



1: The Beginning | Pastor Joe Wittwer | June 14, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

For the next twelve weeks, we are going to study the story of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark and learn to become better followers of Jesus. The game “Follow the Leader” is a good picture of what it means to be a Christian. We follow our leader, Jesus. Mark is the shortest and oldest of the four gospels, written (we think) somewhere between 50 and 70 AD. It was written by Mark, who was not one of the twelve apostles, but a sidekick to them. Mark was written for a Roman audience and is the gospel of action. He wants his readers to get a clear and compelling picture of Jesus.

1. The beginning of the good news about Jesus.

Mark 1:1-3: *The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 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 desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”* Mark reaches far back into Israel’s history and quotes from **Malachi 3 and Isaiah 40**. Long before Jesus came, God had a plan. He gave the prophets glimpses of that plan, and then Jesus came and fulfilled it.

The God of the Law and Prophets is the God of the gospel. Gospel means “good news.” Mark tells us it is the good news “about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus is his name, Christ is his title. The word “Christ” is the Greek version of the Hebrew title, “Messiah,” which means “anointed one,” or “God’s chosen one.” The Messiah was the long-awaited Jewish savior or deliverer. Mark, like the other early Jewish followers of Jesus, believed Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah, so he called him Jesus Christ, or Jesus the Messiah. By calling Jesus “the Son of God,” Mark wants his readers to know that Jesus is divine. The rest of the story backs up this amazing claim: Jesus is no ordinary man, but he is fully human. He is God’s chosen deliverer, and He is the Son of God, fully God.

2. John the baptizer prepares the way.

Mark 1:4-8: *And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs 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.”* In fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, John prepared the way for Jesus. His message was so compelling that people streamed out to the desert to hear him and be baptized. John pointed beyond himself to someone so great that John wasn’t even worthy to untie his sandals. A Jewish servant was not required to untie his master’s sandals; no one had to stoop that low.

With all the crowds streaming out to the desert to hear his message and be baptized, it would have been easy for John to get a big head, but he understood that he was just the set-up man for Jesus. He constantly pointed people to Jesus and did such a good job of it that some of his followers got jealous. To that, John’s answered in **John 3:27-30:** *“A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.’ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.”* We

must point people to Jesus. In John 1, John the Baptist described Jesus in **John 1:29**: *Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* And he continued in **John 1:33**: *...the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.* The gospel is both forgiveness and empowerment; forgiveness and transformation. He takes away our sin and gives us the Holy Spirit. Jesus said it this way in **John 7:37-39**: *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."*

3. Jesus is baptized.

Mark 1:9-11: *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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."*

The baptism of Jesus presents a problem: John was baptizing for the forgiveness of sins, and Jesus was the sinless Son of God. So why was he baptized? **First, it was his moment of decision.** For 30 years, Jesus had been waiting to begin His work. When John arrived on the scene, Jesus knew that his moment had come, and he inaugurates his work by being baptized. In the same way, baptism is meant to mark our decision to follow Jesus. **Second, it was his moment of identification.** Although Jesus had no sin, we think he wanted to identify with John's movement toward God and with us in our sin.

Romans 6:3-4: *Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.* Jesus identified with us in His baptism, and we identify with Him in ours. We show that we are dying with Jesus and rising with Jesus to live a new life. **Third, it was his moment of affirmation.** When Jesus was baptized, three things happened: the heavens were torn open (**Isaiah 64:1**), the Spirit descended upon Him, and God's voice spoke: *"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"* (**Psalms 2:7, Isaiah 42:1**). At this moment, as Jesus began His mission, God gave Jesus His affirmation. In the same way, when we decide to follow Jesus and are baptized, we become a child of God. **Galatians 3:26-27**: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* And **fourth, it was his moment of empowerment.** The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus and from that moment on, Jesus lived and worked in the power of the Spirit. In the same way, we are baptized in water and in the Spirit, to empower us to live the life God wants.

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. Can you recall when you first heard the "good news," that Jesus had come to "make all wrongs right, starting with us?" Can you share who or what situation made that real to you?
2. Mark makes clear that we are both forgiven and transformed through Christ. This is a reflection of the transformation Jesus underwent when John baptized Him. Have you been baptized since you made the decision to follow Jesus? Are there experiences from that you can share?
3. Mark quotes John saying that Jesus will "baptize you with the Holy Spirit." In John 7, John talks about us receiving "living waters" when we follow Jesus. How has receiving the Holy Spirit been a "moment of empowerment" in your life?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- Remember all the "good news" in your life this week, chief among those is God's plans and promises to you through Christ. Remember those less fortunate, and look for ways to give.
- If you haven't yet been baptized, consider signing up for the next session (Sunday, August 2nd is the next baptism).

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Give thanks to God for His good news, and for the plans he has for the world.
- Pray for God to continue to transform you and your life so that you will be a whole-hearted follower of Christ.
- Pray for God's ongoing guidance through the Holy Spirit so we will be effective Christians.
- Offer any other praises or requests that arose during your discussion.