Rock Valley Bible Church (www.rvbc.cc)

2012-001

January 8, 2012 by Steve Brandon

The Servant Who Saves

Mark 1:1

1. The Author
2. The Gospel
3. Jesus Christ
4. Son of God
5. Structure

I love beginnings. I love watching the beginning of basketball games and football games -- when everyone is fresh and the game is being played without the desperation decisions made toward the end of the game. I love the beginning of vacation Whenever we make a trip as a family for some time away, I almost always make an announcement to my family, "This is the best part of the trip," because everything is all before us.

I love the beginning of a project. Everyone involved in the project is all excited about what may come to be. Workers are willing. There’s joy and anticipation ahead.

I love the beginning of preaching through a new book of the Bible. Everyone in the congregation is excited about what will take place. Everyone is eager to learn. Well, today we come to the beginning. We come to the beginning of the gospel according to Mark.

What a privilege we have of digging into the book of Mark. I suspect that it will take us about a year to work through this marvelous book as we work through it verse by verse. What a privilege we will have of digging deep into the life of Jesus Christ. I think of Isaiah 40:8, where it is written, "The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever." Week after week after week after week, we will think about Jesus. We will think about His life. We will think about His death. We will think about the gospel.

That’s where Mark begins with chapter 1, verse 1. We begin today with the very first verse of the gospel of Mark.

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

Now, before we actually get into the book itself, I want to tell you a bit about the author. This is my first point.
1. The Author

At the top of your page in your Bible, you probably have these words: "The Gospel According to Mark." We don’t know that Mark wrote this gospel from the book itself. Rather, we know the author only from the testimony of church history.

One of the early church fathers, named Eusebius, wrote in 140 A. D., "Mark, who became Peter’s interpreter, wrote accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord." This testimony has been universally received all down through church history -- that Mark wrote the gospel, and that Peter was the main source.

We have hints of their relationship from other portions of Scripture.. In 1 Peter 5: 13, Peter identifies Mark as "my son." Certainly, he wasn’t referring to a physical son, but to a spiritual son. Perhaps Peter was the one to lead Mark to the Lord. Perhaps Peter was the key one who discipled him after he came to the Lord.

We know from the book of Acts that they knew each other. In Acts 12, the church was facing great persecution. Peter was in jail, in danger of being executed the next day by Herod, who had just put James to death with a sword (Acts 12:2) Peter’s head was next on the chopping block! There was a prayer meeting in Mary’ s house, where they were praying fervently for him (Acts 12:5). God heard their prayers and sent and angel in the middle of the night to loose his bonds (Acts 12:7) and lead him past the first and second guards (Acts 12:10), and eventually to Mary’ s home. We read in Acts 12:12, "He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark." This is the same Mark who wrote the gospel before us this morning. He witnessed the mighty works of the Lord, freeing Peter from prison. And so, the link of Mark and Peter makes sense.

But, Mark wasn’t linked only with Peter. He and Paul have quite a bit of history together as well. The story of Mark and Paul is a great story of failure and redemption.

The story begins in Acts 13, when the Lord directed Paul and Barnabas to go out from Antioch on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:2). Mark came along as their helper (Acts 13:5). But, early in the journey, Mark deserted them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).

This was a huge blight on Mark's character. So much so that when it came time for Paul and Barnabas to take another trip, Paul didn't want to take Mark along with them, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia during the first trip (Acts 15:38). But Barnabas wanted to take Mark along. Perhaps, in part, because they were cousins (Col. 4:10). But, Paul "kept insisting that they should not take him along" (Acts 15:38). "And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus" (Acts 15:39). Paul, on the other hand, journeyed with Silas (Acts 15:40).

This is no small deal in the life of Mark. He felt disappointment. He felt failure. Surely, he felt that he let down others. And yet, years later, we hear Paul in a Roman prison telling Timothy, "When you come [to see me] ... pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service" (2 Timothy 4:13, 11).

Somehow, in some way, they reconciled. Though Mark had failed at one time. He proved himself to be faithful in the end. And what matters in the Christian life is how you end. There are many who sprout up and look flashy at first, but fade away. And then there are others, who stumble in their walk, but continue faithful to the end. There are those who come faithful in the end (Matt. 21:28-32).

God hates those who fade away. But, God loves those who seek the Lord even after times of failure. Proverbs 24:16 says, "A righteous man falls seven times, and rises again"

As we go through the gospel of Mark, one of the themes that we will see often is how the disciples just didn't get it. Jesus poured Himself out for them. And time and time and time again, they let him down. They failed to believe (Mark 9:19, 29). They didn't understand His words (Mark 9:32). They were in it for themselves (Mark 9:34). Like Mark, they deserted Jesus in His hour of greatest need (Mark 14:27, 50). And yet, the good news is that they were later restored (Mark 16:14-18). And we know from church history that they turned the world upside down (Acts 17).

This is a lesson for all of us. In some ways, we all are like the disciples at one time or another. We lack faith at times. We fail to understand what Jesus wants of us.

We are in it for ourselves and not for His glory. We have failed to be faithful in some of our life's greatest tests. If this is you, then join the club. As one man said, "Confusion in your mind doesn't disqualify you from being a disciple. It means that you are walking a well-worn path." [1]

Mark knew that this was like. Peter, who was in the background of this book, knew what this was like. The disciples knew what it was like. And yet, God is gracious. There is an opportunity for repentance. The gospel of Mark will show this to us. And, I trust that this will give all of us great hope.

This takes us to the next word of my outline. We have seen The Author. And now, let's look at ...
2. The Gospel

I pick this up from verse 1, ...

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

This word "gospel" in the Greek means "good news". In a world full of bad news, Mark's gospel will show us the good news of Jesus Christ.

In the ancient world, this word had special significance, especially as it related to the emperor. When an heir to the throne was born, a "gospel" was proclaimed in the Roman world. When a new king took the throne, a "gospel" was proclaimed. [2]

Imagine the rejoicing that there will be in England when Kate, Duchess of Cambridge, has her first child, the heir to the throne! The "good news" will spread throughout London and throughout the entire world!

In ancient Roman times, this word, "gospel" was also used in another setting. It was used to as a technical term for "news of victory." When the messenger would come back from battle frond and shout, "Hail! We have won!", such a proclamation was known as "gospel." It was known as "good news." It was a time of celebration. Sacrifices of praise would often be offered. In fact, these sacrifices were often called, "gospels." When Nero had been successful in the games he ordered "gospels" to be offered to their gods. This is because the Romans believed that "Good news [was] a gift of the gods. This is why it [was] celebrated with sacrificial feasts". [3]

When you come to the New Testament, the term, "gospel," is the good news of Jesus Christ. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1).

Catch this: Jesus is the king that was born. Jesus has brought the victory. And this is good news. It's good news to those who lived after the time of Christ. It is good news to us who believe in the Christ. The good news encompasses all of His life. Who He was. What He did. And all of the implications that flow from His life.

The apostle Paul told those in Corinth, ...

> 1 Cor 15:1-4
> Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

Paul told those in Corinth, "I'm telling you about the good news." It's about Jesus. It's about His life. It's about His death. And when you believe in Him, you are saved -- saved from your sins. See, when Christ died, He died for our sins! Then Christ was raised, He was raised in fulfillment of the Scriptures! We know that the good news is true!

If you are looking for a key verse in the gospel of Mark, it comes in Mark 10:45: "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Though Jesus is God's Son, though Jesus is God incarnate, He didn't come to receive accolades. He didn't come to be praised. He didn't come to be reign like a king. No, He came to serve.

He served by healing and teaching and giving Himself completely to those around Him. In fact, at one point Mark tells us that "there were [so] many people coming and going [that] ... they did not even have time to eat" (Mark 6:31). Jesus is the servant who served us.

But, Jesus also came to die. He came "to give His life a ransom for many" (10:45). Jesus is obviously referring to His death. Notice the idea of substitution, which is at the heart of the gospel. It was "His life ... for many." And that's the crux of the gospel -- that Jesus died in our place for us, that Jesus bore our sins in His body on

the cross, that we go free. We were held captive in our sins. But, Jesus paid the ransom price. As we believe and trust in Him, we go free!

That's good news. We don't have to work to be good enough to be forgiven. We simply need to believe, and Jesus wipes our sins away.

Notice that Jesus didn't do this "for all." No, He did it "for many." He did it for those who believe.

Oh, church family, how important it is for you to believe the gospel! The book of Mark is all about the gospel! It says it right there in verse 1, ...

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

Now, when we think about the big idea of the book of Mark, I have taken it from this verse. Here it is: "The Servant Who Saves." That's my summary of the book of Mark. That's the title of my message this morning.

This brings us to my next point. We will look at ...
3. Jesus Christ

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). That's what Mark is about. It's a book about Jesus.

Mark tells us the way that He lived -- healing many who were ill (1:32), casting out many demons (1:32), forgiving sins (2:5), calling 12 disciples to be with him (3:13), teaching about the kingdom of God (4:26), raising people from the dead (5: 39), feeding thousands of people (6:33-43), correcting the Pharisees of their erroneous ways (7:1-13), revealing His office as the Christ (8:29), revealing His true nature on the mount of Transfiguration (9:1-8), explaining His purpose in coming (not to be served, but to serve), and to give His life as a ransom for many (10:45).

Mark tells us the way that He died. He entered into Jerusalem (ch. 11), was rejected by the religious leaders of the day (ch. 12), told His disciples of His return (ch. 13), was delivered to the chief priests and scribes (ch. 14), was condemned to death and crucified (ch. 15), and rose from the dead (ch. 16)

This is really what the gospel of Mark is all about. It's about the life of Jesus Christ.

So, in many ways it's a biography. But it's a strange biography. It tells nothing of the birth or childhood of Jesus. Approximately half of the book of Mark covers three years of Jesus' life. The other half covers the final week of Jesus' earthly life. Most biographers don't do this. But some might, especially if they have a specific goal in mind. And that's the case with the gospel of Mark. He's not merely trying to tell the story of the life of Jesus. He wants to tell it from his own angle.

Now, if you are familiar with the Bible, you know that there are four such biographies in the Bible: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each of them tells the story of Jesus Christ. But, each of them tells the story from slightly different angles. This is a common thing to do.

I have recently picked up a biography of A. W. Tozer written by Lyle Dorsett entitled, "A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer." He writes on page 20, ...

> Although there are already two important biographies on A. W. Tozer, ... [One by David Fant and one by James L. Snyder], ... I have chosen to write another book for several reasons. First, some new resources are available since Fant and Snyder wrote their books. ... Second, despite significant contributions of the earlier biographies in setting forth the details of Tozer's life, more remains to be revealed about the inner man. There are dimensions of A. W. Tozer that have eluded students of his life and ministry. As a result, this book attempts to reveal the inner life of this gifted and complex man. ... who at once loved God passionately and deeply, sought to know Him with all his heart and mind and soul, yet found it quite difficult to relate with similar enthusiasm to his own immediate and extended family, or to the congregations God called him to oversee. Third, inasmuch as Tozer has been dead for nearly half a century, we now have a vantage point of longer perspective. Fourth, early twenty-first-century Christians live in a culture that asks some different questions and wrestles with at least a few issues peculiar to our time and therefore not explored by earlier biographies.

There is a reason why this new biography of A. W. Tozer (written in 2008) is needed. And there is a reason why we have four gospel accounts of the life of Christ. It has to do with their flavor. It has to do with their purpose.

The gospel of Matthew was written with a Jewish audience in mind. You read through the gospel and you constantly see references to the Old Testament Scriptures and how they were fulfilled in Jesus. This is all in an attempt to persuade the Jewish reader that Jesus was the Christ. The gospel of Luke was written as an accurate, authoritative biography. Dr. Luke carefully researched everything and wrote, "so that you may know the exact truth" about Jesus Christ (Luke 1:4). The gospel of John is decidedly evangelistic. Near the end of his account, John writes, "These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

So, why was Mark written? What's his angle?

I believe that Mark was written primarily with a gentile audience in mind. Throughout the gospel, Mark takes time to explain the Jewish customs that would be unfamiliar to Gentile readers. Throughout the gospel, Mark often translates words; this translation would be unnecessary for a Jewish audience. For instance, in chapter 7, Mark records that ...

> Mark 7:1-4
> The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)

In chapter 15, Mark writes, ...

> Mark 15:42
> When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath,

He translates words, such as ...
... "And James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means "Sons of Thunder.")" in 3:17.
... "Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!")" in 5:41.
... "You say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God)" in 7:11.
... "and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "be opened!" in 7:34.
And, "Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull," in 15:22.

The gospel of Mark is written to be clear for those who have little background in the Old Testament.

Of the four gospel accounts of the life of Jesus, Mark is the shortest (by far). Matthew is 30 pages long. Mark is 18 pages long, Luke is 31 pages and John is 23.5 pages.

It means that there are many events of the life of Jesus that aren’t told in Mark that are told in the other accounts of the life of Jesus. We have no genealogy of Christ, as Matthew and Luke have. We have no record of His birth or His origin, as Mathew, Luke, and John all have. Matthew records five long discourses of Jesus, sermons and teachings. Mark records two of them, but they are shorter. John records the long discourse that Jesus had with the disciples in the upper room. Mark records very little of this.

It’s almost as if Mark isn’t so interested in the teaching of Jesus as He is in the deeds of Jesus. Not what Jesus taught. But what Jesus did.

And there’s an urgency to Mark’s gospel. Over and over and over again, he uses this word, "Immediately." Though Mark is far shorter than the other gospels, Mark uses this word as many times as the other three gospels combined! Matthew uses the word 19 times. Mark uses the word some 43 times. Luke used it only 10 times. And John uses this word only 6 times. You can see just a few examples of this usage in Mark 1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 28, 29, 30, 42, 43; 2:8, 12. The list goes on.

This adds to this big Idea of Mark that Jesus is "The Servant who Saves." The servant is the one who hears his master’s command and quickly does his master’s command. Such was the life of Jesus. He was the ultimate servant.

And the aim of Mark was decidedly evangelistic. This comes out in my fourth point. I want to look at the last phrase of verse 1, ...
4. Son of God

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

In this verse, Jesus is identified as being "the Son of God." This thought occurs several times all throughout the gospel of Mark. Mark wants for you to know who Jesus is. He is the "Son of God."

Look down a few verses to verse 10. Here we see Jesus being baptized by John. "Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heaven opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: ‘You are my beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased" (Mark 1:10-11).

"The Son of God" is not to be understood as a specific title for Jesus, like the Messiah or the anointed one. No, "the Son of God" is a declaration of the *being* of Jesus. By nature, He is God’s son. He hasn’t become God’s Son. He has always been God’s Son. And God has found His delight in His Son (Mark 1:11). He is an obedient Son. He is a righteous Son. We see His righteousness in Mark 9. This is the story of the transfiguration. Peter, James and John see Jesus atop a high mountain and "His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them" (9:3). Moses and Elijah are there talking with Jesus (9:4). The three disciples hear a voice coming from out of the cloud -- from heaven -- saying, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" (9:7). Jesus is God's Son!

We need to know Jesus. We need to know who He is and what He says. I put on my blog this week a post about a book Yvonne and I have been reading called, "How to Master the English Bible." It is by James Martin Gray. He says that basically the way to master the Bible is to take one book of the Bible, and read it. Read it again and again and again and again. He says that by the fifth time, you will probably be bored of reading it over and over again, but by the tenth time, you will begin to see new things. You will begin to grasp a hold of what the Bible is saying. You will know the events that are happening. You will know what Jesus is talking about in what circumstances. You will begin to "master it", to know it.

I am committing to reading the gospel of Mark every week this year, as we go through the book as a church. Would you join me in reading Mark each week? Let's master it together.

Well, not only is it the Father who testifies to who Jesus is. The demons know who Jesus is. Look down at verse 24. Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and was confronted by an unclean spirit, who cried out, ...

> Mark 1:24
> What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are--the Holy One of God!

This is a reference to the being of Jesus. He is not some man. He is not some angel. He is the Holy One of God! He is the Son of God!

Turn over the chapter 3. Here, we see much the same thing. We see the demons identifying Jesus as "the son of God."

> Mark 3:11
> and whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, "You are the Son of God!"

But, what the demons knew, the Pharisees and Sadducees and the chief priests and the scribes -- all the religious elite -- failed to see. Instead, they wanted to kill him. Look down in chapter 3, verse 6, "The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (Mark 3:6). And throughout the rest of the book, we see the religious leaders seeking to discredit and destroy Jesus.

Eventually, they succeeded in having Him killed upon the cross. And even while Jesus was upon the cross, the chief priests and the scribes were mocking Him, saying "He saved others; He cannot save Himself" (15:31). But, ironically, one of the soldiers who had put Jesus to death knew who He was. Turn over to chapter 15. We read in verse 39, "When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God.

And this is the point of the entire book. Jesus is the Son of God. Mark began his gospel this way (1:1). Mark ends his gospel this way (15:39). Jesus is the Son of God.

Do you believe it? Lots of people have lots of ideas about who Jesus is. Many think that He was a fake. I was told recently that Jesus is dead. Many think that He was a good teacher. Muslims believe that Jesus is a prophet. Mormons believe that Jesus and Satan were brothers. But, Mark's point is that Jesus is the Son of God. He is the same essence as God.

Let's move on. We have seen The Author, The Gospel, Jesus Christ, Son of God, and now, ...
5. Structure

One of the things that I love about the gospel of Mark is that it has a clear structure to it. It all hinges in chapter 8. So, turn there. In verse 27, we see Jesus asking a good question.

> Mark 8:27
> Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?"

This is the core issue for Mark. He wants to show His readers who Jesus is. In many ways, this was the core issue for Jesus as well. He wanted His disciples to know who He was. In verse 28, we see some good answers, ...

> Mark 8:28
> They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets."

These are good answers. These are the types of answers that people tell us today. But, then, in verse 29, Jesus asks a great question:

> Mark 8:29
> And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?"
> ...

Really, when it comes down to it, this is the greatest question in all of life. You can get a lot of things wrong in this life. You can make bad choices as a teenager, which leads you to a corrupting influence in your life. You can make a poor marriage choice, which leads you to heartache for many years. You can make bad business decisions, which leads you to bankruptcy. But, all of those things are temporary. You can recover.

But if you get it wrong about the person of Jesus, there's no recovery. Peter gives a great answer to Jesus' question.

> Mark 8:29
> ... "But who do you say that I am?" Peter *answered and *said to Him, "You are the Christ."

That's it! Right there we see the whole point of the life of Jesus. He is the Christ. He is the Messiah. He is the Anointed One. He is the One who is going to save His people from their sins! Peter saw it. We learn from Matthew's gospel that Peter saw it only because it was revealed to him. And from that point on, things change in the gospel of Mark. Up until this point, Jesus was seeking to show His disciples who He was (chapters 1-8). And at this point, Jesus begins to tell His disciples what He must do (chapters 9-16).

We see the change right away.

> Mark 8:30-31
> And He warned them to tell no one about Him. And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

What must Jesus do? He must suffer and die and be raised from the dead. Jesus reminds His disciples of these things again and again.

> Mark 9:30-31
> From there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it. For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later."

Again, you see the same elements: His suffering, His death, His resurrection. But, it wasn't clear for the disciples.

> Mark 9:32
> But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.

It took 8 chapters for them to finally realize who Jesus was. It will take another 8 chapters for them to finally understand what Jesus must do.

He repeats the same thing in chapter 10, ...

> Mark 10:33-34
> "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."

Again, the same thing: suffering, death, resurrection. That's the story of Jesus. That's the story we must believe. And Jesus wants for the story to be front and center in our lives.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 8, 2012 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

---

[1] Mark Mullery, preached February 4, 2007 at Sovereign Grace Church of Fairfax. See http://www.sovgracefairfax.org/

[2] The Gospel According to Mark, Commentary by C. E. B. Cranfield, p. 36

[3] Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 2, pp. 722-3