

Welcome everyone, to week #1 of our new series in the Book of Mark, which we are calling, *Way to Go: Serving & Giving Like Jesus*. I'm glad that you're here with us this morning, and I pray that God will do a powerful work in our lives to help us see the Savior in a new way and be transformed into His likeness.

Most Bible scholars agree that if there is a key verse in Mark's Gospel, it would be in Mark 10, where Jesus teaches His followers a profound lesson about personal ambition. Let's turn there together.

In **Mark 10** the disciples are sort of jockeying for position in the kingdom of God, concerned about who would have the places of honor, who would sit at Jesus' right hand and left hand, when He comes again in glory. And Jesus says in **v 43-44** – "*Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.*"

And then here is the key statement of the book in **v 45** - you may want to underline these words in your Bible: "*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" And with that simple statement, Jesus turns the values of the world upside down!

If you want to make an impact for the kingdom of God, it's not a matter of having a title, a position, or an overwhelming personality. The eternal difference-makers are not the big shots sitting at the head of the table. They're the ones out in the kitchen serving the meal. Find the servant, and you've found the true leader. And the Gospel of Mark was written to help us find the Ultimate Servant.

He's the one the spoken of by the Lord 700 years in advance, through the prophet **Isaiah**: *Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations (42:1)*. This Ultimate Servant of God is none other than the Eternal Son of God, and Mark shows Him moving in the power of the Spirit, bringing forth justice to all people.

Mark is known as the Go-Gospel, for in it we see Jesus as a man of action, and we learn who Jesus is not so much from what He *says* as from what He *does*. It's as if Mark writes with a paintbrush. He seldom records the content of Jesus' teaching, but he portrays the activity and emotions of Jesus through brilliantly vivid stories.

Although it is the shortest of the four gospels, Mark records more miracles than the other three. He uses the word "immediately" some 42 times to stress the fast pace and constant rush of action in Christ's day to day life. Twice he mentions that Jesus didn't even have time to eat. He is always on the go!

And, He is on a journey. The Gospel opens with John the Baptist preparing what? – *the way*, making a straight path for the Lord. And in the first 8 chapters of the Gospel, which we'll cover between now and Advent, Christ is continually on the move, travelling from place to place, meeting the physical and spiritual needs of all kinds of people. But there is no apparent destination to His movements.

However, after Peter declares Jesus to be the Christ or Messiah at the end of chapter 8, in the second half of the book, which we'll cover between New Year's and Easter – then Jesus sets His face toward Jerusalem, and the journey becomes more focused.

And from this point on, the phrase "on the way" or "on the road" becomes a key refrain, as the Servant of the Lord resolutely fulfills His divine purpose. He must go now to Jerusalem to suffer rejection and execution, and finally to be raised from the dead. But there's a subtle surprise woven into this story.

Because “*On the way*” is not only Jesus’ destiny, it’s also the destiny of His disciples. In fact, if you’re still in **Mark 10**, notice what precedes Jesus’ words about servanthood. In **v 32** it says, *And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them.* Jesus’ way to go was the way to go for any who would follow Him. And how does the chapter end?

A blind man cries out for healing, Jesus springs into action, and **v 52** says, *And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.* Throughout these next months, the Word of God is going to call us to follow Him also. Not just to a life of action, but to a life of purpose and a life of sacrifice. Are you ready to be challenged!? We know this is *our* calling, because in the final paragraph of Mark’s Gospel –

Jesus makes it explicit, when He says, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (**16:15**). Go! Get on your way, serving and giving like Jesus! He shows us the way to go. And as His disciples, we are on this journey together, helping and encouraging each other along the way.

That’s why it’s very important to us that we help you connect to one of our 1:10 Journey Groups – so you can discuss the Sunday sermon and dig deeper into God’s Word with friends who travel the same path.

You’ll notice that along with your sermon outline, we are also going to provide you each week with a devotional guide to help you spend personal time with the Lord every day. And then on the back you’ll see the questions that your Journey Group can use to discuss the text together.

So we’re asking all Journey Group participants to listen to the sermon, take notes on it, complete the daily meditations, and come to your group with the Word of Christ dwelling in you richly, so that you may teach and admonish one another in all wisdom (**Col 3:16**). Now, in case you have to miss a Sunday morning, or you want to review the message more carefully, by Monday of each week you’ll be able to –

Go to our website and download the weekly handout or a written copy of the sermon. Plus, you can also download or listen to an audio recording of the sermon. Or you can stop by the office to pick up any of these resources. So we hope this will help everyone keep up with traffic and stay between the yellow lines on their journey! Now let’s turn to today’s text –

The first 28 verses of Mark chapter 1, where the announcement is made that changed the course of history: **God’s Servant Is Here!** Someone has rightly said, *The Gospel is neither a discussion or a debate. It is an announcement!* And Mark wastes no time giving the announcement –

As in **v 1-11**, we learn **The Servant’s IDENTITY**: *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness:' Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," 4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Jesus Christ is a very unusual Servant, isn't He? After all, usually it is the servant who prepares the way for others and announces their arrival. But when God's Servant arrived on earth, others prepared the way for Him and announced that He had come! Even heaven itself welcomed His arrival. Why?

Because this Servant is **God's Beloved Son**. Now *Matthew* begins his gospel by giving us a genealogy of Jesus, showing Him to be the rightful heir to David's throne. *Luke* emphasizes the humanity of Christ, so he begins with a description of Jesus' birth. *John* begins by stressing the eternal nature of Christ. But *Mark* mentions none of that as he highlights the *credentials* of God's Servant.

This Servant is simply **Introduced by John the Baptist** in **v 1-8**. And it seems fitting that one servant would introduce another. John is simply a messenger, just a voice – quoting Old Testament prophecy to establish Jesus as the Son of God, and to keep the spotlight off of himself.

In ancient times, before a king visited any part of his realm, a messenger was sent before him to *prepare the way*. This involved repairing the roads and preparing the people. And so, with the Lord's Servant ready to make His appearance, John called people to prepare *themselves* by getting right with God.

He proclaimed *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*. And what does that imply? It tells us that John was a bold preacher who talked about sin and warned about judgment! Eventually it would cost him his freedom and finally it would cost him his life. But he never compromised his message.

I guess times really haven't changed much, have they? Many people still don't want to hear preaching about sin! "God accepts everyone," they say, "so let's just talk about His love. There's no need to talk about sin and condemnation. After all, who are we to judge?" They say, "Morality is all relative, anyway. We need to get in step with the times. You know, adjust to your culture."

But the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is only experienced by those who are willing to submit to the unchanging Word of the Lord – those who do not defend or justify sin but mourn over it – thus seeing their need of grace and their need of a Savior. If sin is not real or not a problem, then who needs a Savior?

So if we would *Go and proclaim* the gospel today, we too must include straight talk about sin and judgment, because the good news of salvation is only good news to someone who has grasped the bad news of condemnation – that we are guilty and accountable before a holy God whose law we have transgressed. But like John, we should be sure that we're walking the walk and not just talking the talk.

Do you notice in **v 6** how everything about John was consistent with this message? Like Elijah of old, even John's wardrobe and his diet was a protest against the godlessness and materialism of his day. John the Baptist embodied his message. His life demonstrated what his lips declared.

And he maintained a self-forgetting, humble posture. John knew well what we need to be reminded of frequently: *It's not about me!* "After me comes one who is mightier than I am. We're not even in the same league," John says. "I would call myself His servant, but truthfully, I'm not even worthy to untie His sandals." Do we maintain that kind of self-forgetting attitude in our service to the Lord?

This week I've been thinking about the punch line of that parable Jesus tells in **Luke 17**, where He says we shouldn't be the kind of people who need constant reward and gratitude and applause and attention for our service to Him. Instead, He says, when we have completed our task, we should simply say, "*We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty*" (**v 10**). This is the attitude of John.

And he goes on to say, “My baptism with water is only meant to prepare you for *His* baptism with the Holy Spirit!” Important lesson here, so please understand this: unless you have been converted to Christ and your heart has been cleansed by the baptizing work of God’s Spirit, you can be baptized in water 100 times and still go to hell! You need an *internal* washing.

But if you have come to personal faith in Christ and His Spirit has cleansed your soul, then by all means, be baptized in water as a symbol of your heart’s renewal. That *is* the way to go, for in **v 9-11**, Jesus Himself is baptized, and His identity as God’s Beloved Son is –

Affirmed by the Father. Jesus was not baptized as a sign of His repentance, for He had no sin to repent of. But Jesus was identifying with sinners, because He came to bear the wrath of God we deserved. He came in order to give His life as a ransom for many. His baptism meant the cross!

And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven,

“*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*” Two weeks ago Joab Lohara talked about these same words that were later spoken at the Transfiguration of Jesus. Last week Sean McDowell talked about these words as the heart cry of every young person, to hear their father say, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased.”

But the word “beloved” in the original language means not only affection; it also carries the idea of “one and only.” Scripture says, *all* who receive Christ, who believe in His name, become children of God (**John 1:12**). But Jesus is *uniquely* the Son of God in a way that you or I can never be.

He is the beloved Son – the uncreated, only-begotten Son of God from before time began, eternally of one substance with the Father. And at the baptism of Jesus we see all three members of the Trinity making an appearance, as the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove, and the Father speaks His words of affirmation.

So Mark is not writing about just any Jewish servant. His book is about the very Son of God who came from heaven as the Servant of the Lord to die for the sins of the world. This is the Servant’s Identity.

But in **v 12-28** we discover **The Servant’s AUTHORITY**. Usually, we would expect a servant to be under authority and to take orders, but God’s Servant exercises authority and He gives orders, which are always obeyed. In this section, Jesus demonstrates His divine authority in three scenes –

1st, in **Conquering Satan**. After Jesus’ baptism, **v 12-13** says, *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.*

In **v 10-11** heaven opens; in **v 12-13** hell opens. And so it is for us, that moments of great victory and encouragement are often followed by moments of great trial and temptation. No time was spent basking in the glory of the Father’s approval. Jesus is not treated, as we expect, to a reception or celebration.

No, the Servant had a much different task to perform; and so without a moment to catch His breath, Jesus is immediately driven by the Spirit of God into a place of dramatic combat with God’s adversary, the devil. The test was this: Would Jesus use His divine rights and power for His own advantage, or would He submit Himself in obedience to the will of the Father? Just like you and me, Jesus had some important choices to make.

And thankfully, He chose well. Remember, the Bible identifies Christ as *the last Adam* (1 Cor 15:45). When the first Adam was confronted by Satan, he failed his test miserably, plunging the human race, all of us, into eternal ruin. The first Adam rebelled against His Creator, defied God's law, and was driven from God's presence.

So as the last Adam begins a public ministry, He is compelled to go and confront the same enemy. And Jesus passes the test, honoring God's Word, upholding God's law, and establishing His credentials as the only one qualified to open the way for us to once again enjoy the presence of God. As God's Beloved Son, He is the Servant of the Lord – conquering Satan,

And **Calling Sinners**. Notice the authority displayed here as common fishermen hear the voice of Jesus in 14-20 – *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." 16 Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.*

So John's preaching landed him in jail, but Jesus grabbed the ministry baton and went to another region, proclaiming the same message to the Galileans: "Repent and believe in the gospel." To repent is to have a change of mind that leads to a changed life. If Jesus walked the streets of Alta or Storm Lake or Holstein or Cherokee or Sioux Rapids today, we can be sure that He would not only call us to believe –

He would also call us to give up our adulteries and fornications, to turn from our materialism and greed, to renounce our gossip and our jealousies. And He would do it with a sense of urgency, just as He did then, crying out that *the kingdom of God is at hand*:

Now is the time to give your life to follow the Lord! *Now* is the time to repent and believe the good news that the Servant of the Lord gave His life to save you from sin's penalty and power! Jesus' call had a radical effect in the lives of four fishermen named Simon and Andrew, James and John. These two sets of brothers didn't even hesitate when the Lord interrupted their livelihood with a very exciting challenge:

"Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And so was formed the very first Journey Group. Jesus invites four guys to form a community so they can learn and serve together. And how do they respond? They drop everything that could have hindered a wholehearted commitment to Christ. What would you need to leave beyond if you got serious about following the Lord? Do you think Jesus would make it worth your while?

Little did these guys know how their simple act of obedience would so immensely expand their lives. Until then, their experiences would not have stretched much beyond the deck of their boats and the currents of the lake. Their conversation would have included trade talk, local gossip, Galilean politics.

But Christ was about to stretch their horizons, to say the least! In place of Galilee their hearts would be enlarged to take in the whole world. Smaller interests would give way to eternal priorities. Their lives would never be the same! And Jesus Christ still calls and still changes lives today.

I think of a guy like Van Conover who is going to India with us in November. Van says the only time he has been overseas was in the service. And back then, he was only interested in watching girls and finding

the next bar. Caring about those in need was the farthest thing from his mind. When he got back on US soil and engaged in civilian life, Van had no interest in more travel and vowed he would never fly again.

But now here he is, so excited to travel to a land of poverty on a missions trip to share the love of Jesus Christ with those in need. By trade, Van is a plumber, not a fisherman. So perhaps Jesus has said to *him*, "Follow me, and you will no longer merely connect pipes, but people – to the source of living water."

Well, God's Servant is here. He is the Beloved Son of God, and His authority is seen in conquering Satan, calling sinners, but also –

Commanding Evil Spirits. 21-28 - *And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. 22 And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. 23 And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, 24 "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." 25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" 26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. 27 And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." 28 And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.*

The synagogues of Jesus' day were something like assembly halls, where Scripture was read and explained. But the folks who showed up for church on this day heard some preaching like they had never heard before! They were amazed at the authoritative preaching of Jesus. The scribes, who were largely Pharisees, were in bondage to quotation marks. They loved to quote the authorities.

But when Jesus spoke, it was just the opposite. He *was* the authority, there were no higher sources to quote from! His style was something like this: "You have heard that it was said... but I say to you..." See, Jesus *preached* God's Word; He didn't preach *about* God's Word. It was lightning and thunder, and everyone was astonished at the authority of His words and His life.

But for one man in the synagogue that day, it was too much to bear. His life was demonized, and so he wanted nothing to do with Christ. He wanted Jesus to disappear for He feared that Jesus would destroy him. Whenever you proclaim the authority of Christ or go to minister in His name, don't be surprised if stir up a violent confrontation with the evil spirits who rule in the lives of unbelievers.

In Mark's Gospel, this is the acid test of Jesus' authority. You see it time and time again. Christ rules in the supernatural realm. With the dawning of God's kingdom on earth, the Servant of the Lord goes head to head with the power structures of evil. And this no contest. The Son of God prevails over evil –

Not simply as a victory for Himself, to show His own glory. But as evil spirits are expelled, broken people are set free. Hurting people are restored to health and wholeness. Alienated people are reconciled with their Creator, in whose image they were made.

An account like this reminds us that there is hope even for the worst of us. You or someone you know may have the hardest heart in the county. Everyone may assume that you or that person is beyond reach, irredeemable, impenetrable. But this morning Jesus Christ can set you free from the evil that has you in bondage. Christ specializes in changing lives, and He can change yours. His credentials are impeccable! God's Servant is here today, and He is calling you. Can you hear His voice through the Word of God? Then repent and believe the good news. Follow Him and see what He can do with your life! Amen.