



Growth Group Questions
January 5, 2025
“A New Way for a New Year”

Context:

The tradition that circulated in the early church dated the writing of Mark’s Gospel either shortly before or shortly after Simon Peter’s death in A.D. 64 or 65. Mark was more than likely written in Rome before the beginning of the persecution of Nero which began in late 63 or early 64 AD.

Many scholars believe that the Mark who wrote this gospel is the John Mark we read about in Acts. Acts tells us that Paul and Barnabas took him from Jerusalem to Syrian Antioch (12:25), and then included him on the mission to Cyprus (13:5). In 13:13 we read about how he left them at Perga and then Paul refused to let him join his second mission journey. Acts 15:37-39 tells us that Barnabas wound up taking John Mark back to Cyprus. 1 Peter 5:13 associates John Mark with Peter in Rome, and Peter is more than likely the eyewitness that helped shape the gospel of Mark.

Every narrative in Mark centers around Jesus except for two about John the Baptist. There is no doubt that Jesus is at the center of all that Mark writes about and that his actions are important. Though his words matter as well, Mark wants us to learn about Jesus by taking a look at what he does.

John’s baptism is different than the ritual cleansings that already existed in Israel. In those cleansings people had to bathe themselves, but now John baptizes them symbolizing something new is happening. John’s call to repentance is urgent because it is preparing people for the arrival of Jesus who is going to bring the kingdom and people must offer their entire lives to this one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

The giving of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was an action of God. Only God could bestow the Spirit. John is telling us something important about Jesus. Because he baptizes with the Holy Spirit, John is telling us that Jesus is God, and he will come in power and at the ordering of God at just the right time.

Scripture:

Mark 1:1-8

¹ The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah,^[a] the Son of God,^[b] ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way”^[c]—

³ “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”^[d]

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with^[e] water, but he will baptize you with^[f] the Holy Spirit.”

Malachi 3:1

¹ “I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.

Deuteronomy 18:15-18

¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.” ¹⁷ The LORD said to me: “What they say is good. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.

Romans 14:17-18

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

Questions:

1. The Gospel of Mark begins in a very different way from the other three gospels. What strikes you most about how the book of Mark begins? What might that tell us about what we will learn as we proceed through our study of the book of Mark?
2. John the Baptist’s ministry was to get people ready for the coming of the Messiah. How does John seek to prepare the people for Jesus’ coming (Mark 1:1-8)?
3. Pastor Paul said that there is a difference between believing in Jesus and following Jesus. What do you see as the difference?

4. Mark 1:4 says that John “appeared in the wilderness.” Pastor Paul compared this literal wilderness or desert to the times in our lives when we might feel like our “well had run dry.” What do you think are the signs that your well may be “running dry”?
5. In Romans 14:7, the Apostle Paul says that we are to serve Christ through righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. What does that mean to you?
6. How would you explain the Holy Spirit and what He does in your life to someone else?
7. Pastor Paul said that we should be “people of the way.” What do you think he meant by that?
8. How would you summarize Mark’s message in Mark 1:1-8?
9. Pastor Paul’s sermon focused on the first eight verses of the first chapter of Mark. As you read through the entire chapter during the week, was there anything else in Chapter 1 that particularly spoke to you?

Pastor Paul’s Sermon Questions:

1. There is a difference between believing in Jesus and following Jesus. What can you do over the next four months to be more intentional about being on “the way” with Jesus?
2. Is there a place in your life where you feel like the “well” has run dry and you need God’s provision?