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Title: The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ
Text: Mark 1:1-13 (v. 1)
Theme: Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promises made by the Father to His people.

The Eternal Value:

- In the absence of hope, living becomes an oppressive and intolerable burden.
- In the absence of expectation, of deliverance, the things of life once tolerable become tyrannical.
- In the absence of immediate deliverance, faith must exist to push us past the beast of consumption.

Faith fuels hope. Hope exists because faith does. Mark's Gospel tells us that our faith in God's promises has been fulfilled. In addition, there is still more to come. It is the truth of the good news about Jesus Christ that fuels us to endure the chronic conditions of a fallen world and live in rest knowing that the best is still yet to come.

How will they best hear?

- Use the imagery of a child's restless sleep on Christmas Eve: He seeks to stay awake only to fall asleep and then upon waking realizes it is Christmas morning.

"The main thing Mark gets us to do in this opening passage is to sense the shock of the new thing God was doing." (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, [WJK, 2004], 3).

The Advent Emphasis:

Today is the first Sunday of the Advent Season. The church historically celebrated this season as a time of anticipation of His arrival in fulfillment of the promises we have studied over the last two Sundays.

I believe it is fitting for us to understand what the larger body of Christ is considering this morning by pausing and reflecting on what is considered the first Sunday of Advent. I would like to use the words of Dennis Bratcher as he considers the first Sunday of Advent ("Hope! - A Homily for the First Sunday of Advent," Isaiah 2:1-5 [Advent 1, Year A](#), by Dennis Bratcher, <http://www.crivoice.org/S-isa2.html>)

As the first Sunday of Advent, it is a Sunday of Expectation and Hope. The Old Testament Lectionary reading for this first Sunday of Advent is Isaiah 2:1-5.

¹ "The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ² Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. ³ And many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.' For the law will go forth from

Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And **they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war.** ⁵ Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD" (Isa. 2:1-5).

"Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Israel had a troubled history. She was a tiny nation wedged between huge and ambitious empires that were constantly vying for superiority. Israel had few times during her 700-year history in which she did not live under threat. Wars were almost constant, some were devastating. For much of her existence she lived under the sovereignty of some other nation, unable or sometimes unwilling to establish her own existence in the world as God's people.

In the time of Isaiah of Jerusalem, Judah was a vassal state of Assyria. During Isaiah's lifetime the Assyrians would sweep in and totally annihilate the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and threaten to do the same to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Judah had weak leaders who saw it more politically expedient to appease the Empire than to be faithful to God.

And yet there were those like Isaiah who could envision a different reality. Some like Isaiah knew that God's vision of the world was much different. They knew that the God they served was the same God who had heard the cries of oppressed slaves in Egypt and entered history to relieve their oppression. And they knew that because God was such a God, he would not forever tolerate oppression in the world.

And so they hoped. And they dreamed. They dreamed of a time when God would enter the world and bring an end to war and suffering, when he would establish his reign on earth and restore all creation to what he intended it to be. They dreamed of a time when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Advent. The Coming. Peace on earth has already come 2,000 years ago. But it has not fully come yet. It has only come as a glimpse of what *can* be. The fulfillment of the promises has become new promises and expectation. And so we dream Isaiah's dream again. We dream the dream of a divided people that God will bring wholeness, even as we hammer on our swords and spears trying to make plowshares.

When? How long? When will that day come? We do not know. But we hope and wait expectantly. We live today in the reality of what he has already showed us, and what he has promised. And we cry out for his coming. And we know that as He has come, so He will come.

Mark's Gospel is written in the spirit of Advent.

Introduction:

Mark's account is emphatic in what it excludes in its opening statement. Unlike Matthew, Luke, and John, Mark's statement is direct and pointed. His account is "the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

What he then says in verse 2 is picked up in Matthew's gospel in 3:10 and Luke's gospel in 3:27. His energy is focused and his theme is clear. Everything that he writes will be emanating from the good news about Jesus Christ who is the Son of God.

The strength of the story is in the character of the individual who plays the leading part and in the action done by Him. Each of the following thoughts: 1) His forerunner, 2) His baptism, and 3) His temptation seeks to explain why He is worthy and why the sacrifice He offers is powerful against sin.

Questions:

1. How important is it to live with hope?
2. What emotion does hope stir within the heart?
3. Is humility a fruit that is evident in the believing?

This study will help us see three basic ideas.

To Know: To know what the gospel is.

To Choose: To choose Jesus Christ as our only Savior and Lord.

To Feel: To feel the joy of who He is and what He has done in our behalf.

The Big Picture:

"Every year, at Passover-time, the Jewish people recited the story of the Exodus from Egypt, telling over and over how God rescued Israel from Pharaoh, bringing them through the Red Sea and away across the wilderness to their promised land. Along with the creation story, it's the most important story in the whole Old Testament, and John's hearers would have known it well." (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, [WJK, 2004], 2).

The Passover celebrates Israel's physical deliverance from Egyptian bondage. It is a type of something larger and greater that was to come. John declares the antitype of Israel's physical deliverance in the coming of Jesus Christ, the much longed for deliverer.

What we have in verse one is "a general proposition of his theme or statement of his purpose." (Joseph Addison Alexander, The Gospel According to Mark, [Baker, 1858], 1). It is a simple verse, but one we all too often carelessly overlook.

Mark's Gospel account is a continuation of a story-line that began before the foundations of the world were poured. It is the fulfillment of promises made by God to Himself that would benefit all people in general and His people in particular. It is the

story of Jesus Christ. Mark directly identifies the person and work of Jesus Christ as *gospel*. The word “gospel” gets lost to us modern readers. The word itself is from the Old English *god-spell* “good tidings or good news” as a translation of the Greek word *euaggelion* as used in the New Testament. It is not a word that is found in the Old Testament, but was clearly present in idea. What Mark and the entire New Testament endeavors to do is help us see that Jesus Christ *is* the gospel. He is the good news.

The Present Danger:

Although there is consent as to the statement, “Jesus Christ *is* the gospel,” there is always a present danger of putting our hope and confidence in something other than Jesus Christ. Perhaps it is education, or better employment, or a different spouse, or better behaved children. Even in the manner of how we present the “gospel” can become errant. We have made the gospel an A-B-C proposition, as if the gospel were a 3-step program. What we have learned in the past and what we will hear again in this text is simple: “Jesus Christ *is* the gospel.” But why is Jesus Christ good news?

In this one verse Mark desires for us to note three thoughts about the “gospel.”

- I. An Introduction – the gospel of Jesus Christ (v. 1)
 - A. The beginning of the gospel

Although this is *Mark’s* account on the story line of Scripture, he would not have us conclude that what we are about to read is new. What Mark is not referring to by his statement is that it is the “beginning of *his* gospel.” The gospel began in God before the creation of all things. What we are about to see and hear is a distinct phase of the gospel.

Thus, many would see verse one as a title or description of the whole book. The entire work set before us is an expansion and explanation of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Let us consider this idea as it is found in several noted passages.

- Revelation 13:8 The lamb of God was slain from the foundation of the world.
- Genesis 3:15 God promised to fulfill His word to deliver His people.
- Isaiah 7:14; 9:6, 7 He fueled the promise through signs and expectancies.
- 1 John 4:14 The Father sent His Son in order to be the Savior of the world.
- John 1:29 Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
- 1 Corinthians 5:7 Jesus Christ is the Passover Lamb slain for sinners.

Mark’s Gospel continues this story.

- B. The character of the gospel

The noun form for “gospel” is used eight times in Mark’s account (1:1, 14, 15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9; 16:15). The verb form does not occur in Mark’s account. Our English word “gospel” comes from the Old English *godspel*, “good story” or “good news,” which accurately translates the Greek. The word “gospel” communicates its character.

It is a message of “good news.” Why is the gospel good news? What is it about the gospel that makes it a message of good news?

In the New Testament the Good News is that God has fulfilled His promise to secure salvation for all who would be saved through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The good news of the gospel is found exclusively in the content of the gospel. Because the gospel *is* Jesus Christ, we have good news. “The good news is that God has provided salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (NIV Study Bible, 1898).

Mark’s Gospel tells us that God’s promises have been fulfilled, but there is still more to come. It is the truth of the good news about Jesus Christ that fuels us to endure the chronic conditions of a fallen world and live in rest knowing that the best is yet to come. I would like us to consider the person and work of Jesus Christ as to why who He is and what He has done constitutes “good news.”

Jesus Christ is the eternally existing, inexhaustible, and unchanging God in human form. Jesus Christ is all that God is, and yet in human form, in order to become for us what we could never become for ourselves. His love, acceptance, and forgiveness are without limit. There is nothing He does in thought or deed that exhausts His nature. He is the only one who is all-present, all-knowing, and all-powerful. All of His thoughts and deeds are always full expressions of what it means to be *God*.

It is impossible for finite man to comprehend fully the infinite God. What we know of Him pales against what is knowable about Him. Much of what we know about God must be embraced by faith. His mere existence is *good news*. His presence is heaven and His absence is hell. Yet the nature of God moves Him to act. He chose to create matter in order to form an environment, an arena in which His glory might be manifested and enjoyed by those whom He creates. He ordered a fall in order that He might redeem those who fell. How the ordering and the execution of the order are carried out to fulfillment is a truth whose full understanding escapes finite man. A redemption secured before the foundation of the world presupposes a fall from which the fallen might be redeemed. This brings us to the good news of His redemptive work. The gospel is not a good job, paid bills, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, a spouse, behaving children, healthy living, or any myriads of lesser things. The gospel *is* Jesus Christ in His person and in His work. But the work of Jesus Christ is the consequences of His person. These good things can never exist apart from Him or be appreciated independent of Him. The redemptive work of Jesus Christ is the shadow cast by His presence. However, because of who He is, what He has done has infinite worth and His people are the beneficiaries of this emanation of His glory.

For just a moment, let us consider five of the *shadows* of His glory. We will only note those emanations as they exist inside of His redemptive work.

First, is the word *salvation*. Salvation speaks of rescue, of deliverance. Salvation presupposes you and I needed rescue, we needed deliverance. All of us are in perpetual danger. This danger is imminent; it is already upon us. His work saves us from this danger. This is good news.

Second, is the word *redemption*. Redemption speaks of debt paying, of canceling the obligation that consumes. Redemption presupposes an insurmountable debt that all have and none are capable of reducing. We are all drowning in a sea of sin debt that God must redeem us from. His work redeems us from this debt. This is good news.

Third, is the word *reconciliation*. Reconciliation speaks of alienation, of distance, of warring factions. Because of finitude and sin, mankind sits in a position of alienation from God. We are at war with Him. In fact, as repugnant as it sounds, we hate Him. His work breaks down the barrier between God and man and His people are now reconciled to Him. They have full fellowship and complete access to Him without reservation or restriction. This is good news.

Fourth, is the word *regeneration*. Regeneration speaks of new life, new birth, resurrection. Regeneration presupposes death. Regeneration exists in the absence of life. Everyone, everywhere, at all times is born spiritually dead. Although we look with our eyes and see people with the appearance of life, they are actually “dead men walking.” His work is not simply resuscitating the fainted, but resurrecting the dead. He brings the dead to life. It is only after regeneration that anyone begins to truly live. This is good news.

Finally, is the word *imputation*. Imputation speaks of transfer, of grace. Imputation presupposes need, deficiency, inadequacy, inability, an incurable helplessness. In this great *shadow* of His person, our Lord Jesus Christ transfers to our account His own life, His nature, His righteousness, His obedience. He exchanges it for our failure, our death, our inability, our rebellion. This work is so incomprehensible and utterly magnificent that God now sees us in union with His Son. He sees us as His own. This is good news.

The story of good news is almost incomprehensible . . . almost. It is Mark’s intent to unfold the good news about Jesus Christ and what this means for those who place their faith in Jesus Christ for the salvation of their eternal soul from hell’s separation.

C. The content of the gospel

1. About Jesus Christ

The meaning behind “of Jesus Christ” “is the good news *about* Christ (objective genitive).” (Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament, 29)

“Jesus” is the Greek form of the Hebrew “Joshua,” which means “Yahweh is salvation” or “salvation of Yahweh.” “It is the name revealed by the angel to Joseph before Jesus was born, and it was given as descriptive of our Lord’s mission - ‘and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins’” (Matt. 1:21).

“Christ” is the Greek word for “anointed,” behind which is the Hebrew word from which the English word “messiah” is derived.

It is because of who He is and what He has done that we can experience the unadulterated and undiluted approval of the Father. There is no reservation or restriction in the Father’s acceptance of us. There is nothing that holds Him back in expressing His full love for us. How He “feels” towards His Son is how He “feels” toward us because of His Son.

2. The Son of God

Although Mark stresses the humanity of Christ as servant, there is no question as to his emphasis on the deity of Jesus as well.

“The Gospel is not a mystery story in which the identity of the main character has to be guessed; from the outset it is made clear who this is - the Son of God.” (Walter W. Wessell, “Mark,” EBC, [Zondervan, 1984], 8:622).

“The description of the subject here is not distinctive or exclusive, though specific and definite, admonishing the reader that the history which here begins is not that of a mere man or a private person, but of one who claimed to be the anointed, promised, and divine deliverer of his people from their sins (cf. Matt. 1:21).” (Joseph Addison Alexander, The Gospel According to Mark, [Baker, 1858], 2).

“Most scholars agree that the theological purpose of Mark in his Gospel was to stress the deity of Jesus.” (Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament, 29)

“The word ‘Son’ is without the article in the Greek text. Emphasis is therefore upon character or nature. Jesus Christ is Son of God by nature. [He is of] the same essence as God the Father. The article is absent before the word ‘God,’ showing that absolute Deity as such is in view.” (Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies, [Eerdmans, 1973], 1:11, 12)

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, **the Son of God**” (Mark 1:1).

“Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, ‘You are **the Son of God!**’” (Mark 3:11).

“and shouting with a loud voice, he *said, ‘What business do we have with each other, Jesus, **Son of the Most High God?** I implore You by God, do not torment me!’” (Mark. 5:7).

“But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, ‘Are **You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?**’” (Mark 14:61).

“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!**’” (Mark 15:39).

Jesus Christ brings with Him the fulfillment of all God’s promises (1:14). The much anticipated promises of God are finding their fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is Jesus the Anointed of God, the Son of God.

According to Paul’s summary of the gospel, the message of Jesus Christ is His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-3). The gospel is descriptive of the work Christ accomplished on earth.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not abstract or a mere theory or idea. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a person, thus personal and relational. *He is* to be believed (1:15). *He is* to be shared (13:10; 14:9; 16:15). And *He is* worthy of all our effort and energy (8:35; 10:29).

Similar to John’s Gospel, Mark has no nativity narrative, but begins with John the Baptist’s ministry. As the servant, His genealogy is of no consequence.

APPLICATION: (What the NEXT STEP? – Let us leave with three practical thoughts)

1. Do you believe Jesus *is* the good news?
2. I can call you to recognize you are a sinner and that you need a Savior, but if you recognize that Jesus *is* the good news, then you already know how helpless you are against your sin and how hopeless the future looks for you.
3. For many of us, there was a point in time when we came to see Him as the good news. I am calling you to remember that He was good news, He is good news, and He will forever be good news.

Friend, Jesus Christ is the good news. All that we have and enjoy is only and forever found in Him. He is the true *substance* that casts a great *shadow*. If the shadow cast is beyond our ability to process, then we can only imagine that the substance is beyond doubt glorious. May the Holy Spirit move us to full comprehension and appreciation of the gospel.