] the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him."

Note three things about Jesus' temptation.

1. *The Spirit led Jesus into enemy territory.* The text says that the Spirit *sent* Jesus to the desert. *Ekballo* is a strong term. Typically the word is translated "to cast out," such as with demons. It's the word that would be used to depict expelling a person from society or banishing someone from a family. It means "to cast out, to drive out, to send out," at times with the notion of violence. It's what Jesus did with the money changers in the temple in Mark 11:15 and the demons in Matthew 8:16. Here the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness.

Don't assume that means Jesus was afraid or unwilling to go. He always acted in complete compliance with the Spirit, willingly and gladly, for it was His delight to please His Father.

What happened after the Spirit led Jesus to the desert? Mark says the battle began. Mark uses only two verses to describe Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Matthew has eleven and Luke thirteen verses. Mark records no specific temptations, nor does he mention Jesus' victory over Satan. There was victory, for sure, but Mark wants to emphasize that, as Wessel states, "Jesus' entire ministry was one continuous encounter with the Devil and not limited to a few temptations."

There was a divine necessity to this forty day battle with temptation. There was divine necessity for every step the Savior took on earth. "I must needs go through Samaria," He later would say. And, "Take this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done." The path Jesus walked was established in eternity past in the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Thus, the Spirit *drove* Him into the wilderness.

Think of it. What Jesus faced in those forty days in the desert merely anticipated what the next three years would hold for Him, with the climax at the cross. God's path for Him would include isolation, rejection, scorn, and suffering. The throne would be His, but He would receive it by way of the cross. That was the Father's plan.

The question was whether Jesus the Son could be distracted from such a costly plan. For forty days Satan unleashed his arsenal at Jesus. Matthew's account indicates his strategy was to get Jesus to take a shortcut to the throne. Some people have the notion that Jesus fasted 40 days and *then* experienced the temptation at the end of the period. Mark indicates the assault lasted the entire time. In actuality, Satan's attack continued all the way to the cross.

Please realize that although Satan was the agent of this temptation, the Father used it in His Son's life, as He did in the case of Job and as He does with us. At the very outset of His ministry Jesus faced what He would face in the next three years. Listen to J. D. Jones again: "In vision it was revealed to our Lord what our redemption would cost... It was the Father's testing of the Son's obedience and faith. He showed Him the bitter cup the Redeemer of Souls would have to drink. Privations, sorrows, bitter scorn, the life of toil, the mean abode, the faithless kiss, the crown of thorns—these were all ingredients in that bitter cup. And the Father showed them all to His Son in the wilderness, and said, 'Art Thou able to drink of the cup?' And our Lord, counting the bitternesses, every one, knowing all the pain and shame involved, answered His Father, 'I am able.'"

Let me hasten to say this. Jesus did not face temptation to see if He might possibly fail. He faced the temptation to prove that He would not and could not fail for He is the absolutely sinless One. He was not only without actual sin, but was also without a sin nature. He possessed no inward tendency to sin, as we possess as the sons and daughters of Adam.

On the other hand, this was a real temptation. G. Campbell Morgan's insight is warranted, "I know the old controversy of the theologians and the scholars as to the peccability of Christ. But unless He was *tempted*, then He was *not* tempted; unless He felt the lure of the suggestions made, there was no temptation!"

And so it lasted forty days. The time corresponds to Israel's forty years of testing in the wilderness. Sadly, Israel failed her test. What about Jesus? Again, Mark's account is brief. His aim isn't to give the specifics of this particular confrontation with the Evil One. It's simply to show that the Messiah's conflict with satanic forces has begun. It would continue, too, for the next three years and climax at the Cross. And from the outset Mark makes it clear that...

2. *Jesus faced Satan's assault and won.* For 40 days the Savior endured Satan's temptation but did not succumb. Later in His ministry we'll see Jesus rescuing others from the clutches of the Evil One. As John later wrote, "Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world."

There's a contrast here. The first Adam faced Satan in a beautiful garden and *lost*. Jesus the last Adam encountered the devil in a barren wilderness and *won*.

He wasn't alone in the wilderness. Mark says He was with the "wild animals." The KJV uses "wild beasts," the term can signify any living creature. Metaphorically, it can refer to a brutal or savage man. Interestingly, over three-fourths of the use of this term in the New Testament are found in the book of Revelation where it refers to *the* Beast, the Satanic leader in the Tribulation period.

But there were angels, too. For the angels' activity Mark uses the term *diakoneo* which means "to minister or serve." It's what a servant does for his master. It refers to meeting practical needs in the life of another. In the noun form it signifies a "deacon."

What a contrast here! Jesus was surrounded by *wild animals* (creatures that devour and destroy) and *angels* (God-created beings that, in the words of Hebrews 1:14, are "sent to serve those who will inherit salvation"). That's the contrast Jesus would face throughout the next three years. It's what we face, too.

There are beasts, creatures that seek to harm God's people. Like those the psalmist had in mind when he

cried out in Psalm 57:4, "I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts— men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords." Brothers and sisters, this vile world is no friend of grace.

But let us never forget there are angels, too, God's messengers sent to aid God's children in this battlefield. They came to Jesus in the wilderness, and later in the Garden. They came to Peter in prison, to Paul when shipwrecked, and they come to us when the Father sees we need them.

John Paton was a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands. One night hostile natives surrounded the mission station, intent on burning out the Patons and killing them. Paton and his wife prayed during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them. When daylight came they were amazed to see their attackers leave. A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ. Remembering what had happened, Paton asked the chief what had kept him from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, "Who were all those men with you there?" Paton knew no men were present--but the chief said he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords circling the mission station.

Notice something else about the wild animals. They didn't hurt Jesus. They were wild animals but they weren't wild with Him. They didn't act according to their current, ferocious nature, not with Him. Perhaps Jesus is giving a demonstration here of the conditions in His coming kingdom, when hostility is gone, when the lion and the lamb will coexist peacefully.

John prepared the people for Jesus. God prepared Jesus for the people, at His baptism and then in wilderness. For forty days Jesus faced Satan's assault and won.

3. *From this time on, Jesus would rescue others from Satan.* It's why He came, my friend. He came to set sinners free. He can set *you* free today.

Ponder these Scriptures:

--Hebrews 2:14-15 "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

--Hebrews 2:18 "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

--Hebrews 4:15 "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin."

We've seen today what we will see throughout Mark's gospel. Jesus is somebody special!

A Personal Question: Is Jesus special in *your* life?

You say, "I want Him to be. What does it take?" John made it clear it takes two things.

1. *Get serious about your sin.* My friend, Jesus can change your life. No matter who you are or what you've done in the past. He can change you.

But know this. If you accept Him, Jesus *will* change your life. Are you willing?

2. *Get serious about knowing Him.* If He's really special to you, show Him. Make it your number one priority

in life to get to know Him.