

# Mark 1:1-8

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[ 0 : 00 ] Today we're going to look at John the Baptist, or as I prefer to call him John the Baptizer.! Let's read together the first eight verses. Mark chapter 1.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him, and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and wore a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey.

And he preached, saying, After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down, and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

[ 1 : 06 ] Let's pray together. Father, certainly this morning we can echo the writing of the hymnists. We need you. We need you in this hour to bless the preaching of your word, for our hearing, for your sake.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. So, today we're going to look a bit at who is John. Last week, who was Mark? Here we see who is John.

But I want you to be very clear and remember that this is ultimately a story about Jesus Christ. But it's important, I think, that we know a little bit of the background. We see here in verse 4 that John appears.

And he appears as the fulfillment of prophecy, as the foretold prophet. So, firstly, John was the foretold prophet. We see this bit of prophecy here in verse 2 and verse 3, which is kind of a mash-up.

We know it's attributed here in Mark to Isaiah, but it's actually a bit of a combination of two. Verse 2 is the first part of Malachi 3.1, which reads in the ESV, Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.

[ 2 : 22 ] And then verse 3 in Mark is from Isaiah 40, verse 3, which says, A voice cries, In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

And these two verses together are commonly used, both in Matthew and in Luke, to prove who John the baptizer was, that he was this foretold prophet.

Now, to clarify for you, as it says, as written in Isaiah, the prophet, it was very common when this was done, when two different prophecies were put together, to use the greater prophet, the prophet that had had more influence, that people would have been more familiar with, and to attribute the prophecy to that man.

So this is a very common thing done in Hebrew writing. The writers of the New Testament quote sometimes exactly from the Hebrew. Sometimes they quote from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

They would have had at this time. Sometimes they make sort of a general reference to a text. And sometimes it's an interpretive reference. This is what we see here. If you carefully were listening to me, quoting to you Malachi 3.1 and Isaiah 43, you saw that it wasn't the exact wording, but rather an interpretive reference.

[ 3 : 45 ] Remember that the New Testament writers were inspired, carried along by the Spirit of God to write this, and therefore we can take their interpretations as inspired to help us find meaning and help us understand the Old Testament text.

So it's a common thing that's happening. As you're reading through your New Testament, and you're really checking out those cross references, and you're going back to the Old Testament, so that's not exactly what this says. It is.

Because this was common practice that these people did as they were carried along by the Spirit of God. So we see that he is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and this is the extent of the argument that Mark makes in that regard.

He gives us two verses put together as they were commonly done to say, this John, John the Baptizer, is the one that the Old Testament was telling us about, that Malachi the prophet and Isaiah the prophet said would come and make the way, would be the predecessor for Jesus Christ. Now I say to you, this is proof enough. There it is. Need he say more? Some of the other Gospel accounts make a more extensive case for who John the Baptizer was, that he was in fact this foretold prophet.

[ 5 : 00 ] But I want to remind you that Mark, most likely, it's widely accepted, wrote this Gospel account from Rome, more than likely in a Roman prison, for Roman Christians or a Roman audience to convince them.

He didn't need to use the Old Testament in an extensive fashion. It wouldn't have meant that much to them. So it's important, I think, just to pause at this moment and recognize that it's important for us to look at a letter intended audience.

Why is it that Mark did it in this way? It gives us two verses to say, this is John. This is the foretold prophet. And so we see this here in verse 2 and verse 3.

Now, let's get down to verse 6 for a moment as we ask this question, who was John? There is certainly much that could be said about John the Baptizer.

Right? Matthew, Luke, even John, the Gospel of John, speak of John rather extensively. And they report to us a number of interesting facts about him.

[ 6 : 05 ] Firstly, he was miraculously conceived because his parents were too old and had been barren. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.

It's a unique thing in this day. He was a relative of Jesus. He was the culmination of Old Testament prophetic history, the last prophet, and there hadn't been a prophet for 400 years.

This is John the Baptizer. Jesus said in Matthew 1.11, He's the greatest man that ever lived up until His time. Why? Because He was the predecessor.

He was the herald for Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said He's the greatest man that ever lived up until His time. There's much that could be said about John the Baptizer, but Mark doesn't mention any of this, does he?

He doesn't mention any of it. In verse 6, He gives us some seemingly obscure facts. The things that I have read over the years and just thought made John an odd guy.

[ 7 : 15 ] Right? He was clothed with camel's hair, wore a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. What an oddball. But there's significance to this. The reason that the descriptive things that were given by Mark as just this is very, very important.

So recognize, we need to hone in on these things. Firstly, we need to see that He was in the wilderness. Right? It doesn't actually say that in verse 6. I think we're up in verse 4.

Right? But we need to recognize that He was in fact in the wilderness, which was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 43 and Micah 1.3 that we saw in verse 3.

Right? He'd be the voice of one crying in the wilderness. So here we see the fulfillment of that. But why would He have been in the wilderness? It seems to me that it would have been more beneficial for John to have planted himself somewhere in the city where there were more people.

That's typically a good habit if you're trying to perpetuate something, trying to get truth going, some sort of a movement, to be with people. Right? I wouldn't suggest to any of you that you go off in the wilderness to be a gospel herald.

[ 8 : 25 ] It's really not the best place to be. Go park on the AT and just talk to people who walk by you occasionally. Right? It's good to be around people. Be on campus. Be in your workplaces. Be in your neighborhoods. That's where people are.

So why is it that He's in the wilderness and people are coming out to Him? You remember the wilderness at the first exodus when the people of God were led out of captivity, which was symbolic. It was a foreshadowing of the full and final salvation we have in Christ. The wilderness was a place of trial and judgment. So they're being called back out to the wilderness for the very same reason.

A great quote I'm going to read to you, and I could not find the author of the quote. I found it attributed to somebody, but I don't think this person exists. I couldn't find any information about them anyway. So I'm just going to say to an unknown author, but this is very good.

Listen carefully. The summons to be baptized in the Jordan means that Israel must once more come to the wilderness. As Israel long ago had been separated from Egypt by a pilgrimage through the waters of the Red Sea, the nation is exhorted again to exercise separation.

[ 9 : 37 ] The people are called to a second exodus in preparation for a new covenant with God. As the people heed John's call and go out to him in the desert, far more is involved than contrition and confession.

They returned to a place of judgment, the wilderness, where the status of Israel as God's beloved son must be reestablished in the exchange of pride for humility.

The willingness to return to the wilderness signifies the acknowledgement of Israel's history as one of disobedience and rebellion and a desire to begin once more.

So not only is this a fulfillment of the prophecy, which I would say is the most important reason John was in the wilderness, but it was also a beckoning for people to come back to a place of humility, a place of recognition.

Israel existed, dwelt in the desert for 40 years because of their disobedience. They come out once again to the wilderness to meet with him, to hear his preaching, and to be baptized.

[ 10 : 33 ] We see a record in verse 6, as I said, that he was dressed oddly. That he was dressed oddly. Certainly there could have been some practical application to him being clothed in camel's hair.

In the desert it gets very cold at night. You may not realize that. Very hot in the day, but very cold at night. But the reference here is not to a hide.

This wasn't a camel's hide. This would have been camel's hair woven. It's common. This happened, right? Coats and things were made of this type of material. And this is what he's wearing. Camel's hair and a leather belt.

This was the garb. This was the uniform of prophets. There had yet been a prophet for 400 years. And John comes on the scene, and he knows that to be taken as a prophet, he must dress as a prophet. So catch this. Let me show you the evidence of this.

[ 11 : 36 ] Zechariah 13.4. Speaking of a day when false prophecy will cease, there's a prophecy about false prophecy ceasing, says he, being the false prophet, will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive.

2 Kings 1.8, when we meet Elijah the prophet, says he wore a garment of hair with a belt of leather about his waist.

Elijah set the dress code for prophets. This was the way they set themselves apart from the people. They wore a rough clothing. Rather than a fine cotton, they wore rough clothing.

Would have been similar to somebody clothing themselves in sackcloth. Uncomfortable cloth. This was the garb. This was the uniform of a prophet. And that's why Mark records it for us here.

If you think about this, and I hope maybe at least a few of your minds were drawn to Jesus' words in Matthew 7.15, where he says, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

[ 12 : 43 ] Very clever turn of phrase for Jesus, because the false prophets would have in fact come in some woven form of animal fur to say to the people, I am a prophet.

But the heart is what matters in this case. So, he was dressed oddly, to be sure, but to set himself apart. As a prophet for God.

John did not wish to be associated with the people, but rather with the prophets. Look at this prophecy in Malachi 4, 5, and 6 concerning John.

Behold, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

This is Malachi prophesying much time has passed since Elijah was on the scene. And here it says, Behold, I will send you Elijah, one like Elijah, the one we know as John, the baptizer.

[ 13 : 52 ] Now, as a side note, it's of some significance, but we also see that he ate oddly. He ate locusts and honey. These would have been plentiful things for him to eat in the desert.

Would have been things that the average individual would not have ate as their set-apart diet. And so again, he's separating himself from the people. Incidentally, if you care about this, Leviticus 11, 22, the locusts were one of the only insects that God permitted people to eat in this day.

So locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers were permissible in this way. I thought it was very interesting information about how they cooked them. All kinds of ways. I thought of the scene in Forrest Gump, all the different ways you can cook shrimp.

They did all kinds of things with them. They roasted them. They ground them up and put them in flour. It's a good source of protein. Took off the legs and the wings, and did all kinds of things with the locusts. And this is what John ate.

Plentiful supply of locusts and honey would have been there for him. Good protein and carbohydrate complement there. So this is what John is doing.

[14:59] This is why Mark chooses to share this information with us. So here's how we see it. We see John as a prophet in the line of Elijah, sent from God to herald the coming of the king.

So that's who John was secondly. John was the herald of the king. We'll go back to verse 1. And recall his language here. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Son of God. And this word gospel is the word euangelion. Euangelion. And now as he's writing to a primarily Gentile population, in Rome there would have been Jews as well.

And they would have really understood this term. It meant generally good news. We know that.

Gospel. Good news. It meant that generally. And was used in that way throughout history.

Throughout both Hebrew and Greek writing. In a very general sense. But it more often was specifically used to speak of the coming of a God king. We have a couple of Old Testament examples of that.

[16:02] I read these to you last week. Isaiah 40 chapter 9. Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion. Herald of good news. Here's the word. In the Greek, in the Septuagint, would have been this word.

Would have been translated that way. Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem. Herald of good news. Euangelion. Lift it up. Fear not. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God.

So here they are heralding God. Isaiah 52.7 says, How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news. Euangelion. Who publishes peace.

Who brings good news of happiness. Who publishes salvation. Who says to Zion, Your God reigns.

Again, heralding the God king who will come.

There also would have been a very clear understanding of this term in Greek culture. In Gentile culture. In Rome as well. Listen to this inscription from 9 B.C.

[17:00] Okay, so track the timeline there. Pre-Christ, 9 B.C. Listen to this inscription. The providence which has ordered the whole of our life, Showing concern and zeal, Has ordained the most perfect consummation for human life, By giving to it Augustus.

Caesar Augustus. By filling him with virtue for doing the work of a benefactor among men, And by sending in him, as it were, A savior for us and those who come after us, To make war cease, To create order everywhere, The birthday of the God Augustus Is the beginning for the world of the good news, Of the gospel that has come to men through him.

So this inscription, apparently, Etched on Caesar Augustus' birthday, Uses that very same term, Of course, in this manner, Speaking of Caesar Augustus.

They worshipped him as a God-king. So they would have understood this term as well, This euangelion, right? That this was a good news of the coming of a king That was not just a king, But God who would reign.

A lot of significance, right? In that little word, Right there at the beginning of the gospel of Mark. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, The Son of God. And here we see him ascribing to Jesus As Yeshua, the God who saves, As Christ, the anointed one, right?

[18:22] The king who saves, And as the Son of God, Who has equality then with God. You see now the power and the thrust of verse 1. And then he goes right on to tell us about John the baptizer, The one who is coming to tell us of this God-king, Who is coming to reign.

Turn to Luke chapter 1. This is the record of the angel coming to Zechariah, Who was John the baptizer's father.

Beginning in verse 13, It says, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, For your prayer has been heard, And your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, John. And you shall call his name John, And you will have joy and gladness, And many will rejoice at his birth.

For he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, And he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, Even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel To the Lord their God.

And he will go before him In the spirit and power of Elijah. There he is again, Elijah. To turn the heart to the fathers, To the children, And the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, To make ready for the Lord A people prepared.

[ 19 : 32 ] So here's the work that he's about doing, right? Heralding the coming of this king, The Lord, The one who will come and reign, To make them ready for his reign.

So what was he saying to prepare the people? What was it that he was preaching To prepare the people For the coming of Jesus? We see in verse 4, Excuse me, I'm going to back up a sec. Firstly, judgment. Not found necessarily in verse 4, But we see that in verse 4, He was preaching a baptism of repentance For the forgiveness of sins.

Why do we need forgiveness of sins If there is no judgment? Okay, so there's my connection for you. Right? But turn down to Luke chapter 3. To show you some of what he was saying. We'll step out of Mark To give you a little bit of weight To what was being preached By John the baptizer. Beginning in verse 7, He said therefore to the crowds That came out to be baptized by him, You brood of vipers, Who warned you to flee From the wrath to come?

[ 20 : 38 ] Bear fruits in keeping with repentance And do not begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones To raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid To the root of the tree.

Every tree therefore That does not bear good fruit Is cut down and thrown into the fire. Right? Don't come out here Making claims That just because you're a Jew You have salvation.

Right? You must bear fruit In keeping with repentance. That's what he's saying. He's preaching judgment to them. And then skip down to verse 15. As the people were in expectation And all were questioning In their hearts concerning John Whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all saying, I baptize you with water, But he who is mightier than I Is coming, The strap of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie, He will baptize you With the Holy Spirit And fire.

His winnowing fork Is in his hand To clear his threshing floor And to gather the wheat Into his barn. But the chaff he will burn With unquenchable fire. So here he is Preaching this judgment Upon the people That are coming out to him.

Because of your sin, Because of your offense to God, You will be destroyed. Right? So here we see As he's preaching A baptism of repentance For the forgiveness of sins, This is why.

[ 21 : 51 ] Right? It's this teaching of judgment That he's bringing upon them. That God will in fact Judge the wicked. Secondly, He's also preaching Repentance.

I flipped my notes this morning So I apologize for the Previous misspeak. He's preaching repentance. A baptism of repentance For the forgiveness of sins. Now at this point, This is where I'd like to explain to you Why I like to call him John the Baptizer.

Right? This was a signifying mark for him. Certainly appropriate to him As he was in the wilderness Baptizing In the Jordan River. Right? It's a way to set him apart. There were a lot of Johns In this day.

A couple of years ago We would have said that Of our church as well. Lots of Johns In our church. Right? So this is a way of Setting him apart. Right? John was not the first Baptist. To be clear.

Right? I think he would have Agreed with us. But he was not The first Baptist. He was simply John who baptized. Right? John the Baptizer. Right? But what is this Baptism that he's doing?

[ 22 : 52 ] What is this Pre-Christ Baptism That we're observing At this point? Because we understand Baptism to be A symbol A picture Of what Christ Has accomplished On our behalf With his death And his resurrection.

Right? Romans 6 3-4 says Do you not know That all of us Who have been baptized Into Christ Jesus Were baptized Into his death? We were buried Therefore with him By baptism Into death In order that Just as Christ Was raised from the dead By the glory of the Father We too might walk In the newness of life.

Okay? So here we have The picture That Paul's laying out For us About what baptism Is meant to symbolize To show people What has taken place In our hearts. Right? But Christ has yet to be Killed and buried And resurrected.

Right? So what is this baptism That John is performing In the wilderness? There was a practice Called proselytite baptism And that would have been For somebody Who was not Of Jewish descent But was a Gentile And wanted to come And worship God With the Jews.

Right? As they saw rightly To worship the God Of the Hebrews And wanted to be included In that community Of faith. It's called Proselytite baptism.

[ 24 : 08 ] Right? It was a very uncommon thing. Very, very rarely happened. But by and large Up until this point Until Christ sends the gospel Out to the world.

Right? Israel had been very closed off To the nations. They were really meant To be that way. We talked about that In Nehemiah That they were meant To be a people Set apart for God's glory. So it's very rare That God brought Into the family Into the community Somebody in this way.

But recognize Who's coming out. Verse 5 And all the country Of Judea And all Samaria A vast number of people We don't read these Alls as literal Alls But a vast number Of people Are coming out.

People of Jewish descent Judea and Jerusalem. Right? I think I just said Samaria. Excuse me. Judea and Jerusalem They're coming out To be baptized With a proselytite Baptism.

Which was to say They recognized Their offense Against God To the degree That they saw That they ought Not be treated As the people of God.

[ 25 : 13 ] That they should be Treated as a Gentile Outside of this Community This covenant community. They were seeing That it was more Than just Their Jewish descent That made them Right before God.

But rather Repentance of sin And righteous living. Catch that. That's important. This was For these Jews Radical repentance.

Seeing this To be the case Was a huge Deal For them. Now What John Was doing for them Was simply To prepare them For the Christ.

Simply to prepare them For what was happening. This was not Forgiveness Of their sins. Right? But it was to prepare Their hearts For the gospel That was coming To them In the person And work Of Jesus Christ.

Okay? So be careful At that step. Right? This was not John had a special A special time Where he got to Baptize people And that forgave Their sins. It didn't. In fact We have a record here That all the country Of Judea And all Jerusalem Were coming out to him Listening to his teaching Receiving his baptism.

[ 26 : 21 ] How many people After Christ is crucified Do we see waiting Upon him Afterwards? Right? 120. So was there True Genuine Repentance On their part?

No. But this was a step To prepare them For what was to come. Most of these people Came out Thinking They were repenting And in fact Weren't.

But this was what Was going on. This is proselytite Baptism. This is why He was baptizing In this way. Thirdly John was preaching Jesus Christ.

I'm getting to you next. Verse 8 We see that John baptized With water But Jesus Will baptize With the Holy Spirit.

We're not referring here To some Pentecostal Second baptism. It's not at all What's being talked about here. This is the washing Of regeneration And the renewing Of the Holy Spirit Of Titus chapter 3.

[ 27 : 19 ] This is the new covenant Purification Cleansing Transformation Regeneration New birth. And John says to them I can't give you that.

I can prepare the way. I can herald The coming king. The one Who can come And give to you New hearts. The one that will Come to you And bring you The Holy Spirit.

I can't do that. I can prepare your hearts. I can maybe Massage them a little bit To get you prepared For the coming Of the king Who can give you The spirit. This is why He says He's not even Worthy to untie Jesus' sandals.

It was not his point To get people To worship him. It was his point To get people To worship The Christ. Right? Now understand That this task That he says That he is below Would have been The lowest Possible task For any slave In Jewish culture.

This would have been The lowliest Of the low task. The reason that Jesus washed The disciples' feet Would have been this. You did not Want to be around Feet at this time. I think as a culture Now we probably Understand that more Because all of you Wear Chacos All summer.

[ 28 : 33 ] And your feet Stink. Right? We at least Get the benefit Of bathing And soap For our sandals And can do things Like that. They didn't do that As often In this case. And their feet Stunk. Right? They were dirty. Filthy. So the job For a slave To untie Somebody's sandals Was a low job. In fact Most masters Didn't require That of any Of their slaves.

They thought It so belittling They didn't even Ask them to do it. They would untie Their sandals Themselves And then let The slave Wash their feet. Right? So this is An incredibly Subservient thing.

And what John Is saying is I'm not even Worthy To do that. Right? Think of the Most humble person In our society. I am more humble Than that Compared to This Christ.

Right? John was a great man. Jesus himself said That John was a great man. Filled with the spirit From his mother's womb. Right? Accomplishing Great things For the coming Of the kingdom.

[ 29 : 33 ] The first prophet In 400 years. And he says Compared to the one Who is coming I am Nothing. His aim Was to point People To Christ.

We see the record Of the words here. John chapter 3 Verse 28 through 30. John the baptizer Speaking. He says I am not the Christ. People were speculating that. They thought maybe he was. He says I am not the Christ But I have been sent Before him. The one who has the bride Is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom Who stands and hears him Rejoices greatly At the bridegroom's voice.

That's John. The friend of the bridegroom. Therefore This joy of mine Is now complete. He must increase But I must decrease. He must be made great.

Stop coming And looking to me. Stop worshipping me. I am simply John the baptizer. The one you need to worship Is Jesus. The Christ. And that's what he was Out there doing.

[ 30 : 31 ] Preaching this. Judgment. The repentance of sin. And Jesus Christ In whom we find Our forgiveness. Jesus. Jesus. The coming king.

Jesus. The one who would come And rule In the hearts of men. Who would bring his kingdom To earth in a way That nobody thought As they reviewed The Old Testament text. They thought he would come In a charge With an army.

Conquer Rome. Send them back Cowering. Instead he came And brought his kingdom To rule in the hearts Of the men. And that is the kingdom We are part of This morning. We are part of This kingdom.

So John was the Foretold prophet Who came to herald The coming Of a new king. It's good news. Isn't it? That is good news.

A king who would usher A kingdom Of forgiveness For sins. John foretold The coming of Jesus Christ Who would be The great climax Of redemptive history. The Jesus that we Have placed our faith in For the forgiveness Of our sins.

[ 31 : 34 ] The source of our life. Our joy. Our comfort. Our peace. He is to us Our great prophet. Our atoning priest.

And our glorious king. And now it has been Given to us As those who are Filled by the spirit By the work of Christ.

Much like John Was filled by the spirit. To also be heralds Of our king Who is coming Again To return. This is the place We find ourselves in.

He has come Brought the kingdom. He's coming To complete That work. Right? And that is our Task now. In that way John's a very unique Character in the Biblical narrative.

But in that way We should be Just like him. Making much of Christ. Making very little Of ourselves. Right? I fail if you look at me On Sunday morning. Right?

[ 32 : 30 ] If you look at me And think Nathan's a great speaker. But if you do that I failed At my job. Right? But if you look To Christ And you say Christ is a great savior. He is a king Worth worshipping.

Then I have succeeded. Right? I must decrease. He must increase. Right? All of us Must do this For the sake of the kingdom Our good And God's glory. Let's pray together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.