

# Mark 1-2 The Early Ministry of Jesus

## An Outline

- I. The Preparation for Jesus's Messianic Ministry (1:1-13)
  - A. John the Baptist Prepares the Way (Mark 1:1-8)
  - B. The Baptism and Testing of Jesus (Mark 1:9-13)
- II. Jesus Begins His Galilean Ministry (Mark 1:14-45)
  - A. Jesus Announces the Good News (Mark 1:14-15)
  - B. Jesus Calls His First Disciples (Mark 1:16-20)
  - C. Jesus Drives Out an Impure Spirit (Mark 1:21-28)
  - D. Jesus Heals Many (Mark 1:29-34)
  - E. Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place (Mark 1:35-39)
  - F. Jesus Heals a Man with Leprosy (Mark 1:40-45)
- III. The Beginning of Conflict (Mark 2:1-27)
  - A. Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man (Mark 2:1-12) – Only God can forgive sins
  - B. Jesus Calls Levi and Eats with Sinners (Mark 2:13-17) - Eats with tax collectors & sinners
  - C. Jesus Questioned about Fasting (Mark 2:18-22) – His disciples don't fast
  - D. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-27) – His disciples are violating Sabbath laws

## Questions for Study

1. **John's Baptism vs. Jesus's Baptism:** John baptized with water but Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit (and fire). Compare with Matthew 3:11-12 and Luke 3:16-17 and John 1:33. John's baptism was one of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It was a break from the OT sign of circumcision because (1) John preached to the Jews, who already had circumcision, so they needed a new sign, which was based on repentance and faith and tied to a new covenant, expressed in "the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1) and (2) John's baptism was a sign of personal, individual repentance rather than a sign of birth into a covenant family, and while circumcision was only for men, baptism was for both men and women (Acts 8:12; 16:15) and (3) John's baptism, like Jesus' baptism by the Holy Spirit, was a sign for believers, not infants, for it evidenced genuine repentance and faith in Christ (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; cf. 1 Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27; Titus 3:5). John's baptism, as his ministry, was only a precursor or shadow of the reality, which was Christ. The water represented the Holy Spirit, who would come by Christ (cf. Titus 3:5 "washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit"). Matthew and Luke also reveal another baptism, namely the baptism by fire, which was a baptism of judgment by unquenchable fire (i.e. judgment in the Lake of Fire, cf. Revelation 20:15).
2. **Shortest and Fastest Gospel:** With only 16 chapters, Mark is the shortest of the Gospel accounts. There are no long discourses in Mark as there are in the other Gospels. What is more, Mark moves the narrative along with expressions of immediacy, like "at once" (Mark 1:12, 18, 43; 4:16; 5:30; 6:25; 14:45), "without delay" (Mark 1:20), "just then" (Mark 1:23), "as soon as" (Mark 1:29; 6:54; 7:25; 9:15), and "immediately" (1:30, 42; 2:8; 5:29, 42; 6:27, 45, 50; 9:20, 24; 10:52; 14:72). I think Mark is deliberate in this approach to presenting the Gospel. He wants Jesus's actions to prove His Messianic claim. His presentation is raw and so real, with un-redacted

reactions to Jesus's message: some celebrating, others confused, and still others, especially the leaders, conspiring to kill Him. Even the disciples display doubts and fears right to the very end of the book (e.g. Mark 16:8).

3. **The Divine Witness that Jesus is the Messiah:** The visible and audible witness of the Holy Spirit to John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, is included in every Gospel (Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34). It is the definitive heavenly witness of the Messiahship of Jesus, along with the transfiguration event (Mark 9:2-10; Matthew 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36; John 1:14 by inference). Regarding this witness, Matthew and Luke focus on his genealogical qualifications as a son of Abraham (true Jew) and a son of David (royal lineage). Every Gospel brings forth his fulfillment of OT prophecies, his Messianic miracles and his authoritative teaching. Mark focuses on his miracles and parables (revealing truth just to His believing disciples) and activities over teaching. Right from the very beginning of Mark, we find the Holy Spirit providing a three-fold witness via (1) the baptismal work of Christ (Mark 1:8), (2) the baptism of Christ Himself (Mark 1:10), and (2) in leading Christ to be tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Mark 1:12).
4. **The Good News:** Jesus preached, "The time has come...The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). What is the good news? Mark introduced it from the very first verse: "The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). What about Jesus? He would be the One that would baptize by the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8; John 1:33). This was the unique ministry of Christ: to baptize with the Holy Spirit. So we read, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7). Jesus would tell Nicodemus the same message of new birth by the Holy Spirit: "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:6). The disciples themselves would not experience salvation until Pentecost, following Jesus's death and resurrection, when they were baptized by the Holy Spirit. This baptism did not occur until after Christ's death, resurrection and ascension (John 7:39; 16:7).
5. **Reading the Gospels in Parallel and Harmony:** When you read Mark's account of the calling of the disciples, it sounds like He called His disciples, and they immediately followed Him without any gap of time (Mark 1:16-20). However, when we read the more detailed account of Simon's (i.e. Peter's) encounter with Jesus in Luke 5:1-11, we understand that it was not simply that Jesus called him and then Simon left everything and followed Him. Peter heard Jesus preach, and then he saw Jesus's power that upended all his years of experience as a fisherman. After this, Peter wanted Jesus to leave him because he became painfully aware of His sinfulness (repentance?). It was then that Jesus called him to move from fishing for fish to join Him and fish for men (faith?). Consequently, salvation may still have to await Peter's baptism with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. If you only read Mark, you would not know the details of Peter's calling. Luke fills in some details. John 1:35-51 gives even more insight into the calling of Jesus's first disciples. For example, Andrew witnessed to his brother, Peter, and brought him to Jesus.
6. **Career to Witness:** Jesus took fishers of fish and made them fishers of people (Mark 1:17). He called Andrew, Peter, James and John, two sets of brothers, who were also fishermen. They would apply their expertise in their trade to catching people for the kingdom. Luke, the

historian, applied his expertise by recording the chronology of the life of Christ in the Gospel of Luke and then the history of the early church in the Book of Acts. Paul, a zealous, traveling, Pharisee, who persecuted the Church, would be commissioned by God to be a zealous, traveling evangelist, who suffered for Christ. Oftentimes, God takes what you are, what you are doing, what you are good at, and uses these very things to serve Him and His Church. Here's the rule of thumb: "If anyone **speaks**, they should do so as one who **speaks the very words of God**. If anyone **serves**, they should do so **with the strength God provides**, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen" ( 1 Peter 4:11). Therefore, in whatever we do, we do it for God and for His glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).

7. **The authority of Christ:** Jesus is contrasted with the teachers of the Law, because He taught with authority (Mark 1:22). The people were amazed because of this authoritative teaching. We find this same account in Matthew 7:29 after Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. In contrast, the teachers of the Law would cite this Rabbi or that section of the *Mishnah* or the *Gemarah* (Ancient Jewish commentaries on the OT), but Jesus spoke with His own authority. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, He taught, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." **But I tell you...**" (Matthew 5:21-22). When Jesus forgave the sins of a paralyzed man so that he could walk, the crowd was amazed at the authority God had given to man, that is, the God-man, Jesus Christ (Matthew 9:8). Jesus had authority over evil spirits (Luke 4:36) and gave this authority to His disciples (Mark 3:15; 6:7). Authority has to do with power, normally uncommon power. In Mark 1:27 the people observed the authority of Jesus's teaching that extends even to commanding obedience from impure spirits. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus taught that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him. Jesus was just not one of the religious leaders of the day. His words and works had divine authority. It is with this same conviction that we say the Bible is not like any other book. It has authority. Thus we understand from 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
8. **Why did Jesus silence the demons?** Jesus told them to "Be quiet" in Mark 1:25. According to Mark 1:34, Jesus did not let the demons reveal who He was (cf. Mark 3:12). The reason seems pretty evident. He did not want the truth of His identity to be associated with evil spirits. After all, the religious leaders would later try to do just that by associating Jesus' miracles with the prince of demons, Satan (Mark 3:22). The demons were well aware of what they were doing by revealing the true identity of Jesus. Even though what they said was true, mere association with them would cause him bad press. In our day, Democrats tried to discredit President Trump by associating him with David Duke, a white supremacist, who supported him. Jesus authoritatively made short order of this ploy in His day. Without any incantation or long mantras, he simply ordered the demons to shut up and get out, and they obeyed Him. Later, when the religious leaders tried to associate him with demons, Jesus simply argued, "If I'm associated with demons, why would I cast them out? A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand" (cf. Mark 3:23-26).
9. **Why did Jesus tell those healed not to tell others?** Jesus simply told the leper, who He healed, to follow the Law in testifying of his healing to the priest (Mark 1:44). But the leper went out to tell everyone. On the one hand, Jesus was well aware of Moses's warning against false prophets.

Those who taught contrary to the Law, even if their prophecy came true, were deemed false. Thus, Jesus commanded the man to obey the Law and report his healing to the priests. This was not the first time he told those he healed not to tell others. He said the same to Jairus, whose daughter he raised (Mark 5:43). Again, he said the same thing when he healed the mute and deaf man (Mark 7:36). But they also did not obey Him. As a result of people spreading the news, Jesus “could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places” (Mark 1:45). It appears that He was not so much interested in simply attracting large crowds. It may have even inhibited His itinerant ministry. He could also be accused by the religious leaders of stirring up the crowds. He was not interested in simply drawing people with signs and wonders. He was not trying to entertain them. He wanted them to believe in Him as their Messiah (cf. John 6:26-27; cf. Herod’s interest in signs in Luke 23:8).

10. **Jesus’s Prayer Habit and Its Significance:** In Mark 1:35 we read, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” There is no better example to follow than our Lord Jesus Christ with respect to your practice and discipline of prayer. He prayed early in the morning. In other words, prayer was not something tacked on to a busy schedule. It constituted the foundation and harbinger of His day. He went off to a solitary place. Jesus would not be distracted by people and things when He was communing with God the Father. Luke 5:16 adds, “Jesus **OFTEN** withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” So, this was not something He did once in a while. It was frequent. Sometimes, before important occasions, like the selection of the twelve disciples, He prayed all night (Luke 6:12). And even after a long day of ministry, after He dismissed the disciples, and after He dismissed the crowds, He went off by Himself to pray (Matthew 14:23). Surely, He was tired, but His prayerful communion with the Father was more important than His fatigue. Prayer was always a priority.

Notice that Jesus did not go to a place, where He could be easily found and interrupted. Peter and the disciples had to look for Him to find Him. Oftentimes, we think that we need to always be easily accessible because “we are so important.” I’m being sarcastic. Jesus had a different perspective. Time with the Father was more important. We are told that when they found Him, they **exclaimed**, “Everyone is looking for you!” Can I translate? “You are a Superstar. You are ON in five! You’ve got to perform! Your fans are waiting for You! Your disciples are depending on You to do Your thing!” I love Jesus’s response: “Let’s go somewhere else” (Mark 1:38). I can think of the objections arising in the minds of Peter and the other disciples: “But you are so popular here! We are doing so well here! Why would you want to risk all that and go somewhere else, where they might even reject You?!” I believe His frequent occasions for prayer guided Jesus so that He could stay focused on the will of God rather than the interests of man. Jesus tells His disciples, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. **That is why I have come.**” In the same way, later on, Jesus would say that He had to go to Jerusalem, where he would “suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” Peter rebuked Jesus and rejected this plan. But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (Matthew 16:21-23). Jesus prayed so that His will would remain aligned with God’s will. In fact, we are told that that’s the problem with many of our prayers. We don’t know God’s will when we pray; therefore, we need the Holy Spirit to help us:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because **the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God** (Romans 8:26-27).

11. **Jesus Authority to Forgive Sins:** A paralytic was brought by four friends to be healed by Jesus. Two things are notable here. First, notice whose faith becomes the basis for Jesus's healing the paralytic. It is not the faith of the paralytic but the faith of his friends (Mark 2:5). I would contend that faith was not required for Jesus to heal. Otherwise, how could He raise the dead, for the dead had no capacity to believe Jesus? When Lazarus was raised, there was no one believing except Jesus. Therefore, when "faith healers" fail to heal, it is likely because of the healer rather than the one being healed. The healer has no authority or power to heal, whether for lack of faith or for lack of gifting. Second, Jesus asserts His authority to forgive by the evidence of His power to heal as "the Son of Man," a title given of the Messiah by the prophet Daniel (Daniel 7:13-14). And when Jesus said, "Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk,'" He was not referring to the fewness of the words but rather the authority needed for both. As the Son of Man had authority on earth to heal, so He had authority to forgive sins. One was not harder or easier than the other. He could do both. Jesus would say to His disciples, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is I me; or at least believe **on the evidence of the works themselves**" (John 14:11). His signs gave testimony to His authority as Messiah (Hebrews 2:3-4). This was the first instance of conflict with the teachers of the Law. They thought Jesus was blaspheming God when He forgave sins (Mark 2:6-7).
12. **More Conflict with Religious Leaders – Associating with Sinners:** Again, Jesus landed on the wrong side of religious leaders. This time was when He chose to eat with known "tax collectors and sinners." They believed that such an association would cause defilement. But Jesus had a different opinion: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). At first, Jesus' words seem uncritical and simply pedagogical; however, we would learn later that He was not implying that the religious leaders were "healthy" or "righteous" but they thought themselves to be healthy and righteous (cf. John 9:40-41; Luke 18:9; 16:15). They only had the appearance of righteousness (Matthew 23:28). They were self-righteous. On the other hand, it was not simply the sick and sinners Jesus was reaching, but those who recognized that they were sick and sinful and needing a Savior, just like the tax-collector in Jesus's parable, who humbled himself in prayer (Luke 18:9-14). The focus is again on the authority of Jesus, even the recognition of their need for Him.
13. **More Conflict with Religious Leaders – Not fasting like the Pharisees:** We are told that both John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting (Mark 2:18). Likely, only the disciples of John, who had not come over to Jesus, were fasting. That people were so aware of these groups fasting may suggest that they were making a show of it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned against such displays and that fasting should be done in secret and for God's approval, not man's (Matthew 6:16-18).

Jesus spoke of "the bridegroom" being with them so that there was no need to fast at the time. This is the same bridegroom imagery that John the Baptist would use to describe Jesus. He described himself as the bridegroom's friend, whose joy was fulfilled in the coming of the

bridegroom (John 3:29). While Jesus, the bridegroom, was with them, there would be rejoicing, not fasting. Only when he would be “taken away” (a first hint at his crucifixion), would they mourn and fast.

Finding this a teaching moment, Jesus introduced another metaphor, that of old and new garments and old and new wineskins (Mark 2:21-22). As new cloths needed to be attached to new garments, so new wine needed to go into new wineskins. The coming of Christ, the bridegroom, was the initiation of a new covenant. New covenant thinking and practices were, therefore, required. The Mosaic Law represented the old covenant. One replaced the other. As John writes, “Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:16-17). In order for people to receive the new wine (new covenant), they need to become like new wineskins, open to learn and adapt; otherwise, they would not be able to receive Him.

14. **More Conflict with Religious Leaders – Violation of the Sabbath:** Jesus’s disciples picked some heads of grain on a Sabbath because they were hungry (Mark 2:23; Matthew 12:1). The Pharisees claimed that this was a violation of the Sabbath. It may have been a violation of their Sabbath tradition; however, it was not a violation of the Mosaic Law (cf. Deuteronomy 23:25). The Pharisees chose to interpret the Sabbath law in its most restrictive sense, and by doing so, they violated the principle taught in Hosea 6:6, where God says, “I desire mercy over sacrifice.” They were condemning the disciples, who were guiltless. Jesus gave the example of David’s men eating the forbidden consecrated bread in the days of Abiathar as an example of applying the Law correctly, honoring the letter of the Law while not letting go of the principle of mercy (cf. 2 Samuel 21:1-6). The priest could have been very restrictive and forbidden David’s men from eating the sacred bread; however, he chose to be merciful, interpreting the three days the men were abstinent from women (cf. Exodus 19:14-15, 17) as a kind of consecration, enabling them to be fit to eat the consecrated bread. Jesus also declared that He was the Lord of the Sabbath. In what way was Jesus the Lord of the Sabbath? Both as the Son of God and as the One who before them authoritatively exemplified the proper application of the Sabbath.

## Discussion Question

Every event of Jesus’s early ministry was led by the Holy Spirit. While Jesus was God Himself, He still prayed as a human and expressed dependence upon God through His frequency and prioritization of prayer. Jesus was approved by God and empowered by Him in everything He said and did. How can we follow Jesus’s example so that we might gain approval from God and find both peace and power in our lives? Try not to generalize the teaching, but be very specific and practical, and share what the Spirit may be moving you specifically and uniquely to do. Then, encourage one another.