



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## The One In Whom God Took Delight

Mark 1.9-15

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### *How Mark Gets to the Point*

A standard part of teaching students to write papers is showing them how to develop a thesis statement that declares the main point their paper is to make. The rule of thumb is to have a sentence of somewhere between fifteen and twenty-five words. Many scholarly journals maintain a variation of this, including a short abstract that summarizes where the article is headed before it begins.

In some ways—and this analogy is admittedly an oversimplification—Mark functions as a sort of “abstract” among the Gospels. We immediately notice that it is shorter than the others: 16 chapters compared to 28 in Matthew, 24 in Luke, and 21 in John.<sup>1</sup> While there are things the other writings, especially Matthew and Luke (the other Synoptics), tell that he does not, Mark often reports the same events they do without the elaboration they include. A prime example is our text where Mark covers Jesus’ baptism, temptation, and first preaching activity in just seven verses.

- In Matthew, we read 22 verses on the same events (3.13-4.17).
- In Luke, the events are reported in 33 verses (3.21-4.15); from 3.32, we read 60 verses before the first explicit mention of Jesus *preaching* the good news about God’s reign (in 4.43). Luke adds Jesus’ genealogy, an expanded account of the wilderness temptations, a brief beginning of the ministry, an expanded account of his rejection in Nazareth, and a series of healings before Jesus’ first words about preaching good news of the kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

My point is not that all we need is Mark. The fleshed-out accounts in Matthew and Luke are invaluable for understanding Jesus and his work, and we’ll draw on them throughout this study.<sup>3</sup> However, when Mark condenses the events, he allows us to see what Jesus thought was most important in a way we may miss when we read the longer accounts. In other words, from Mark we learn in “twenty-five words or less” as it were what Jesus’ priority was from the beginning of his ministry.

### *Pleasing God Mattered Most (1.9-11)*

Mark 1.2-8 records John’s ministry in which he announced that God was beginning to do what he had promised and that people needed to make their lives right to accept his reign.

Jesus' arrival is depicted (as in all the gospels) as the next step in the God's grand plan. Not only did John endorse him (1.7), but Jesus "accepted John's message and obeyed his call to be baptized."<sup>4</sup> (Matthew emphasizes this when he reports that Jesus told John he was being baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" - Matt 3:15).

That this attitude and obedience were intended by God is shown in Mark 1.10-11.

- "Immediately," a word Mark uses 41 times to add "a sense of speed and urgency" or to introduce a new incident or a surprising turn of events.<sup>5</sup> "Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water" (1.10 NET), God approved his action.
- The approval is explicit: "... in you I take great delight" (1.11 NET).
- Beyond the obvious approval, the citation of the words from the heavens "may allude to Isaiah 64.1, where the prophet prays for God to 'rend the heavens and come down,' in a passage appealing for divine salvation for the people of Israel (64.1-12)" (Hurtado, 19), an appeal that emphasizes the importance of righteousness on the part of the people.<sup>6</sup>

Whether or not Mark had these OT allusions in mind, there is no question about the point: Jesus did what pleased God. That was his priority, the essence of the life he modeled and to which he calls his followers.

### *Remembering the Priority is Necessary for Loyalty (1.12-13)*

The challenge for many of us is not whether pleasing God should be the priority—or even whether we want it to be. We struggle to consistently be loyal when tested and tempted. In just two verses, Mark reminds us that Jesus experienced the same challenge.

- Notice the role of the Spirit, stated more forcefully in Mark than in Matthew 4.1 or Luke 4.1. "The Spirit immediately drove him out (ἐκβάλλω; *ekballō*) into the wilderness..." "[T]he testing [the word *πειράζω*, *peirazō* can mean either test or tempt, DA] there was God-ordained, part of the necessary preparation for God's chosen Son" (Hurtado, 20).
- Echoes of OT events indicate that it was part of the "fulfilled" (1.13) time, forty days being the time of Israel's testing in the wilderness (Deut 29.5) and Moses' time on Mt. Sinai waiting to receive the law (Exod 24.18). In other words, this was "a time of new revelation and salvation equivalent to the revelation given to Moses and Israel in the classical, Exodus time" (Hurtado, 21).<sup>7</sup>
- Understanding the OT background gives us a better sense of God's plan, but what we draw strength from for living is the fact that Jesus met the temptations unique to him by refusing to deviate from God's plan for the way of Messiahship (cf. Matt 4.3-4, 6-7, 9-10).

### *God's Purpose Sets the Direction for Service (1.14-15)*

Jesus was keenly aware that he was the embodiment of God's work in the fulfilled (right) time and accepted God's direction for establishing his reign.

Notice that the "gospel of God" is the coming of "the kingdom (rule) of God." Good news! God is at last enacting his reign, coming to Israel to do what he had always said he would.

"Kingdom" was the theme Jesus stressed throughout his ministry (Mark 4.11, 26, 30; 9.1, 47; 10.14-15, 23-25; 12.34; 14.25) and just before his ascension (Acts 1.3). It was also the theme at the center of the apostolic preaching in Acts (Acts 8.12 [where it is used with "good news"]; 19.8; 20.25; 28.23, 31).

He stayed focused on that priority: proclaiming it, demonstrating it (i.e., healings, etc.), and living it. He never deviated. It was God's purpose and way. And so it remains.

### *Seeking to Live Like Jesus?*

"In twenty-five words or less," what was Jesus all about? What does it mean to live like him? The two questions are the same. Am I obeying, living to please God above all else? Do I remain loyal to God throughout the challenges of life? Am I focused on his mission of sharing and showing the good news that is his reign?

Let us continue to grow in seeking to live like Jesus!

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> As counted from the ESV, Mark's 14,351 words are 4,541 fewer than the next longest gospel (John, 18,892), which has the equivalent of five additional Markan chapters (using the average number of words in Mark's sixteen chapters). Mark is 10,265 words shorter than Luke's 24,616 words; Matthew has 22,648, 8,297 more than Mark. Word count figures are from Accordance® 13 Bible Software, © 1994-2021 OakTree Software, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> The numbers cited above do not count the extra material in Matthew and Luke on the births of John and Jesus and other matters prior to the formal beginning of his ministry. In Luke's case, for example, we read 152 verses before we come to 3.21.

<sup>3</sup> For example, without Luke's longer account of Jesus' visit to Nazareth (4.16-30, cf. Matt 13.53-58; Mark 6.1-6), we would not know Jesus cited Isaiah 61.1-2 on that occasion and offended the people of Nazareth with his references to events in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.

<sup>4</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983, 1989), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Hans F. Bayer, *Notes on Mark*, *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1893.

<sup>6</sup> Hurtado also notes possible allusions to the emphasis on God's coming Spirit in Isaiah 61.1-2, and the echoes of OT passages that speak of revered people in Israel (e.g., Psa. 2.7; Gen 22.2; Isa 42.1), texts that some in Mark's time understood to be foreshadowing the Messiah (Hurtado, 19-20).

<sup>7</sup> Mark will later report a second time a voice endorsed Jesus from heaven, at the time of his transfiguration where his superiority to Moses and Elijah, representative of the law and the prophets, would be declared (9.2-8).