

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK: WEEK 1

Introduction: "The Beginning" Mark 1:1-13

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**Commentary:** This past week I had the unexpected task of showing a location scout around our Church building. One phone call led to a walk-through, led to a series of calls, a two more walk-throughs – and it looks like St. Andrew's might be used for a soon to be shot TV drama.

Back in the early 90's, while I was attending Knox College, I worked as the custodian at Rosedale Presbyterian Church – and one of the tasks that I had was to shadow the various TV and film crews who would use the building to film scenes for shows and movies. It was interesting work. The one thing that I learned was that the only thing that mattered was what the lens of the camera saw. What this means is that it didn't matter what the whole picture – what you and I see when we look at a room – looks like, it's what the framed, focused, view of the camera sees that's important. In the process of filming, it's the shot that counts – everything else detracts from the narrative.

This week we start a new Bible Study – this time, on the Gospel of Mark – and I mention this about filming, and by extension, TV shows and films, because, in many ways, the same principle applies to this Gospel.

The Gospel of Mark is written with the brevity of a script with each scene drawn out on storyboards – sketches of Jesus' life and ministry – as episodes that move the story forward to its climactic conclusion. Each sketch/episode is meant to catch our attention and hold of curiosity and interest; they're meant to move us to a decision about who this Jesus of Nazareth is. And like a storyboard script, there's not a lot of connecting narrative – each new scene, a quick edit cut from the last; the only continuity being the Gospel's singular focus on Jesus' ministry. As a result, the Gospel of Mark has a restless, relentless, and driving energy that challenges us – the reader/hearer of this "good news" – to respond. For the author, there is no middle ground: Christian discipleship is an all-or nothing experience with consequences that are both immediate and eternal, costly and rewarding.

Nowhere is this cinematic sense clearer than the beginning of the Gospel. The action happens immediately, with no context, no introduction: we're on the side of a river, in the midst of a crowd of unknown people; there's noise, music, wails, shouts; our point of view is focused on moving toward a figure standing in the river – as the narrator says; "*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;*" we hear the echoes of a prophet Isaiah:

*As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,  
"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;  
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,' "*

Without any back story, we're introduced to Jesus – the Christ, the Son of God. Mark wastes no time on narrative: In 15 verses he accomplishes what both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke took chapters to accomplish. There's no birth narrative, no stories of Jesus' childhood, no family trips to Jerusalem; Mark's Jesus is a man with a mission and we're already in the middle of it.

The author of the Gospel of Mark knows both his story and his audience – and he knows that his time is short. He writes with the same urgency and brevity as God has in acting toward bringing about our salvation. Using repeated and jarring shifts in scene, action, and outcomes, he creates an immediacy and suddenness that accelerates the pace of the narrative right from its sudden/abrupt start to it equally sudden/abrupt ending. All of this is meant to force us to encounter the Jesus who didn't come to tell us who He was, but to have us respond and come to believe in Him by faith. In this way, using seemingly random, juxtaposed, events and moments, in stark contrast or in repeated sequences for emphasis, Mark reveals Jesus by hiding Him – and His "messianic secret" – until we put the pieces together and profess Him as the One promised to bring about our salvation.

For a prayer, I close with this quote from William Tyndale as we seek out Christ in Mark' Gospel:

***"Enagelio (that we cal gospel) is a greke worde, and signyfyth good, mery, glad and joyfull tydings, that maketh a mannes hert glad, and maketh hym synge, daunce and leepe for joye."***