



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

“What Sort of Man Is This?”

Mark 1.1-3

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What Would You Do?

Let's think about a particular aspect of church life in the mid-to-late first century.

1. The church had spread from its beginnings in Jerusalem across the Roman world.
2. Questions that arose as they applied the teaching of Jesus to their specific settings had been resolved by consulting or receiving communication from original disciples, eyewitnesses, and those especially designated by them and empowered by the Spirit.
3. But a scattered church and the death of more and more eyewitnesses necessitated something more permanent.

What would fit the need as they continued to tell Jesus' story?

1. What should be included in the telling of that story, especially since there was so much that could be told (cf. John 21.25)?
2. How should those seeking to tell it in a different form approach that task, especially to assure those who would receive it that what they were hearing was accurate?
3. How would one affirm his faith in Jesus without getting in the way of the story?

What They Did

The gospels answer those questions. Luke 1.1-4 provides insight into the process.

1. They were *selective* – “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ... (v. 1).
2. They had *good sources* – “... just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word ...” (v. 2).
3. They were *true to the tradition*—“... eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered¹ them unto us” (v. 2).²
4. They *prepared thoroughly*—“follow[ing] all things closely³ for some time past, ...” (v. 3).
5. They aimed to be *clear*—“... to write an orderly⁴ account for ... Theophilus” (v. 3).
6. They were producing *teaching for the church*—“...that you may have certainty⁵ concerning the things you have been taught”⁶ (v. 4).

Even as they secured the information, they recorded it as men of faith, including both claims from those who participated in the story and their own view of the events.

Three of Mark's Claims

First, notice how Mark brackets his entire writing with a claim about Jesus' nature.

1. His title: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1.1).
 - a. "Christ" refers to the Lord's anointed and is itself a statement about Jesus.
 - b. "Son of God" in Jewish culture is more a reference to his nature (one sharing the qualities of the one of whom he is the son).
2. Near the end of the writing, with nearly all the story before the reader to evaluate, the centurion's view is, "truly this man was the Son of God" (15.39).

Second, Jesus said and did things that were properly the prerogative of God (and were so recognized even by his critics). Consider the story in 2.1-12.

1. Setting: Jesus' preaching was interrupted by four men who brought a paralytic (2.1-4).
2. Surprisingly, Jesus' first pronouncement was not to heal him, but to pronounce forgiveness (2.5).
3. The scribes were appalled, correctly concluding that Jesus was claiming to do what only God could do (if they were right, "blasphemy" is exactly the right word) (2.6-7).
 - a. As a man, Jesus could, of course, forgive someone who offended him in some way; but in this case the paralytic had not sinned directly against the man Jesus.
 - b. You can forgive someone who sins against you, but imagine how you would feel if I came along and said that I was forgiving her.
4. It was then that Jesus pointed out that the same power of God was necessary for both healing and forgiving (2.8-9).⁷
5. Using another exalted title ("Son of Man" – more on this later), Jesus told the paralytic to pick up his bed and go home, which he did, much to their amazement (2.10-12).
 - a. The text and Jesus' actions assume the Jewish view about the connection between the ills of this world, especially sickness, and sin and death.

Third, notice the pronouncement in Mark 1.2-3, the first statement after Mark's heading.

1. In a citation of two Old Testament texts that Mark attributes to only the more prominent Isaiah, he shifts emphasis from God to Jesus, thus equating the two.
 - a. Malachi 3.1 – "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD [*Yahweh*] of hosts."
 - i. The context continues to emphasize, not salvation, but judgment upon Israel for their unfaithfulness during Malachi's day (3.1-5).
 - ii. Mark's citation: "... 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way,' ... " (Mark 1.2).
 - b. Verse 3 cites Isaiah 40.3 (LXX) to introduce the coming of John the Baptizer who was Jesus' forerunner (Mark 1.4-8).
3. Notice the change of pronouns: language that clearly referred to God in Malachi is altered and interpreted to refer to "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1.1; see 1.6-11 where Jesus is identified as the one whose way John was preparing).

Who Is This ... ?

The idea of Jesus' authority (a term we saw in 2.10) and right to delegate it is at the heart of Mark, especially in the first half of the book (another way of emphasizing he is Son of God) (see 1.22, 27; 3.15; 6.7; also 11.28, 29, 33; 13.34).

1. 1.16-8.29 is devoted to demonstrating his authority.
2. His authority is seen in light of the reaction of various groups to his actions; a classic case is in 4.35-41 where, after Jesus awoke from sleep in the boat to still a violent storm, the disciples asked, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (v. 41).

After several events, Peter answered Jesus' query about what the disciples thought about him with his famous confession, echoing part of Mark 1.1: "You are the Christ" (8.29).

That was the claim of Mark's Gospel in response to the question you and I must answer.

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Notes

¹ "Delivered" (ESV) translates the aorist form of παραδίδωμι (*paradidōmi*), "hand over, give (over) deliver, give up." (F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 2nd ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983], 148). The word is also used in the New Testament to refer to the passing on of tradition or teaching (see e.g., 1 Cor 11.23; 15.3; 2 Thess 3.6, 15).

² The question of oral tradition has proved troubling to some even when we assume the earliest of dates that have been proposed for the gospels. Assuming the position of most scholars today that Mark was written first (a view that is held by the majority of scholars, but is not unanimous), only a few date it as early as the late 40s to early 50s; the consensus puts it in the early to mid-60s. Whether early or late, there is a gap between the original events (Jesus died ca. 30-33 AD) and the time of writing. Wouldn't things have been changed in the telling from person to person and into succeeding generations? Given the way things work in our world, this would be a legitimate concern. But, study of oral cultures, the type of culture in which Christianity began, has shown that they are much more careful with information they are passing on. It is also probable, given Luke's reference to others who had determined "to compile a narrative," that there were other written records of at least some of the information that had begun to be collected.

³ παρακολουθέω, *parakolouthēō*, probably refers to one who has immersed himself in the tradition to know it thoroughly. Moulton & Milligan summarize papyri evidence and note the following about Luke's use: "In view then of these passages we seem to be justified in understanding that Luke comes before us in his Preface not as one 'having investigated' all his facts afresh, but as one 'having acquired familiarity' with them, 'having become cognizant' of them, for long (ἄνωθεν [*anōthen*]), and having so kept in touch with them, that his witness is practically contemporary witness." (J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930], 486.) ESV / RSV ("followed closely"), KJV ("having had perfect understanding"), and ASV ("having traced the course of all things accurately") reflect this view. In contrast the NIV / NASB / NRSV all translate "investigated" and the *ESV Study Bible* note includes "investigated" parenthetically. Since one can check the evidence closely in the sense of investigation, the distinction is subtle.

⁴ καθεξῆς, *kathexēs*, "adv. in order, one after the other with reference to time, space, or logic" (Gingrich, 97). The word can refer to chronological order but does not necessarily do so.

⁵ ἀσφάλεια, *asphaleia*, "security, safety Ac 5:23; 1 Th 5:3. Fig. certainty, truth Lk 1:4" (Gingrich, 29).

⁶ κατηχέω, *katēcheō*, "inform, teach, instruct [catechize]" (Gingrich, 106). Cf. Acts 18.25; 21.21; 1 Cor 14.19; Gal 6.6.

⁷ Notice the indirect testimony about Jesus in the passing comment that he was "perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves" (διαλογίζονται ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, *dialogizontai en heautois*) (2.8), exactly what v. 6 says they had been doing.