

INTRO: R/P. {1-3}

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 and 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." In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

In 1978, *Superman the Movie*, with Christopher Reeve was made {4}. It begins with an intergalactic scene on planet Krypton. A man named Jor-El foresees Krypton's demise so he sends his son, Kal-El, in a pod to Earth. Kal-El is 3 when discovered in Smallville, Kansas by the Kents. They raise him as their own child, Clark Kent, and discover he has superhuman ability. His whole life is spent hiding his true identity. The movie is about Clark's journey to self: Is he nerdy Clark the reporter who fawns over Lois Lane? Or will he remove his spectacles, don tights and a cape as a humanitarian superhero? Viewers understand where he came from and why he is different, but the story's characters wrestle along with Clark. The main question of Mark's gospel surrounded the identity of Jesus... who is He? Where did He come from? Is He a humanitarian superman, religious rebel, political leader, sage, the greatest of many good men? Jesus' identity is life's most important question; Mark's gospel answers: *Who is Jesus?* {title}. He gives important context. Jesus didn't drop into earth from outer space. His days were ordained in eternity past. But to grasp His identity we must go deeper and understand His person and work. Mark focus us there. I selected this text to fit with where you have been in your catechism series, wrestling with the

same question. So I hope this sermon reinforces you in truth. But Mark is not just giving info; this text demands our response. How will you, and I, respond to Jesus? What will **WE** do with Jesus? So Mk 1:1-15 teaches does 2 {4} things – it teaches: **Jesus is God's Son who came to deliver God's people.** And it demands right response: **believe in Him and follow Him.**

CONTEXT: This book is officially titled "The Gospel According to Mark." The gospel is the message: *Jesus came to save sinners.* There are 4 accounts (Matt, Mk, Lk, Jn). These 4 retellings overlap and support one another. They each emphasize facets for various audiences and purposes. Mt is written to help Jews embrace Jesus as the Messiah. Lk is a historical account, coupled with Acts, to show how Jesus transforms the world through the church. John shows Jesus as God in the flesh. *Mark's goal is to give us Jesus' identity and call us to immediate response.* Mark was written earliest (~55-58AD) by John Mark. He is the same one whose mother hosted the Last Supper. Mark was an associate of and fellow missionary with Paul. He planted churches, went on missionary journeys, and was connected with the Apostles. Mark's gospel is actually a recording of Peter's account, so it is more accurate to understand this as Peter's account through Mark's hand. When Peter was imprisoned in Rome, Mark came to be with Peter; there they recorded this gospel before Peter's death in 64AD. It is a fast moving, pithy book – with bold claims (like Peter's personality). This is intentional; Mark calls us to examine Jesus and respond *immediately* to Him. Mark is organized in 2 halves: the 1st half (chs1-8) unfolds Jesus identity as a person which is certified by His ministry. The dividing point in Mark 8:27-29 {6} comes around Jesus' identity. Jesus asks "Who do you say I am?" Peter responds: "You are the Christ." With His identity clear, ch8 closes with Jesus foretelling his crucifixion. The 2nd half (chs9-16) focus on Jesus' work at the cross. Mark makes it clear that we cannot separate the person and work of Jesus. His

divinity, healing, wisdom, compassion, and teaching are inextricably linked to His suffering and death. Jesus did not come to ascend the heights {7} but to give his life as a ransom for many (10:45). That is the urgent message of Jesus to US. The question "Who is Jesus?" is not philosophical vagary to be mulled with a PSL and hipster music playing in the background. It is a life and death question. Who is He? What does He mean to me and how does His person and work direct MY life? To answer Mark begins with:

Jesus' Identity as Son of God

The first step is a quick historical sketch. Immediately in v1, Mark makes it clear: Jesus Christ is the SON of God. This is not a general statement like "we are all God's children." This certifies His uniqueness in the universe. He is the Christ; which means the promised Messiah. Jews and many others argue that the Messiah is a mortal man. Mark clarifies: Jesus is both Christ and SON. He is not God the Father. He is a separate person. But He is not merely a person like us. To be called Son means He is 100% co-equal with God; fully Divine. And it has always been God's plan that His Messiah would be Divine. Mark quotes Is 40 which promises a messenger would come to call God's people to attention. The messenger is John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin. John came, and called people to repent and believe that the Kingdom of forgiveness was at hand (v4). He was calling people to be ready for the coming of *the Lord*. It couldn't be clearer: the coming Messiah is GOD incarnate! If you hear someone intone that Jesus was just a man, point out this verse: JtB prepares *the way of God, himself*.

Note also how different this Kingdom and new way is. JtB knew: I am a precursor of a greater One. {8} I am unworthy of even being his foot servant. My baptism, with water, calls you to repent and seek forgiveness. His is a baptism of the HS. Jesus inaugurates God's Kingdom. So John's

ministry of water baptism was a call for spiritual reformation. But it was preparatory and it didn't have the transformative power that God's new Kingdom possess. Jesus's way is TOTALLY OTHER, totally Divine. His ministry and baptism is totally other. It penetrates past the external shell, to the heart. Jesus' baptism with the HS transforms us from the inside out. By His ministry, thru the gift of the HS, Jesus fills us to overflowing with the 3rd person of the triune God... Living IN US! As such everything about OUR identity is reclaimed, remade, transformed! Imagine if I replaced the 4cylinder putt-putt engine of my Toyota Corolla. But I don't put in a Lambo or Porsche engine... Instead I install a DeLorean with a Flux Capacitor. It's operating on a total new set of rules! (88) The outside looks the same. But inside a totally new level of power is at work. This was always God's plan; to send His Divine Son to revolutionise the way we relate to God, to transform us from the inside, and to make us totally new in identity thru the Identity of Jesus filling us to full by the indwelling presence of God's Spirit.

Mark continues with contextual info. Jesus was born as a child in Bethlehem and raised in the Galilean countryside in a little village called Nazareth {9}. To start his ministry, Jesus came to John, His cousin, and was baptized. It wasn't because He needed to repent. He takes part in this baptism as a step of identifying with those He came to save. It is a display of unity with us. He enters the waters to show His obedience to the Father as the One who will bear the sins of those who DO need forgiveness. Immediately as He comes up from the water the heavens are open. The word is violent, *torn* apart, to foreshadow the tearing of the temple curtain at Jesus' death. The point is that a channel of blessing, hope, and access to God is open (for the first time) between heaven and earth. This moment connects to Calvary: access to God will be made reality through Christ's cross-work! Then, gently, like a dove, the presence of God's Spirit settles on Jesus, and the Father bellows:

This is my BOY! My One and ONLY Son. Oh how I love Him. Oh how I am Pleased in Him!!! Who is Jesus? He is the promised Messiah; Worthy beyond worth. The Holy One of God who will save and transform God's people. The SON in whom God is pleased! These verses sketch His identity But again, His person and Work cannot be divided. So next we see...

Jesus' Work at the Cross

In v12-15 Jesus is driven to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. There, He was doing battle with sin. He was standing against Satan's most sturdy attacks. Jesus' work is not, as we will see, merely healing and comfort and teaching... Jesus came to battle the great enemy SIN. Before His public ministry commenced, the Father focused His mission. He engaged every sort of sinful attack and every expression of temptation we will face and fall to. Jesus stood alone, in a desert, He stood and resisted on our behalf. Just as He entered in with us through baptism, that wilderness place speaks to His unity with us... When you struggle and face temptation – know that Jesus has gone ahead. He has faced the same exact sorts of temptation and the same attacks you face. And then, at the end of that season – as a victor over sin, He stepped forward and proclaimed a good news message of Hope (v15). Now, the time is at hand. The Kingdom of God is here in the form of its King – the Lord Jesus! Hope, forgiveness, freedom are found in Jesus. But for us to be able to say this, we must understand how this connects to Jesus' cross-work. He came to save. He came to conquer sin and death. He came to conquer our rebellion and transform us through the indwelling Spirit's work... none of that is possible without His dying work. The proclamation of the gospel of God is a proclamation of substitutionary sacrifice. In other {10} gospel accounts (Jn 1:29), when Jesus comes to be baptized we learn that JtB says "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Jesus' ministry culminates in giving his life as a ransom for many. As a

Lamb, a sacrifice, in place of our sinfulness He substitutes His righteous life. He mounts the cross to suffer for our sake. He dies the death we deserve and suffers the wrath we earned. Who is Jesus? He is a great teacher, and a compassionate servant. He is a revolutionary, He is the greatest of all men. But more: He is the SON. The Divine man who entered into our mess to rescue us. The promised Messiah of God from ages past. Above all, He is the suffering servant who must die! He must take the fall if we are to be forgiven. He is God's Son who came to deliver God's people from the wreckage of our sin. That leads to the only right response...

Our Response: Repent and believe

V15 says it. Right response is to repent; turn from sin. It is to hate the thing Jesus hates most. Sin is His great enemy because sin separates us from God. He came to crush sin and was willing to be temporarily crushed by sin in order to bury its power for eternity. We cannot grasp Jesus and rightly respond if we do not engage in earnest repulsion to sin. What I don't mean is being perfect or cleaning ourselves up. I don't mean acting good and seeming clean on the outside. We cannot be good enough; we cannot do enough acceptable things to be acceptable to God. And earnest repulsion to sin does not mean we don't feel the sinfulness of sin clinging to us like a dark blood stain on an otherwise clean white shirt. It means hating that stain and seeing the presence of sin as the greatest enemy we have. Do you hate your sin? Are you repulsed by the attitudes and actions that drive you from God and from others? Do you see it clinging to you and you just want to be rid of it? Or do you tolerate it? To repent is to be intolerant and sickened by the sinfulness of sin. {Ex – with my child at soccer... couldn't sleep, felt so sick of myself}. Only when we hate sin can we truly turn and run from it and see that Jesus alone is the solution. Repent and believe are two sides of a coin – to repent is to hate and turn from sin. But to believe is

to then run to Jesus and seek His healing touch as your sole-soul's hope. {cont illustration... crying out for change}... Do you know how any of us can respond in this way? Only by God's empowering presence... the person and work of the Spirit to press us to embrace the person and work of the Christ! {Gospel call}. But this isn't just a call for those outside to come in... It is. But it is also the WAY of the Kingdom. See, we continue to walk out our desert temptations. And we fail over and over. Where do we go with our failings? Where do we run to find the strength to overcome? Run to Jesus there – where you have failed, where you are tempted... This is the desire of God and the way the HS intends to work in us to ongoingly transform us That's what I needed to do in that example above. I failed in a moment of temptation. I needed to repent (and I did to my child and the whole team). I needed to also appropriate the grace and truth of forgiveness... Jesus' makes me, and you clean! His blood spilled washes the foulest clean and removes the most ingrained stains. And for me – I need to cling to Jesus in belief that He is working and still transforming me. That even my failures and weakness are moments to see how weak I am and to embrace His strength!

But there is another aspect of repenting and believing that I think we miss. Often, I think we hold the gospel as the fix for when we have already fallen. But we miss that it is the power to NOT fall when tempted. To repent includes to stare temptation in the face. To see our desire to rebel and to be sickened by sin's temptation. And instead turn in belief to Jesus. It is to say – I know it might feel good to vent my sinful anger for a moment, or to engage my lust, or to give in once again to materialism... But I know you sin. I see your attack, Satan. You have tempted me and I have fallen before. And I am forgiven for that. And this time – I turn from Sin and Run to Jesus BEFORE engaging in sinful action. I BELIEVE that JESUS IS BETTER! I BELIEVE that is way is truly more satisfying. And when we do that – we

grasp Jesus. We GET His identity – He is the SON and ALL SATISFYING ONE. You want to know how to fight and win over sin – Repent and Believe – Look sinful temptation in the face and say: My Jesus fought you and beat you and I am sticking with HIM because He is better! And guess what – that isn't something you and I have to "find" the power to do – we have it already – God's Spirit, the power we need every moment – lives within us!

Close (WT)

Superman learned he had a Kryptonite weakness – an Achilles heel that could crush him. Aren't you glad to know that your Saviour, the SON, has no Achilles. The devil threw his harshest attack and temptation. And He stood. He stood for me and for you. Where you are weak, where you fail... Look to your deliverer. He persevered to and defeated sin and death for us. Where you are tempted to despair because you continue to fail, or where you see your identity as merely a sinner and failure – look up to Jesus. His identity as Son and Victor has guaranteed deliverance and victory for us, His people. He has filled us with His Spirit so His purposes of ongoing transformation will keep going in us as we keep our eyes on Him! **Let's pray!**