

Mark

Chapter One

### Introduction

An author is always careful to choose just the right setting for his or her story. The setting contributes a great deal to your understanding of the message the author intends to communicate.

The Gospel of Mark opens in the wilderness. "Wilderness" is mentioned no less than four times, in verses 3, 4, 12, and 13. The wilderness of Judea is a desert - a vast, undulating expanse of barren chalky soil covered with pebbles, broken stones and rocks. Here and there a bit of brushwood appears, with snakes crawling underneath.<sup>1</sup>

It is just the right setting for the message the author intends to communicate! The people were being called out to the desert wilderness of Judea to show them their true condition in the world. They were *already* living in a desert wilderness far worse than the bleak and barren badlands of Judea. Mark portrays the world as the devil's wilderness, a world in which disease and demons hold men and women in bondage.

How did the world become the devil's wilderness? Adam and Eve were tempted by him in a beautiful, perfect garden, over which they ruled. Their sin brought them and the entire human race into submission to Satan. Their sin plunged the world from a garden paradise into a desert wilderness over which Satan rules. Disease and demons are the major features of his reign over the world and its inhabitants.

Jesus came to the devil's wilderness and succeeded where Adam and Eve had failed. Disease and demons fled at His command, indicating His complete victory over the devil. The "kingdom of God" has dawned among men. All those who repent and believe in the gospel become citizens of the kingdom of God and await the return of the King to rule in righteousness.

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<sup>1</sup>Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 37.

The kingdom of God is both already here and yet not quite fully revealed. It is already here in the hearts and lives of believers. It will not be fully here, though, until Jesus Christ physically returns as King to literally reign over the world. We live in-between Jesus Christ's victory over the devil and His coming to fully establish the kingdom of God on earth. During this in-between time, the world remains the devil's wilderness for the vast majority of human beings - for all those who have not yet trusted Jesus Christ. In this first chapter of the Gospel According to Mark you are given encouragement and exhortation: encouragement about your salvation, and exhortation about your service: #1 Jesus Came To Save You From The Devil's Wilderness, and #2 Jesus Calls You To Serve Him In The Devil's Wilderness.

#1 Jesus Came To Save You  
From The Devil's Wilderness  
(v1-13)

The Gospel According to Mark is unique in its emphasis on Jesus as a servant. As it begins you notice it makes no reference to the birth or the genealogy of Jesus. These things were unnecessary when examining servants! Mark wrote to a Roman readership, a Gentile people who would only be interested in the faithful performance of Jesus as God's servant. His favorite word is "immediately," translated "straitway" in the KJV. He uses it some 41 times. His gospel is a story of constant activity on the part of God's servant. In it he records only four parables but eighteen miracles. Jesus is portrayed as God's busy servant, conquering the devil's reign of death, disease, and demons. Mark 10:45 is a key verse:

Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

We should expect God the Holy Spirit to use this gospel to spur us into greater service as God's busy people...

Mark, the author of this gospel, is the Jon-Mark of the New Testament. He lived in Jerusalem with his mother, Mary. Their home was a meeting place for believers.<sup>2</sup> Since the Apostle Peter called

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<sup>2</sup>Acts 12:1-19

Mark "my son,"<sup>3</sup> it is probable that it was Peter who led Mark to faith in Jesus. Church tradition states that Mark was Peter's interpreter, so that the Gospel According to Mark reflects the personal experiences and witness of Peter.

Mark's message in these first fourteen verses is that Jesus came to save you from the devil's wilderness. God's *voice* in the wilderness announces your salvation, and God's *victory* in the wilderness assures your salvation.

(v1-8) God's voice in the wilderness announces your salvation:

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The "gospel" is the announcement that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, God's promised Savior. He is "the Son of God" - God come in human flesh. The announcement was made by John the Baptist:

Mark 1:2 As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You."

Mark 1:3 "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'"

John quotes from Isaiah, Malachi, and Exodus. God the Father is promising His Son that He will send a messenger before Him. In Roman times a messenger was sent ahead of the arrival of an emperor or King to give the people time to prepare for his arrival.

In verse three John says he is a voice for the One crying out in the wilderness. The One crying out in the wilderness is God. God is calling out to all men everywhere in the devil's wilderness to prepare themselves for Jesus! The preparation is that of the heart, as seen in verse four and five:

Mark 1:4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Mark 1:5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

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<sup>3</sup>1 Peter 5:13

By coming out to the "wilderness" the people were acknowledging their bondage in the devil's world. Their coming indicated an awareness of the presence of indwelling sin and the practice of individual sins, from which they desired to "repent." "Repent" means to change your mind and your actions upon realizing you have sinned.<sup>4</sup> The people came, "confessing their sins." To "confess" means *to agree with God*. They agreed with God about their sins and repented from them.

These people trusted God for "the remission of sins." "Remission" means that their sins were put away from them onto someone else. This happens at the Cross of Jesus; your sins are put away from you onto Him. These people looked forward by faith to the Cross, just as we look back in faith at the Cross.

They were "baptized" as an outward symbol that their sins were remitted by God. They were baptized because of having already received forgiveness of sins; that's the meaning of the word "for" in verse four!

Coming up out of the waters of the Jordan...What would life be like? They had only to look at John! They would become simple servants who would be endued with the Spirit by their Savior:

Mark 1:6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

Mark 1:7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.

Mark 1:8 "I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

John's dress and diet spoke of simplicity...His belt spoke of service, as did his description of himself as the lowest servant in a household - lower than the one assigned to remove sandals and wash feet. Power for this simple servanthood would come from the baptism with the Spirit - fulfilled after Jesus rose from the dead, on the day of Pentecost.

(v9-13) God's victory in the wilderness assures your salvation:

Mark 1:9 It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

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<sup>4</sup>Wuest, *Mark*, p. 18 (Volume 1).

Jesus confessed no sin. His baptism was not for the remission of His sin, but for His mission to become the sacrifice for your sin. At His baptism the sinless Son of God identified Himself with your sin to become your Savior.

Mark 1:10 And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.

Mark 1:11 Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

God the Father testified from heaven that in Jesus there was no sin. God the Holy Spirit came upon Him to anoint Him for His ministry. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. God is a tri-une God, One God in three Persons.

Mark 1:12 Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness.

Mark 1:13 And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.

Jesus was constantly being tempted by Satan those forty days. He was tempted as to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - just as Adam and Eve were. In a beautiful garden where they were fully satisfied, Adam and Eve failed. Creation was cursed, marked by the fear put into the animals they had once tended. They were driven out by angels. In the devil's wilderness, Jesus Christ was victorious. His victory was marked by His being "with the wild beasts." I have always heard this as referring to His being in danger from the wild animals. In fact, the text indicates that He was in perfect harmony with these animals, as a symbol that in Him creation would be restored! And the angels came and ministered to Him - just the opposite of their assignment with Adam and Eve. Jesus came to save you from the devil's wilderness, and His victory in the Judean wilderness assures you that He has!

Jesus was and is victorious over the devil and will eventually turn the devil's wilderness into His kingdom of God on earth! He is the King; but He has not claimed the fullness of His kingdom. In the mean time the world remains the devil's wilderness for the vast majority of human beings - for all those who have not yet trusted Jesus Christ. During this in-between time,

#2 Jesus Calls You To Serve Him

## In The Devil's Wilderness (v14-45)

Jesus defeated the devil in the wilderness. In these verses He applied that victory by curing diseases and by casting out demons. But the most important thing He did was to call disciples. In-between His first coming to announce the kingdom of God and His second coming to establish it, He calls for disciples to follow Him as servants to those still held captive by Satan. In these verses you see your *call to salvation*, your *call to service*, and your *conduct as servants*.

### Your call to salvation:

Mark 1:14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

Mark 1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Repent and believe is God's universal call to mankind. John preached repentance and faith; Jesus did; then the apostles did.

God's voice is crying out in the devil's wilderness. He cries out through His creation. He cries out through your conscience. He cries out through various other voices - especially, though, through the Scriptures. God's universal call to mankind is because of your universal need for salvation. In Jesus He has made a universal provision for mankind's need!

You answer the call by repentance and faith. Theologians argue about which comes first - repentance or faith, faith or repentance. It is somewhat interesting to look back on your salvation; but the intent of this message is an urgent call to those who are perishing in their sins.

The universal all to salvation must be individually answered. Between verse fifteen and sixteen, Simon, who is Peter, Andrew, James, and John answered the call to salvation. In verses sixteen through twenty they are believers who become disciples and answer a further call to service.

### Your call to service:

Mark 1:16 And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

Mark 1:17 Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

Mark 1:18 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

Mark 1:19 When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets.

Mark 1:20 And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

These fishermen would become "fishers of men." Here is something to think about: Everyone they contacted would be caught in their net! In Matthew 13:47 & 48 you read,

"...the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away."

These men were performing different tasks when they were called to serve. Peter and Andrew were "casting a net"; James and John were "mending their nets." This continues to be true when fishing for men. God gifts *you* in His own unique ways to serve Him. There are many ways to further the gospel. Fishing for men requires net casters *and* net menders!

Peter had a family to support; he left his livelihood to follow Jesus. James and John were well-off, their father owning a fishing business with hired servants. They left their future security to follow Jesus. This was a definite call to discipleship - to forsake all and to follow the Lord.

Jesus said He would "make [them] become fishers of men." He would train them for the task. Their training began immediately - in the synagogues and at Peter and Andrew's house. There you see,

Your conduct as a servant.

Three words summarize these remaining verses: *Teaching*, *Touching*, and *Tarrying*.

Teaching:

Mark 1:21 Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught.

Mark 1:22 And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Jesus taught with authority. He did not refer back to what others had said; He declared what God had said in His word.

Preaching and teaching were the primary activities of Jesus, and the primary mission He left to His disciples. The preaching and teaching of God's Word ought to always be our central focus.

Mark records many miracles, many signs and wonders. But he is careful to remind you that signs and wonders always follow<sup>5</sup> preaching and teaching of God's Word; they are not the goal, but the result. Here at this synagogue in Capernaum Jesus delivered a man from demon-possession:

Mark 1:23 Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out,

Mark 1:24 saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are; the Holy One of God!"

Mark 1:25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!"

Mark 1:26 And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him.

Mark 1:27 Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."

Mark 1:28 And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee.

Demons go to church. Demons know Jesus; they believe He is God come in the flesh. They know He is the "Holy One of God." For all that they are not saved. You must believe in Jesus, believe upon Him, for salvation.

The people had seen demon possession, and had seen attempts at exorcism. The people "were all amazed" because Jesus used no incantations, no formulas; He simply spoke with authority. This encounter served to highlight His having defeated the devil in the wilderness. There was no battle; only victory!

Jesus Christ's first lesson to His disciples is: *Teach the Word!* Teaching and preaching must always be and must always remain our central focus and goal. Then He gave them two lessons in:

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<sup>5</sup>Mark 16:17

## Touching:

Mark 1:29 Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

Mark 1:30 But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once.

Mark 1:31 So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them.

Mark 1:32 At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed.

Mark 1:33 And the whole city was gathered together at the door.

Mark 1:34 Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.

These two episodes represent touching believers who are in the household of faith, and touching unbelievers who are outside the household of faith. Jesus reached out to both. Jesus ministered to the needs of Peter's mother-in-law. We should be looking for ways to minister to the needs of believers. Jesus ministered to the needs of His neighbors. We should be looking for ways to minister to the needs of our unbelieving neighbors. We need in-reach, *and* we need out-reach. With only in-reach we grow critical; with only out-reach we don't grow. We must teach the body to be strong and healthy, to then reach-out to a lost and dying world through the preaching of God's Word. Edifying believers and evangelizing unbelievers is the mark of a mature Church.

The motivation for our touching others is given in verses forty through forty-five:

Mark 1:40 Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."

Mark 1:41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."

Mark 1:42 As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.

Mark 1:43 And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once,

Mark 1:44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

Mark 1:45 However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.

William Barclay describes leprosy:

"The whole appearance of the face is changed, till the man loses his human appearance...The nodules grow larger and larger. They ulcerate. From there comes a foul discharge. The eyebrows fall out, the eyes become staring. The voice becomes hoarse, and the breathe wheezes because of the ulceration of the vocal chords. The hands and the feet always ulcerate. Slowly the sufferer becomes a mass of ulcerated growths. The average course of the disease is nine years, and it ends in mental decay, coma, and ultimately death. The sufferer becomes utterly repulsive - both to himself and to others."<sup>6</sup>

Jesus "touched" this man, because He was "moved with compassion." It's an example for us. You see, leprosy is an external picture for us of internal sin. Everyone is leprous with indwelling sin. Seeing this leper, Jesus was moved with compassion for His physical condition, and He touched Him with power to bring healing. Seeing unbelievers as lepers, we are moved with compassion for their true spiritual condition. We must touch them with Christ's empowering to bring the healing of God's salvation.

Leprosy is a description of sin, a description of unbelievers as they truly are before God in the devil's wilderness. In the Bible, in Leviticus 14, there are instructions for the cleansing of a leper. Two birds were involved. One was put into a jar and killed; the other was stained with blood and set free. The leper then had blood applied to his right ear, his right thumb, and his right big toe. Then oil was put on the blood.

The two birds represent the two aspects of our Lord's first coming. His incarnation and death are represented by the bird put into the jar and killed. His resurrection and ascension are represented by the bird stained with blood, but set free. The blood applied to the ear, the thumb, and the toe, represent God's Word, God's work, and God's walk for the one cleansed by the blood of Jesus. The oil put on the blood represents God the Holy Spirit coming upon those who have had Jesus' blood applied to them.

If you really want to touch others with Christ's empowering, you must follow Jesus' final example. He was found *tarrying*, waiting upon God, in prayer.

### Tarrying:

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<sup>6</sup>quoted by Stedman, The Servant Who Rules, p. 53.

Mark 1:35 Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

Mark 1:36 And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him.

Mark 1:37 When they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You."

Mark 1:38 But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth."

Mark 1:39 And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.

Jesus prayed in a solitary place. Notice the difference between Him and the disciples: They were anxious, fretting, trying to figure out how to touch the crowds - but without the Lord's presence!

Notice also the cleansed leper. He went out teaching without tarrying in the way the Lord commanded. As a result, he missed an opportunity to witness to Israel's priests about Jesus, and He hindered Christ's further ministry.

This is the true secret of the servant, the true conduct of the servant: Tarrying upon God. In it Jesus renewed His spiritual vigor and vision. Without it we teach and touch in vain! With it we teach with God's authority and we touch with God's compassion.

## Conclusion

Jesus came to *save* you from the devil's wilderness. Now He calls you to *serve* Him in the devil's wilderness.

The leper asked Jesus if He was willing. Lepers still enslaved by the devil are still asking Jesus if He is willing. They ask silently, by the very fact of their hopeless condition. They ask us - those of us who are moved with the Lord's compassion. Are we willing? Willing to be servants? Let's answer the call!!