

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL ABOUT JESUS

Mark 1:1-13 (Key verse 1)

"The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God"

Today's passage is an introduction to the book of Mark. This book was written by Mark, also known as John; he was raised by Jesus disciples. The disciples continued to teach and raise Mark, and something miraculous happened in his life, Mark became an active gospel worker. What happened? What kind of teachings did the disciples give to Mark? They taught him about the gospel of Jesus. The gospel about Jesus on its own was so powerful to transform Mark, such that he even recorded this book. Through this book, Mark shares the gospel with us as well, with a desire to share the glorious gift that he has received. And through today's passage we are going to learn about the beginning of the gospel, what it entails, its impact, and what attitude we should have towards it. I pray that God may have mercy on us today, to receive one word and experience the power of the beginning of the gospel.

Let us look at **verse 1**: *"The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God,"* The word gospel means "good news" So here Mark emphasised the beginning of the good news brought by Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As we live in this world many good things happen to us, we pass our matric, we get accepted at Wits, UCT, UP and UJ, we attend orientation, some of us get good jobs, we get blessed with children. As we look at all these things, we are also convinced that they are the beginning of good things. Now, in today's passage Mark brings our attention to a new beginning, the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And this is good news to us, it is good news to the whole world. However, this is a very special kind of good news, the most important good news. How is it that this news is more special and important?

This good news is special because it is brought by Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This good news is not from an ordinary man, but from the promised messiah, the Savior of the world. Jesus is the promised Savior of the world, Savior from the power of sin and death, since the disobedience of Adam and Eve mankind have suffered greatly under the bondage of sin. Mankind has been wondering around with a sense of guilt, failure and no satisfaction, because of the power of sin. Even very educated men and women who occupy high positions and possess lots of money still suffer from the power of sin, and nothing in this world can help solve this problem. But through the good news about Jesus, the Son of God we can have hope. In **verse 10-11** it says: *"Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. /And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.""* Here God himself publicly acknowledged Jesus as his son, meaning Jesus is God, he is the creator of the heavens and the earth and all creations. So, Jesus knows what we need, he knows us deeply, and he is the bearer of the good news that we really need. In the nutshell the good news of Jesus is the beginning of life, without the good news of Jesus our life has no meaning and purpose, we cannot experience joy and peace.

Furthermore Mark introduced us to the beginning of the gospel news, let us look at **verse 2-3**: *"as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" / "a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"* The beginning of the gospel did not just occur out of the blue, it was foretold through prophecy, it was foretold through the word of God. Through this prophecy we can have a clarity on the details of the

beginning of the gospel. From the prophecy, it says the gospel will begin with a messenger from God who will be sent to prepare the way for Jesus Christ. How will the messenger prepare the way for Jesus Christ? It says: *"a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him'"* The messenger will do this by going out to the people and telling them about the coming of the Lord, the coming of Jesus Christ the Son of God, the coming of the promised messiah, the Savior of the world. The message to the people is to prepare the way for the Lord, by making straight paths for him. But what does this mean? How can the people make straight paths for him?

To understand this clearly let us look at **verse 4**: *"And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."* Through John the Baptist the prophecy was fulfilled, he appeared to the people from the wilderness, calling out in a loud voice, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John's message to the people was repentance for the forgiveness of sin, this was the way for the people to prepare for the Lord, to make straight paths for him. Repentance is the beginning of the gospel, the beginning of the good news to manifest in the people's lives. But what is repentance? What does it mean to repent? Firstly, repentance is an acknowledgement that I am a sinner, that I have wronged before the eyes of the Lord. Repentance is acknowledgement of all sin, not just sin that is visible to mankind, but all sin even that kind of sin that nobody knows about, the sin that I do in my own secret place.

When I grew up everybody knew that I am a good person, I was a good boy, my parents were proud of me and could talk highly of me before other people. When I came to University things remained the same, I believe I was still a good person, and no one had issues with me. However all this was just an outward appearance, deep down I was a sinner, I was self-righteous, all I cared about was myself, I was bitter inside about many things, my parents who got divorced, causing me shame before my friends and many of my relatives. Deep inside I was dirty, filled with lots of bad thoughts, sexual immorality, hate and anger. Outwardly I was good, but inside I was a dirty and stinking body like a dump site. Now to repent, is to acknowledge especially all these inward things, and to cry out with deepest need for help, with a deep desire to turn away from the life of sin and to follow the way of God.

When John the Baptist came out from the wilderness, his message was very clear that the beginning of the good news in our life is to repent, the beginning of the forgiveness of sins and redemption from the suffering of sin and death is repentance. Acknowledgement that I am a sinner and a deep desire to turn away from our life of sin. Now what happened when John the Baptist came out from the wilderness preaching this message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? Let us look at **verse 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."* When the people heard the message from John, they did not hesitate but confessed all their sins, not just outward sins but all their sins. These people were Jews, who had very strong beliefs about obeying the law, they were convinced that they were the chosen people of God and already saved. But when they heard John's message, something changed, they went out to John confessing their sins and were baptised by him at the Jordan River.

How could they respond in this way? Was it because John was influential in society? John looked very lowly and homeless, he came out from the desert with clothing made from Camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, he ate locusts and wild honey. So, nothing was attractive about the person John. But the people came confessing their sins. Why? Because

the message of the beginning of the gospel penetrated their hearts, such that they indeed realised that they need to repent from their sins for them to be saved. The message of the beginning of the gospel has power, if we too can listen carefully to it, we can repent, we can confess our deepest sins for the forgiveness of our sins. Sin has caused us so much suffering, because of sin many people are wondering around, they live with anxieties and helplessness. Furthermore, let us spread this message to others as well, many people are dying and in desperate need of this message.

After John had baptised the people, he said to them in **verse 7-8**: “...*After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. / I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*” John emphasised that repentance is only the beginning, it is a very critical step towards the good news of Jesus Christ, but it is only the beginning. John emphasised that Jesus in his great power and might will fulfil the full measure of the good news. Jesus the Son of God will be betrayed, tortured, killed on the cross and on the third day rise from the dead. Through this Jesus will defeat the power of sin, through this Jesus will redeem us from the consequence of our sins. So, when repent we must not lose hope, we must not be consumed by guilt, shame and pain of our sins, we must not be afraid wondering if we will be able to resist our temptations. But we must put our hope and trust in Jesus Christ the son of God, who has power and might to make all things possible. Jesus who baptizes with the holy spirit. Through Jesus the full measure of the good news is fulfilled.

Conclusion:

From today's passage we have learnt that the beginning of the gospel is repentance, in order for us to experience the good news of Jesus we need to begin with repentance from our sins, confess all our sins even the deepest sins that only we know. In **verse 9** it says: “*At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.*” Jesus is the son of God; he is without sin and has never been with sin. However, here we see him baptized by John, with the baptism of repentance. Why did he do this? This is because Jesus wanted to identify with all sinners, the nature of his gospel is to identify with all sinners. Meaning Jesus will welcome all mankind regardless of the measure of our sins, and he loves all mankind without any discrimination. When we confess all our deepest sins, the Son of God, Jesus will welcome us with both arms, filled with love, he will not reject us. I pray that we may all acknowledge that we are sinners, confess all our sins and not be consumed by guilt and sense of rejection, but have faith that Jesus will welcome and will forgive us from all our sins.