

Part 2 God Prepares Jesus for Ministry (1:1-20)

In the opening verses of Mark's Gospel, Mark introduces Jesus<sup>□1</sup> and then begins to relate the events that led to rising opposition to Jesus in Galilee<sup>□2</sup>.

□1 1:1-20  
□2 1:21:3:6

1. Jesus is the Son of God

**1. Mark wants us to know that Jesus is the Son of God.** His book opens with a statement of its theme: 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' <sup>□1</sup>. 'Gospel' or 'good news' is one of Mark's favourite terms<sup>□2</sup>. This is what the Christian faith is all about and what Mark's Gospel is all about: the good news of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ. The Christian faith is not first and foremost a philosophy, an intellectual system to be mastered. It is not a programme of what human beings should be endeavouring to fulfil. It does not **begin** with an invitation to an experience of God. It begins with an announcement – an announcement of what **God has done**.

□1 1:1  
□2 See 8:35, 10:29, 13:10

• Jesus is the Good News

The good news is a person – Jesus. In Jesus, God has already acted; He has already done something. All that has to happen is that we should be told about it. God has already provided salvation for the world.

• Believe!

What do you do with an announcement? With a philosophy – you study it. With a programme of endeavour – you do it. With an experience – you feel it. But what do you do with an announcement? You believe it!

• Jesus is the Son of God

Mark wants us to know who Jesus is. He is 'Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. Some Greek manuscripts omit the words 'the Son of God', but the manuscripts which have it are, I think, right. Mark's Gospel persistently insists that Jesus is the Son of God<sup>□1</sup>, so it is likely that this central point in his book should occur in the title. Some scribes probably omitted it to make the title of the book shorter and sharper.

□1 1:11; 3:11; 8:38; 9:7; 12:6

• The beginning – John the Baptist

What does Mark mean by 'the beginning' of the gospel? It probably refers just to the ministry of John the Baptist, because the Bible often makes the point that this crucial period of history began with John the Baptist. <sup>□1</sup>

□1 see Acts 1:21–22; 10:37; 13:24

2. Preparation for ministry

**2. Mark tells us of three things that were involved as Jesus was prepared by God for ministry.**

• John the Baptist – salvation is spiritual

First, John the Baptist made clear the nature of the salvation that was coming. Malachi and Isaiah had both spoken of the way in which God planned to prepare for His coming. Mark 1:2–3 quotes Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, mentioning the major prophet. John the Baptist fulfilled this pattern. John made it clear that **Jesus' Messiahship would be spiritual in nature**. People expected a political Messiah. They still do. People are far more concerned about political progress and economic welfare than they are about the forgiveness of sins and a clean conscience. The poorer nations of the world often ask for financial help and sometimes for political support. But they do not generally ask for spiritual help and when they do it is normally with hidden motivation.

The plan of God for the world began with the sending of a Saviour from sin. John the Baptist was a living summary of the Old Testament prophets. He called people to repentance, and he baptized those who expressed their willingness to repent. John's baptism was not spiritual magic; it did not automatically save anyone, but it expressed repentance<sup>□1</sup>, and repentance brought the experience of God's forgiveness.

□1 1:4

John's preaching brought revival<sup>□1</sup>. He insisted on an obviously and visibly simple lifestyle, following the pattern of Elijah<sup>□2</sup>. He made it clear that the salvation that was coming was spiritual. He pointed to Jesus whose greatest gift would be the giving of the Holy Spirit<sup>□3</sup>.

□1 1:5  
□2 1:6  
□3 1:7–8

• **Jesus' baptism and the Holy Spirit**

Secondly, **Jesus needed to receive the Holy Spirit**. There came a time when John the Baptist's ministry was finished, and Jesus' ministry began. He left Nazareth where He had spent most of His earlier life, and was baptized by John<sup>□1</sup>. His baptism expressed commitment to a new way of life. For Jesus it could not **precisely** express repentance – since He had nothing to repent about! But He was identifying with the people. He was acting as though He was a sinner like them. It was His commitment to a new way of life, and especially His commitment to His ministry in which He would die upon the cross. As soon as He committed Himself to God in this new way, He was given the outpouring of the Holy Spirit<sup>□2</sup>. The Spirit was like a dove, a bird associated with gentleness and purity. Jesus' receiving the Spirit was not His conversion! It was a sealing of His Sonship ('*Thou are my beloved Son*'), and a commissioning for His ministry<sup>□3</sup>. The words '*... in whom I am well-pleased*' echo Isaiah 42:1, and confirm that Jesus is the suffering servant of God predicted by Isaiah.

□1 1:9

□2 1:10

□3 1:11

• **Temptations to turn from God's will**

Thirdly, **Jesus had to prove His willingness to do God's will despite temptations to move in a different direction**. The Spirit led Him into the wilderness of Judea<sup>□1</sup>. It was a time of prayer and preparation, and during that time temptations came to turn Jesus aside from the will of God. Should He be a Messiah in some other way than the one in which the Father was leading Him? The animals of the desert were nearby, but (like Daniel in a den of lions) the Father kept Him safe. Angels protected Him<sup>□2</sup> and kept Him alive. Since Jesus was doing the Father's will He had the Father's protection.

□1 1:12; 'driveth' is too strong a translation

□2 1:13

**3. Training workers**

**3. From early days Jesus was concerned to train workers**. After John was put in prison it was a signal that a major phase of Jesus' ministry was to begin<sup>□1</sup>. He began preaching. His theme was the good news that God's royal power was at work. He announced that His own coming was a new phase in the work of God's kingdom, and He asked for a response of repentance and faith<sup>□2</sup>.

□1 1:14

□2 1:15

• **On the job**

At this time He brought His first workers into the work with Him<sup>□1</sup>. We do not always like to train workers who do the same thing as us. We might want assistants but we do not generally want replacements! Many would fear that assistants might take over their ministry! In developing countries 'experts' may come from the west. They are willing to do a good job, but are often not willing to train someone to take over their job. Jesus had none of these hang-ups. From early days He was training people to take some of the work that He was doing. Of course no one would be a ransom for many<sup>□2</sup>, but the disciples would be asked to '*take up their cross*'. Jesus was training successors. One of His earliest tasks in Galilee was to start choosing trainees. They had to 'follow' Him (quite literally), to get on-the-job training.

□1 1:16–20

□2 10:45

• **Successors**

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