

I enjoy reading biographies, especially those written about the American Presidents. It is fascinating to see how they all have the same facts, but they have different focuses. Some will spend a lot of time on one particular area of their life that another author will completely ignore. You notice it right away with where they begin. Usually, authors start at birth. Sometimes even a little bit before. Some authors will give a brief biography of the president's parents, their place of birth, and some context to the time period. Others will go even further back and describe several different generations of grandparents.

The gospels are somewhat similar to these biographies. They each are about Jesus, His life, His work, and the gospel. But they have different focuses. This Advent, we are focusing on the various ways each gospel talks about Christmas and the birth of Jesus. If you have read ahead, or know your Bible, you may already know the interesting thing about Mark's gospel. He does not address the birth of Christ at all. He completely skips it.

This morning we are going to ask why. Because Mark does it on purpose. It is not as if Mark does not believe in the virgin birth. He just has a different focus. And there is something we need to understand if we are going to have the right focus this Advent. Because I think Mark is trying to teach us that Christmas, and the birth of Christ, is not actually about the birth at all.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Mark 1:1-20

I. Jesus came to baptize in the Holy Spirit (v. 1-11).

This is why Jesus came.

You see, Mark is not worried about the birth.

Because he is focused on why Jesus would come in the first place.

Mark is fast and focused.

If he made a movie, it would be short and fast-paced.

Other gospels, like Luke, would be a four hour epic that needed an intermission.

Let's take a closer look.

We are not going to look at everything in the passage.

I might not be as in depth as normal.

Because I mostly want us to be thinking about Advent and the birth of Jesus.

I want us to ask over and over why would Mark include this, but not Christ's birth?

Verse 1, **"the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."**

Here is the beginning.

Mark acknowledges that Jesus is God.

And he is writing to explain the gospel and message of Christ.

But he does not begin in Nazareth or with a genealogy.

Verse 2, **"as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."**

He begins with a prophecy from Isaiah.

The prophet who is filled with Messianic prophecies.

But this one is about John the baptist.

The one who will be the messenger and precursor to the Messiah.

He will cry out in the wilderness and prepare people for Jesus.

Verse 4, **"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."**

Again, we don't get John's birth like in Luke.

John simply appears miraculously.

It is as if he just pops into the story.

He is in the wilderness preaching,

But Mark wants us to focus not on the life of John but on his message.

He is proclaiming baptism and repentance.

Because people need to repent of their sins.

He is like the prophets of old, convicting the people of their sins and idolatry.

Verse 5, **"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."**

And revival appears to be breaking out.

Thousands of people are coming to confess their sins.

And they come to be baptized.

Because baptism is a ritual to cleanse us of sins.

It reminds us that we are dirty and need to be washed.

And so the people confess sin and then wash in the Jordan.

In hope that their sins will be washed away.

In hope that God may forgive them.

Verse 6, **"Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey."**

We get this quick description of John

And Mark gives it to us because he wants us very briefly to understand that John is a prophet.

That he is like a wild, holy man.

He is something completely different than the rabbi and Pharisees and religious teachers they are used to.

He comes from the line of Moses and Isaiah and Jeremiah.

And so he has someone to listen to.

But he himself is only pointing forward to Jesus who is yet to come

Verse 8, **"I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

There is a massive difference between the baptism of John and Jesus.

John just baptizes with water.

His baptism is only symbolic.

It is a good meaningful ritual.

But it cannot wash away sins.

And it is a baptism that is done over and over again.

Just like the sacrifices, it must be repeated.

But Jesus offers a different baptism.
His baptism might also have water, but it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
And this is the first thing Mark wants us to get.
Jesus came to earth to baptize us in the Holy Spirit.
He came to make us clean.
He came to offer true forgiveness and redemption.
It is not just hope and a nice message, but the reality of forgiveness.
This baptism is what happens at conversion.
He gives us the Holy Spirit who makes us new.
He causes us to be born again.
He gives us new life.
He empowers us to actually go forth and sin no more.

His baptism has power.
There is a lot written on baptism.
Christians have different ways to look at it.
But this is part of why I think something significant happens at baptism.
Because the baptism of Jesus is not like John.
It is not just water.
Somehow, the Holy Spirit is present.
Our baptism in water points to the earlier baptism in the Holy Spirit.
And we need real power.
Mark's gospel gives us more than a nice story.
Even the secular world likes Jesus.
They enjoy Christmas and will sing some carols.
They don't mind the story of a young poor girl giving birth to a son.

But Jesus came not to give us some hope.
Not to remind us of the importance of family.
Not to give us some cute decorations we put up once a year.

He came because we are sinners to need to be made clean.
We need to be redeemed.
And Mark is focused on what Jesus came to do.

II. Jesus came to proclaim the gospel (v. 12-14).

Jesus was born on in order to preach the gospel.

He had a message to proclaim.

Some people treat Jesus as if He just wanted to heal and help the poor.

Or others act like His message was just to love each other and be kind.

But Christ came to proclaim the kingdom of God.

He came to preach the gospel.

And we see that in everything he does.

Verse 9, **"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan."**

Mark goes right to Jesus' appearance.

This is the first time Jesus appears in Mark's gospel.

And he appears right away to be baptized by John.

And this is not because He has sinned.

He appears to be commissioned.

This is Jesus revealing Himself to the people.

This is the prophet John declaring that Jesus is the Messiah.

Verse 10, **"And when he came out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."**

So Jesus is baptized.

And right after it happened, heaven tears open the Holy Spirit falls upon him and God the father speaks to say this is my son.

He is immediately revealed as God.

And I think this is part of why Mark does it this way.

We don't get the story of Joseph and Mary and the birth.

Jesus just appears at baptism and is revealed as God.

Verse 12, **"The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 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."**

Jesus then goes to the wilderness where he's tempted by sin for 40 days. We don't get a lot of what happens. Mark isn't interested in that. He just wants to see that this was part of Jesus's preparation that before he could preach before he could proclaim that there is forgiveness of sins he had to prove that he was the son of God receive the blessing of God and then prove that he was sinless. And for 40 days without food for 40 days without water, he was tempted and did not sin.

Some of us sinned in the parking lot just walking in and some of us may sinned this morning inside these walls. But Mark wants us to see that Jesus did not sin and because he did not sin he can proclaim the gospel.

Verse 14, **"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."**

John's arrested and disappeared from the story and Jesus emerges to preach the gospel.

This is how Mark describes Jesus's appearance.

It is the first time that Jesus speaks and his gospel.

When it comes to babies, we love to talk about their first words.

Quinn is mostly starting to babble, but you can tell she's trying to communicate

And it's fun when young babies start to speak and we wonder who they're gonna say mama or dad first

This gospel in Jesus appears and speaks he's not talking as a baby he comes, and he says believe the gospel.

When Jesus talks about the gospel, he tells him it is the kingdom of God. Because Jesus is coming as a king and Jesus is coming as the Messiah and Jesus is coming to proclaim the God's kingdom has come on the Earth. The kingdom of God is here and I need to re-orient and Center their lives around the kingdom

What is the gospel?

There is a sense in which the gospel is just Jesus.

It is the message and person of Christ.

He is the good news.

Not just His death and resurrection.

His appearance, His personhood, His love.

Everything about Jesus is the good news.

And Jesus is who we must believe.

Partially the gospel is the kingdom of God.

It is declaring that it is the only kingdom that will last.

The gospel declares that the kingdom of God is here.

The gospel declares there is only one King of Kings and His name is Jesus.

The gospel declares that the kingdom of God has its own laws and values.

This is part of the gospel.

It is making citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

The gospel is also repenting from our sins.

It is turning away from our rebellion and rejection of God.

It is ceasing to reject Jesus.

It is stopping our addictions, evil, and idolatry.

And instead it is turning to Jesus.

We are also to believe the gospel.

There is an imperative to the gospel.

The message of Jesus is not just stuff that we are supposed to do. It is something that we must accept and believe to be true.

Belief in Jesus is not optional.

It is not up for debate. It is not just one option among many.

The message that Jesus preached is that we must believe.

And what is it that we must believe?

We must believe the essentials of the faith.

We must believe that Jesus is truly God.

We must believe in the message that he taught and deliver to us.

We must believe that what he said is not just the ideas of men written down and shifted and changed decades later,

We believe these are the very words of God.

We must believe that he truly came to save us from our sins to save us from ourselves fix what is wrong with our world.

We must believe that he died on the cross not because the government didn't like him or because the religious leaders were angry and jealous, but he died on the cross in our place to save us from our sins.

He died on the cross to defeat death.

He died on the cross as a ransom from our sins.

He died on the cross to wash us clean of our wickedness.

And the gospel means we must believe that he was raised from the dead on the third day.

He didn't appear as a ghost or a figment of imagination, but once he was dead in the grave, and then he came out alive again.

We believe that he was resurrected and is ascended at the right hand of the father, and that one day he will come to judge the living and the dead.

We must believe this

We have to believe this.

This is the message of Jesus and this is what he taught.

Yes, he taught us to care for the poor. Yes, he taught us to love our enemies. Yes, he taught us to turn the other cheek, but you cannot disconnect those things from the rest of the gospel.

And we also see as we look closer that repentance and belief are tied together and really are inseparable.

If you have truly repented of your sins, then you will believe

And if you truly believe that, these things I have just been preaching or true then you will return from your sins.

But many Christians today try to have one without the other.

There are those who repent of their sins, but who do not believe in Jesus.

There are plenty of people who have no problem with the commands of Jesus or the demands of Jesus.

There are people who like the Bible teaching on sexuality you think that we shouldn't get drunk or curse. They dress modestly and they think our culture is sinful.

And that's good and fine, but then they think they could do all those things and they don't have to actually believe that Jesus is God

But you cannot have one without the other

The flipside of those who think as long as they believe the right things, they can do whatever they want.

Their people who think well I prayed a prayer to accept. Jesus is my savior and I was baptized and I signed a card and I know that I'm gonna be with Jesus forever and so I can do whatever I want.

They believe they can sin however they want and God will forgive them.

They don't feel they need to confess their addiction

They don't feel the need to turn from their sins and turn to Jesus they think I believe in the right stuff I don't really need to go to church. I don't really need to read my Bible. I don't really need to pray. I can just kinda do whatever I want

We have to do both.

You can't separate them.

And I'm not saying that repeating of your sins, being holy earns salvation.

Because the salvation of Jesus is a gift.

But what I am saying these two things go together they're not separate

And the message of Jesus came to proclaim is repent of your sins and believe in me

Turn from your sins and believe in me

And I think it's vital that we understand this and Mark thinks it's vital that we understand this.

This is why he skips the birth of Jesus.

This is why these are the first words that Jesus speaks and Mark gospel.

Because Mark wants us to understand the gospel and understand the message of Jesus was that the kingdom of God is here repent of your sins and believe in me.

And this is what all of us have to remember.

Some of you were here this morning and this is you.

You've repented of your sins or or you like Christian values, but you don't believe in Jesus Christ and you need to repent of your sins yes and then you need to believe in Jesus and accept the message of the gospel.

Some of you hear or believing in the right things, but you have not turned from your sins and you're hiding sin in your life you need to repent of your senses and belief.

You need to live like you say you believe you should live.

Christmas is a wonderful time to proclaim the gospel.

Because we shouldn't just tell people Oh remember this time of years about Jesus

It is, but we shouldn't just remind ourselves that Jesus was born in a manger. We should remind ourselves of the gospel that Jesus came to preach.

III. Jesus came to make disciples (v. 15-20).

This is one of the first things that Jesus does.

It actually defines so much of His ministry.

He is never doing public ministry alone.

Even though His is God, He is not a lone wolf.

He make disciples and invites them to do ministry with him.

Because part of Jesus purpose was to make disciples.

Verse 16, **"Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."**

Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee.
He does not just happen to be walking by there.
He is not just talking a nice walk on the beach.
He is looking for disciples.
And He has particular disciples in mind.

Jesus sees Simon Peter and Andrew.
There is nothing special about them.
They are just doing their jobs.
They are trying to catch fish.

Jesus sees them and invites them to follow Him.
At its core, a disciple is someone who follows Jesus.
It is more than being a convert.
It is more than being someone who believes what Jesus says.
There are thousands of people who will accept Jesus message.
There are plenty of people who will listen to Him preach.
But there are only some who want to be disciples of Jesus.

And these disciples can come from fishermen.
Jesus disciples are not from the seminaries.
They are not from the religious elite.
They are not from the rich and educated.
They are people who just work manual labor jobs.
People who have to break their backs every day to put food on the table.
Jesus goes to these people and invites them to follow.

Because to be a disciple means a new occupation.
This is why Jesus says he will make them fishers of men.
Part of this is Jesus takes their gifts and uses them for Him.
He takes who we are and our gifting and uses them to make disciples.

Verse 18, **"And immediately they left their nets and followed him."**
Look at this response.

They go right away.

No debate.

No wanting to go home and sleep on it.

They immediately leave and follow.

They don't return the nets or set up plans for the business.

Like Abraham, they respond to the call and leave what they know.

Willing to follow Jesus into a strange country.

Jesus is calling us even this morning.

He is inviting you to be His disciple.

And His call demands a response.

It demands a response right now.

Will you follow?

Verse 19, **"And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him."**

Following Jesus is costly.

We cannot just add a little Jesus to our lives.

Following Jesus means everything in our life takes a backseat.

That includes family relationships.

To follow Jesus, they have to walk away from their father.

In this culture, that was taboo and unheard of.

It would be disrespectful and they would have viewed like prodigal sons.

They walk away from everything in their family to follow a homeless Rabbi with no temple and an uncertain future.

Following Jesus means we have to walk away from things.

We have to be willing to carry our cross and follow Him.

Too many people act like they can just do whatever they want and then as long as they go to church some Sundays and maybe don't do the really bad sins, then they are Christians.

They might call themselves Christians, but they are not disciples. To be a disciple means being willing to walk away from anything if Jesus asks.

For me, this has looked like walking away from family. I had someone ask me on vacation why I moved to Oklahoma. And I just said, Jesus called me. It isn't close to my family and it's not close to Brianna's. We had no connection here and worldly reason to come. But we visited this church and felt God's call. And we were convicted long ago that following Jesus meant going wherever He calls. Even if it leads us to strange places. This is what Jesus' disciples do. This is what we are to do. We heed the call of Christ.

There is one of their aspect of following Jesus that we need to understand. Because if we are following Jesus, and if we are disciples of Jesus, then we also will make disciples like Jesus made disciples. Listen, sometimes it's a trap we can fall into. We can think that it's all good that we are following Jesus, but we forget that we are also supposed to help other people follow Jesus.

This is something we've been talking about as elders. We have been praying about it. We've been thinking about it. We've been discussing and working and asking the question of how can we as a church? Make sure that we are truly making disciples. How can we be sure and how can we do the work to ensure that we aren't just entertaining people or feeding some people or providing for the poor but that we are also intentionally helping people follow Jesus. And helping people follow a way that they want to help others. Follow Jesus.

Because Jesus came to earth to make disciples.

He does not want people who call themselves Christians.
He does not just want people who fill up buildings on Sundays.
He does not just want people who don't curse and vote the right way.
He wants people who will follow Jesus.
Who will do all that Jesus asks not just the things they like and agree with.
Jesus was born on Christmas to make disciples.
As we think about His birth this Advent, we must remind ourselves that He came so that we would follow Him.
And like the disciples we should leave our nets behind and follow.

CONCLUSION:

Mark is helpful for us to remember this Christmas.
Because this season is not just to remind us that Christ was born.
Mark wants us to remember what Jesus came to do.
To remind us what His coming means.
He came to baptize in the Holy Spirit, proclaim the gospel, and make disciples.
And that His coming should change us.

So, this Advent season.
Do more than remember the fact of the birth of Christ.
Remember what Jesus did after He was born.
Remember the whole story of the gospel.