

94-10-06 Mark

Father, we thank you for the privilege we have this morning of assembling and studying your Word together. We thank you for the fellowship that we enjoy, united in Christ Jesus and children belonging to you. We pray that as we look into the truth... The Gospel according to Mark starts out by saying this is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Beginnings are very important, aren't they? It is the first impression that often colors our association with someone for quite a while to come. The first date, the first meeting, the first time we visit a church, the first time we attend a meeting of an organization. I'm sure the first time many of you visited this town or visited the retirement center or visited the organizations that you're a member of, it made an impression on you that lasted.

The first things tell us something and give us an impression that affects everything else that we do. And this Gospel starts out by saying this is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The beginning of this Gospel is critically important because it tells us the purpose of this particular Gospel.

We have four accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. What is it that this account is going to tell us? What should we bring away from our study of the Gospel of Mark? What I'd like to do this morning is summarize what we have seen in the first chapter, because this is our launching point, seven points on John's ministry and Jesus' baptism. And these are going to go by pretty quick, so pay attention.

First of all, this is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and where does it start? It starts with the ministry of John the Baptist. What does Peter begin his account with? We know that the Gospel of Mark is really a record of the preaching of Peter. Mark was a follower of Peter and set these things down.

And so we have here a set of notes, basically, that Mark took on the preaching of the Apostle Peter. And Peter begins by talking about John the Baptist, establishing his roots in Old Testament prophecy. The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ starts with the ministry of John the Baptist.

This is important because of what John the Baptist represents. Our second point, John performs a ritual ministry of baptism and preaching. It's a ritual ministry.

He performs a ritual baptism in the waters of the Jordan. This is what starts the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a ritual ministry of preaching, baptism. This preaching had to do with a change of mind about something.

Was this a change of mind about the government of Israel? Was it a change of mind about the Roman domination? Was it a change of mind about God as the God of Israel? What was this change of mind, this repentance supposed to be about that John was preaching? It tells us in

Mark that this was a change of mind with regard to sin. A change of mind with a view toward the forgiveness of sin. Now, this tells us something.

Why would a change of mind be necessary with regard to sin and with regard to the forgiveness of sin? Hadn't this been established back in the days of Moses, the Mount Sinai experience, the Ten Commandments, the giving of the law, the establishment of the sacrifice system in Israel? Why is a change of mind with regard to the repentance and forgiveness of sin, why is that necessary at this time? Why is John preaching repentance? Because repentance is necessary. A change of mind is necessary. There is something wrong in Israel about their attitude toward sin.

Now, let's think about this. What's going on in Israel at this time? Don't we have all kinds of religion? Don't we have the Pharisees and their strict adherence to the law and their additional compendium of rules and regulations to specify how to be righteous? Don't we have the Sadducees as a separate sect with their beliefs about Scripture? Don't we have the scribes and the priests? Religion is rampant in Israel. So why is John preaching change of mind about sin? It sounds like they've got this well in hand.

Something is wrong with the religious approach to sin. Something is wrong in the religious life of Israel. There is not a proper attitude about sin.

And John is saying, change your mind. There is a need for change of mind. Now, as we examine the ministry of John in our third point, we will see why this is necessary and what John's message is.

So our first point now, if you've lost track, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the ministry of John the Baptist. Now we're going to look at that. Our second point, John is performing a ritual ministry.

Water baptism in the Jordan is a ritual. It can wash the outside, but it does not wash the inside. Thirdly, John is ministering in a particular place.

John didn't go down to the temple courtyard. He didn't go down to the pool of Siloam. He didn't go to the market square.

He didn't go to the tables of the money changers. He didn't stand on a pinnacle of the temple and preach to the assembled crowds in Jerusalem. John is out in the wilderness, east of Jerusalem.

The most important message in hundreds is on the lips of John the Baptist, and he's not in the capital city. He's out in the desert. This is significant.

This is important. Why is he out there? Well, where is he? He's east of Jerusalem. He's in the wilderness next to the Jordan River.

He's calling out, prepare the way of the Lord and make his path straight. We have seen from

Isaiah chapter 40 that this is a reminder that the glory of God has departed from Israel. Why is John preaching change of mind about sin? Because sin has been the cause of the departure of the presence of God from Israel, and he never came back.

We saw this in Ezekiel. In fact, turn back with me to Ezekiel chapter 9. Let's review the departure of the glory of God from Israel very quickly. Ezekiel chapter 9. Chapter 8 of Ezekiel is God telling Ezekiel what's wrong in Israel.

In chapter 8, he says, look, they've set up idols right here in the temple courtyard. Look at the priests, the people who are supposed to be ministering the things of God to the nation of Israel. They are in there worshipping idols.

They are in there pursuing their own form of religion. Then in chapter 9, verse 4, he says, the Lord said, go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all of the abominations that are done within it. There is abomination in Israel.

There is no obedience. There's been a departure from prioritizing the things of the Lord. It's reflected amongst the common people.

It's reflected in the leadership of Israel. There are idols set up right in the temple of God. And so God is now going to judge.

God is going to distinguish between those who care about this and those who don't. Those who care about the things of the Lord are going to be anguished. They're going to be shamed.

They're going to be crying and sighing over this condition in their nation. This is how we should be. We're coming up on an election.

We take this time to concentrate on where our country is, where our society is heading, where our leadership is taking us. Do we care? Do we cry and sigh over the evil direction that some of our policies are leading us in? Do we sigh and cry over the evil direction of our culture, the evil direction, the evil sinkhole into which the younger generation is being dragged? Sighing and crying is not a casual activity, is it? This means that it is piercing to the very center of our being. Do we watch the news and actually come to the point of tears? Do we sigh? Do we go to the throne of God because we care about our nation, because we care about our culture, because we care about our young people? Does it concern us that much? Does it concern us enough to go out and cast a vote for those candidates who most closely conform to the Word of God? If it doesn't, we are going to be one of these people, as the angel travels through the city, that does not get the mark on the forehead.

This person doesn't care. They're not crying and sighing. They haven't noticed the evil.

They haven't identified it. They haven't reacted against it. Then what's going to happen? To the

others, he said in my hearing, go after them throughout the city and kill.

Do not let your eyes spare nor have any pity. And in Ezekiel 9, 6, he says, utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women, but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark and begin at my sanctuary. Judgment begins at the house of God, doesn't it? Those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ have a responsibility before the Lord to pay attention to what's going on in our community and in our nation and to have an attitude about it.

And when we see evil and we see the things of God being set aside in favor of other issues and other priorities, we should be concerned. We should be brought to the point of crying and sighing. God will notice.

God will honor that. Those who do not care, those who do not take an interest, whose mind is occupied with other things, are going to find themselves under the discipline of the Lord. Notice how severe this discipline is.

This is not a rap on the knuckles. This is a severe discipline. God is sending the avenging angel through to kill people in Israel.

We remember that Israel is a picture of believers. Israel has come out of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb. Israel as a nation pictures the life of believers.

And when we see God disciplining Israel in the Old Testament, it is a picture of discipline on believers who are disobedient. We have a responsibility to pay close attention to who we are and why we're here. The discipline for failing to do so is severe.

God considers this to be important enough to determine life and death. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women, but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark and begin at my sanctuary. So they began with the elders who were before the temple.

And why is that? From those to whom much is given, much is required. And leadership bears double blessing and double discipline. A leader who is not faithful to teach and preach the things of the Lord, leadership that does not lift up the principles of God's Word, whether in government or in the church or in any other sphere, will come under discipline first from God because there's a responsibility there.

Many lives are affected. So in this, our third principle, we see that John is in the wilderness east of Jerusalem saying, Change your mind. This is the attitude that caused the glory of God to leave Israel.

And if you trace, starting in Ezekiel chapter 9, verse 3, the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherubim that were at the Ark of the Covenant and went to the threshold of the temple. And in Ezekiel 10, 4, we see the glory of God slowly departing the temple, going from the threshold to

the gate. And in chapter 10, verses 18 and 19, chapter 11, verse 23, we see the glory of God going from the Holy of Holies to the threshold, from the threshold to the gate, from the gate to the Mount of Olives, and then disappearing from Israel, never to be seen again in the Old Testament.

God's presence, the glory of God that was the heritage of Israel, has departed because of their lax attitude toward sin, their lax attitude toward the things of God. They had allowed something to come between themselves and the Lord. Something had taken God's place on their priority list.

What is the first commandment? First commandment. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. And we immediately think in terms of idolatry, but in our day and in our age, many things can knock God out of the top slot of our priority list.

Well, I'm going to worship the Lord, and I'm a Christian and have been for many years, but my security is really most important to me. My financial future is most important. My children are most important.

My job. My social life. My professional advancement, whatever it may be.

And we have violated that first commandment. God is no longer in first place, and God will not take a back seat. God will not be number two, but trying harder.

God demands first place, or God's presence and God's glory will depart. We know that we cannot lose our salvation, but we also know that the presence and the blessing of God's presence in our life can depart if we do not put God first in every area of our life. This is a tremendous challenge.

As Lyle pointed out earlier, the tempest of circumstances that we are engulfed in, the flood of news and information, the things that come across into our living room over the TV set, what we see in the paper, the events of our lives, our sufferings, our circumstances, people, things, crowd into our attention and clamor for first place in our thinking, and God demands that first place. So, John is in the wilderness calling Israel back to putting God in first place, and in order to do that, they have to acknowledge the sin that has separated them from God. It is prioritizing other things that cause the glory of God to depart, and it must be recognition of that, but it must take place before God's glory will return.

John is east of Jerusalem. This is the direction that the glory of God departed, and he is out in the wilderness saying, look, prepare in the desert a highway for our God. If we want God to have first place in our nation, let's get ready.

Let's have a change of heart. That was our fourth point. The glory of God departed Israel because of the nation's failure to put God first.

It's that simple. The glory of God, the blessing of God's presence in our life can depart for the very same reason. That old bumper sticker that I saw when I was little as we were driving into Tulsa, that someone had on their old station wagon, it said, does God seem far away? Who

moved? If God doesn't seem like a real presence in our life, if the presence of God, the power of God doesn't seem to be a reality in our life, whose fault is it? Who is it that has changed their mind and changed their priorities? It certainly is not the Lord.

It is us. So the glory of God departed because of the nation's failure to put God first as the law demanded. You may recall that first commandment, thou shalt have no other gods before me.

And the second is really an extension of the first. Thou shalt not make any graven image in the likeness of men or beasts or anything else. Why is that? It isn't that God has a dislike of art or statuary or bar relief.

It is that God did not want Israel to set up idols like all of the people around them. We live in the midst of a society that is idolatrous. We live in the midst of a culture that pursues pleasure, that pursues self-gratification, self-satisfaction, and lifts it up to a high art and legitimizes it and says this is right, this is proper.

If you're not happy, we need to change society to make you happy. If you're not prosperous, we need to change our nation to make you prosperous. Your happiness is the first and foremost concern.

And it's an easy thing to fall into because we're surrounded by it. We subtly and without knowing it can fall into the trap of thinking, well, God is basically there to make me happy. I'm a believer because I expect God to make my life better.

And we blaspheme the Lord our God. God is not an Alka-Seltzer to take away our stomachache. God is not an aspirin to relieve our pain.

God is the God of the universe and he does not serve us. We serve him. And as soon as we forget that, we have put something ahead of God.

We put our own pleasure, our own satisfaction, our own goals ahead of the Lord. This is why God's glory departed. The elders of Israel set up their own idols in the temple and worshiped them in the darkness instead of the Lord God, it tells us in Ezekiel 8. God disciplined the nation severely and his glory departed the temple.

When is the glory going to return to Israel? When will the glory of God once again fill the temple? Turn to Ezekiel chapter 43. Ezekiel chapter 43. In the previous couple of chapters, God has given the dimensions of the new temple, all of the specifications of the millennial temple to Ezekiel.

The measurements, the fittings, the furnishings, the materials, two whole chapters filled with the details of the millennial temple. And in chapter 43, afterward, he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. Remember the east, the direction where the glory of God departed, the place in the wilderness where John is preaching, prepare the way of the Lord.

And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters and the earth shone with his glory. It was like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city.

The visions were like the vision which I saw by the river Kabar and I fell on my face. And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

This glory will return when Jesus Christ sets up his millennial kingdom on earth. The second coming of Jesus Christ when he returns and delivers Israel at the battle of Armageddon. His feet touch the Mount of Olives and it splits from north to south and provides a way of escape for the armies of Israel.

And then Jesus Christ will personally, himself, destroy the invading armies of the king of the north and the king of the east. The blood will run as high as the horse's bridles as Jesus Christ returns in judgment. He will then establish his kingdom.

The Old Testament saints will be resurrected to enjoy the blessings of the covenants that God made with them, starting with Abraham, going on to the Davidic covenant, the promise of the land, the throne, the dynasty and so forth. Those covenants will be fulfilled to Old Testament believers and the glory of God will once again reside on earth in the temple at that time. Why is it that the glory of God will be able to return at that time? Because the new covenant to Israel will have been fulfilled.

I will take out your heart of stone and will give you a heart of flesh. You will follow my ways and my precepts from the heart, God says. There will be a change of heart in the nation of Israel.

It's a change of heart that John is calling for in the wilderness. It's a change of heart that will take place at the beginning of the millennial kingdom. Why? Because only believing Israelites will be partaking in that kingdom.

When you're talking about the nation of Israel, it's the believers that are resurrected to enjoy that kingdom. So Israel as a nation will be comprised totally of believers. Resurrected believers and survivors of the tribulation who did not take the mark of the beast.

That heart of stone will have been removed because unbelievers and the faithless will not be there. This is when the glory of God returns. Now what does this mean to us? What should we bring away from the ministry of John the Baptist? Jesus Christ, this by the way if you're keeping notes is the fifth point.

Jesus Christ embodies the glory of God. In him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. Hebrews 1.3 tells us that Jesus Christ is the brightness of his glory and the express image of God's person.

Jesus Christ is the glory of God. We are in such a unique time in history. We live in the church age and we in our individual lives can dwell in the millennial kingdom.

The glory of God we can dwell in the temple but we are a temple. We are a dwelling place for Jesus Christ and our individual life can be the dwelling place of the glory of God because of the indwelling of Jesus Christ. The person of Jesus Christ active within us and a reality within us is a foreshadowing and an early fulfillment of those promises that will be literally fulfilled in the millennial kingdom.

So we can have a preview of that wonderful presence, that wonderful blessing and that wonderful glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ shining within us. Those sound like fine words but when we get down to brass tacks and it's Tuesday afternoon or it's Wednesday morning, how does that become a reality? How can that glory of God shine in us in a real and personal way? We heed the call of John the Baptist. We heed the call to have a change of mind, not think like the Israelites, not allow something to supersede God in our thinking and in our priorities.

And it's a daily, hourly battle. What is it that concerns us? What is the number one concern that we had this past week? What did we spend the most time on this past week? When New Year's comes around we make New Year's resolutions and we say this year things are going to be different. These are the things I'm going to prioritize.

These are my goals. Yet as we survey the preceding year, where we spend our time reflects our true priorities. How much time did we spend on the things of God? How much time did we spend in God's Word? How much time did we spend in prayer? How much time did we spend taking advantage of opportunities for service? Opportunities for the Holy Spirit to use us to further the plan and program of God.

As we look over our lives and think, well, you know, most of my time was spent doing this or doing that or doing the other. That is really our true priority because time is a resource just like finances. Time is that which we spend.

We can either buy up the time because the days are evil or we can spend it on things that do not have eternal impact and do not count. Even those daily chores that are required of us, whether it's work, cleaning, cooking, corresponding, socializing, performing those functions that are a part of our daily life, are those done with one eye on the Lord? Do we do them heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men? Do we do them motivated and conditioned by the things in God's Word or not? That is the test of whether we will have the mark on our forehead or not. That is the test of whether or not the glory of God has any possibility of shining in our lives.

And it's kind of embarrassing as a believer. And I will say this because I have had this experience and I'm sure some of you have as well. We can be believers of longstanding.

We can have been saved in our childhood. We can have been saved in our early days and have

spent years in church, years in Sunday school. We might have even taught Sunday school.

We might have even been looked up to and considered a real part of the spiritual establishment in some way. And yet, in those quiet hours in the early morning or those quiet times when we're by ourselves and we look at our soul, we think, you know, I don't really feel the reality of Jesus Christ. I don't really perceive the glory of God in my life.

I feel like I'm kind of going through the motions. I have all of the trappings. I'm in good standing.

Nobody thinks ill of me. But I don't feel like I really know Jesus Christ in a personal way. If He appeared this afternoon and walked up to me, I think I would be a little uncomfortable because I don't feel like I know Him that well.

I think I would be nervous and be uncomfortable. And it's a hard thing to admit, particularly when you feel like there's no good reason. I've been in church.

I've been doing all these things. And yet, I don't really feel that reality in my life. Well, this is the answer.

We have to stop and analyze ourselves. If we judge ourselves, we are not judged by God. And so, it's up to us.

If that reality is not there, that's a red flag waving that there's something amiss. Because Jesus Christ is a real person. He really exists.

He should be a real and living presence within us. And if we don't perceive that, that's the first indication. And if we care enough about the things of God, we will pursue the resolution of that problem, whatever it takes, even if it's humiliating.

Even if we have to come back and say, You know, I really don't understand as much as I wish I did about the Bible. I don't really think I've got a good handle on what the spiritual life is all about. And I don't care what it takes.

I don't care if it's embarrassing. I don't care if I have to go back to square one. It's important to me that God be real in my soul.

It's important that the glory of God and the person of God take first place. And whatever it takes, that's what I'm going to do. That's the call of John the Baptist.

Have a change of mind with regard to God. Have a change of mind with regard to sin. Because it is a true fact that if God is not in first place in our lives, we are engaged in sin.

There is sin in our life. If God is not first, if God is not a presence, if we don't perceive the glory of God shining at the very center of our life, we are in sin in some way, shape or form. And unless we eradicate it, we will never know the presence of God.

We will never know the blessing of that glory shining within us. And we can be called a believer. We can be a pillar in the church.

We can have been a church member for umpteen years. It doesn't matter. If that glory is not shining, there's something amiss.

And John the Baptist is in the wilderness giving us a wake-up call. He's saying, look, Jesus Christ is about to appear. The kingdom of God is coming on the scene.

Judgment begins at the house of God. And it's going to begin with us. We are the house of God.

And we'd better judge ourselves and pursue the things of God and put them first and set everything else aside, whatever it takes. If it's embarrassing, that's okay. The meek will inherit the earth.

So that meekness is a good thing. There's no excuse for not putting God first. That's the call of John.

Jesus Christ embodies the glory of God. John announces that he and the baptism he offers, that baptism of water in the Jordan, are inferior. He says, I'm not worthy to touch the shoelatch of the one that is coming after me.

I baptize you with water. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. This is the difference between ritual and reality.

This is the difference between going through the motions on the outside and having the dynamic power of God active on the inside. Water baptism versus spirit baptism are like night and day. It's the difference between ritual and reality.

There's nothing wrong with ritual. Ritual foreshadows and teaches about the reality, but it is not a substitute for the reality. The blood of goats and bulls never paid for a single sin in human history, and it never will.

It is not the blood of goats and bulls that redeemed us. It is not the blood of goats and bulls that atoned. That is a ritual that foreshadowed the work of Jesus Christ.

If we rely on the ritual, we're out in the weeds. We are not putting God first. We're putting the ritual first.

We're putting the identity and the thoughts and the perceptions of people first. It's the reality that counts. And John said, look, don't get hung up on my baptism just dunking in the Jordan.

Don't think that that does anything for you. It's change of mind on the inside that prepares the way for the glory of God and the reality of the baptism of the Spirit. John's ministry, this is your sixth

point out of seven, John's ministry typified the whole Old Testament system of ritual.

The Mosaic Law was a system of ritual. It conditioned behavior on the outside. If you walk into a tent and come in contact with a dead body, you are unclean for seven days.

This was a prescription for external behavior. It didn't matter what you thought. It didn't matter what your motivations were.

You could keep many of the provisions of the law just by deciding that you wanted to. The law did not prescribe thinking. The law prescribed behavior.

It was an external system of ritual. It was designed to teach the devastating nature of sin, the corrupting influence of sin, the holiness of God and the separation, the problem between God and man. That's what the law taught.

If there had been a law given which could have given life, righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined everyone under sin in order that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. That, by the way, is Scripture.

This is from Galatians chapter 3. There has been no law given which can give life. The ritual doesn't give life, it's the reality. Scripture has confined all under sin that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ, prepare the way of the Lord, have a change of mind towards sin, prioritize God, seek the glory of God.

Faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. This is summed up in the ministry of John the Baptist.

Here's the ritual system. He's calling people to repentance. We know that nearly everybody in Jerusalem and Judea came down and got baptized by John, and yet it did not change them.

The Jordan water did not wreak a change of heart in those Israelites. And those same people shouted, crucify him, crucify him, just a few years later. The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ in order that we might be justified by faith, by that heart attitude that God recognizes and does his cleansing work in us.

After faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. And once Jesus Christ comes, the ministry of John the Baptist is at an end. Once Jesus Christ comes, the ministry of the Mosaic law in Israel is at an end.

Jesus did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. And you'll notice that once Jesus Christ comes, we don't see the ministry of John the Baptist anymore. Jesus really begins his active ministry in Israel at the point that John is imprisoned.

And there's a shift, there's a change from the ritual ministry that John performs to the ministry of teaching and the encouragement to faith that Jesus Christ preaches. By the deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Romans 3.20 This is the call of John the Baptist.

Recognize sin, identify the problem, and have a change of heart so that God can do something about it. John called out for those who came to him to confess their sins and express their change of mind in a ritual baptism. We know that most of those who were baptized did not change their minds.

Even though they came out and confessed their sins, they were dunked in the Jordan by John, it didn't do anything. And why is that? It's the same reason that people can attend church today. It's the same reason people can say Lord willing and have all the identifying marks of a Christian on the outside and have no power and no dynamic presence of God on the inside.

Because it requires an attitude of seeking the Lord. It requires that we decide to put God first. We've talked about the fact that this is genuine humility versus arrogance.

Humility is seeking God and putting Him first. Arrogance is not seeking God and putting ourselves or some other thing first. And it's that simple.

Most of those who were baptized did not change their minds. And God talks about this category of people when He says, These people draw near to me with their mouths and honor me with their lips. Isn't that a scary thing? Someone talks about the Lord, honors God with their lips, gives God the glory when good things happen in their life.

To all outward appearances, they seem to be a faithful follower of God. Yet God says, these people draw near to me with their mouths and honor me with their lips, but they have removed their hearts far from me and their fear toward me is taught by the commandments of men. We saw in Colossians the danger of human tradition, of the accretions and the barnacles that build up on the life of the church.

And we start looking at that as spirituality. We start looking at church attendance or activity in the church or having the right language or having the right lifestyle as spirituality. And God says, watch out, because you can honor God with your lips and you can preach for truth the commandments of men.

We have to go back to Scripture. This is something we're going to be seeing in our upcoming studies, the importance of measuring things by the Word of God, the standard of the Word of God and not results. For example, you can have a ministry going on on television or in a tent or whatever and there may be people that are saved.

If someone comes to Christ under that ministry, does that tell us that that ministry is good and

right and pleasing to God? No, it does not. We do not measure by results. If we take a particular course of action in our life and good circumstances result, does that mean that we made the right decision before the Lord? No, it does not.

There are lots of rich people in this world and they can say, well, look, I made the right decision. I've got money in the bank and I wouldn't have had it otherwise. I invested in the right stock.

I pursued the right career. We cannot look at circumstances and say, I did the right thing or did the wrong thing. The standard of the Word of God is what's required to evaluate.

This is what makes it so difficult because people legitimize their course of action. They legitimize their ministry. They legitimize their denomination.

They legitimize their cult even by results. Look at how lives have changed. Look at how people have come to Christ under this ministry.

Therefore, this ministry must be good and that is manifestly not the case. We have to evaluate by the standard of the Word of God. God's Word does not come back void.

And there are people who get saved in bars by reading a passage of Scripture that's scribbled on the bathroom wall. But that doesn't mean that that's a legitimate form of ministry. There are people who have come to Christ hearing the Gospel from the lips of an unbeliever.

My wife being one of them. And yet that doesn't mean that unbelievers preaching the Gospel is a legitimate type of ministry. God's Word carries its own power and its own authority and God will use it in the most bizarre circumstances we can imagine.

But the fact that God has honored His Word and that someone has been saved does not legitimize or authorize that form of ministry or that denomination or that set of beliefs. We have to go to the standard of the Word of God. And this is what Israel had dropped.

This is why they had Pharisees and Sadducees and religious leaders of every stripe. And God says, But their hearts are far from Me. This is the test we have to apply to ourselves.

It is not enough that we are accepted by our peers as wonderful, holy people of God. It is not enough that by the measure of this world we are thought to be Christian or we are thought to be spiritual. It doesn't count and it doesn't matter.

And we cannot fool ourselves with that notion. James says, Look into the perfect law of liberty if you want to see your reflection. If you want to find out what's right and what's wrong in your life, look in the Word of God.

This is why we, as a Bible church, prioritize the study of the Word of God. Everything about God, everything from God comes to us through His Word. The capacity to appreciate His blessings.

The capacity to identify His opportunities. The capacity to enjoy the power of His Spirit. All of these things come through the Word.

The Word is the manna that feeds our souls. And it is the standard by which we evaluate ourselves and we evaluate everything else in life. If you want to know who to vote for in this upcoming election, look in the Word of God.

Evaluate candidates by the standard of the Word of God. Life and death. Freedom or bondage.

Independence or dependence. It's amazing what a powerful temptation it is when someone stands up behind a microphone to get off into political discourse. I will remind you of one Scripture.

Let him who does not work, not eat. There is a work ethic that's taught in Scripture that people should not be dependent. Who was it that the church supported in the early days of the church? Let not a widow under the age of 60 years be taken in for the purpose of support.

Let her take advantage of the opportunities to either remarry or be supported by members of her family or her extended family. It was a very strict criteria in the church before the church would support someone without anything being done by that person. Look in the Old Testament.

Did the Mosaic law say, bake extra loaves of bread and set them out on your windowsill for the poor? It did not. It said, when you glean your field, leave the corners uncut and let the poor go out and gather their own grain and grind that grain into flour and make their own bread. There is a work ethic taught in Scripture.

That's a principle that we can apply in the upcoming days. Who is it that supports a work ethic in this country? Who is it that supports making everyone dependent? It's a principle of Scripture. And we see that Scripture is the criteria, not, look how these people have been fed by this wonderful government program.

That's not the measure. The measure is the standard of the Word of God. If John the Baptist measured his ministry by the outcome, getting beheaded in prison, he might have selected a different course for his life.

But he did not measure himself. If the apostles had measured by whether or not they got in trouble with the law, the gospel would not have been preached in Jerusalem and Judea because they were continually being locked up as criminals. Someone could have come up and said, oh, Brother Paul, you know, this getting locked up by the law all the time is really a bad testimony.

You're a lawbreaker. You're a criminal. Look at you.

In chains. You're a disgrace. You're socially unacceptable.

Good, upstanding people aren't going to listen to you. You're a criminal. That's not the standard that Paul used to evaluate his ministry.

He used the standard of the Word of God and that's what we must do. Finally, in point 6, Jesus Christ was baptized by John in the Jordan symbolizing his fulfillment of the righteousness of the law. We see that John in his ritual ministry sums up and typifies the whole ritual system of the Old Testament.

John's message, repent, change your mind about sin, is the message of the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law brought us to Christ. It shows us our sinfulness.

Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill, Christ says in Matthew 5.17. And in undergoing the baptism of John in the Jordan, Jesus symbolically fulfills the righteousness of the law and shows us that it is his reality that brings to fulfillment all of those shadows. We saw last week in point 7 here, the ripping apart of the heavens and the appearance of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove signals that the era of ritual is drawing to a close.

The ministry of Jesus Christ is that transition period between the age of ritual, the age of the law, and the age of reality, the age in which we live. Note the comparison and the contrast between the introduction of these two phases of God's rule. The theological students of the Word of God talk about the theocracy, God's rule in the Old Testament established in Mount Sinai.

God says, I will be your God. You will be my people. There's no intermediate king.

I am your government. Here's the Mosaic Law. How did that start out? Do you remember back in Exodus? In fact, Moses summarizes this in Deuteronomy chapter 4, verses 9 through 12.

He says, Remember when God gave the law, there was the mountain and the darkness and the fire and the thick cloud and the quaking and the voice of God coming out of the fire and you were afraid and you didn't want to draw near. That's how the rule of God was established in the rituals and the Holy Spirit descending. That barrier of the heavens that we studied last Sunday morning is torn open and the presence of God descends on a human being, on the person of Jesus Christ with whom we are in union.

The voice out of the fire that made righteous demands and said, You must adhere. Now that same voice speaks from heaven and says, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Instead of righteous demands, we have the satisfaction of God's righteousness.

Here is that which fulfills and satisfies everything I'm looking for in the human race. What a contrast between the giving of the law at Sinai and the breaking through of the Holy Spirit on mankind starting with the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the object of our worship.

God did not permit His form to be seen at Mount Sinai. And Moses says in Deuteronomy 4, This is because if you had seen His face, you would start making idols and worshiping those idols. But we do see the image of God in the person of Jesus Christ and God is not afraid to show us that form because Jesus Christ is the worthy object of worship.

And we are free to look to Him and worship Him as God because He is God. That is the review of this first portion of Mark.