

Mark: The Words of Eternal Life

“The Messiah's Herald”

Mark 1:1-8

Please open your scriptures to Mark chapter one, verses one through eight. The Gospel writer writes...

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way. A voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to meet him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and honey. And he preached, saying, after me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of his sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Well, it is a joy to dive into the gospel of Mark with you. You know, I was thinking about this this week, and I don't think I've ever started two sermon series on the same Sunday before like this. And I was thinking about this, this kind of format of the intro sermon. And at first I was kind of like, you know, I don't really like it because I don't get to dive right into the text. But then there's a part of me that's also thinking, you know, there is a special utility to these introductory sermons. There's a special utility in our studying of God's Word to sit down with a whole book and just say, what does this book mean? How does it work? Who is the voice behind it that the Lord is speaking through? There's something about that I actually want to encourage you in that.

I remember when I first was called to Faith, when I was sort of drawn back to the faith of my youth as a child. I was later eighteen years old, and I remember it was in the study, very individual study of First Corinthians. I was going through this verse by verse, line by line, and that was how the Lord really laid hold of my soul and drew me back into the faith that I had professed for many years, but kind of made it real, made it my own. And so as a result, for a decade or so, that's the way I thought you had to study the Bible was by minute reading of each individual verse. and it was only about, as I said ten years later, that a friend introduced me to the idea of just sitting down and reading a book in one sitting. Okay, don't stop. Don't try to figure out every word. Just let the whole book just kind of wash over you. Okay. There's something to that. If you haven't done that in your own personal devotion, I'd encourage you in it every once in a while. Maybe once a month, maybe once a week, to sit down. The books of the Bible are not that long. Okay, you can break up the Psalms. The Psalms have a Psalms, have a nice five part division, so you can break up the Psalms in that way if you wanted to. But just sit down and let a book just wash over you.

Or here's another way to do it. You can join in with the tradition of brothers and sisters over the millennia who have only heard the Bible by hearing it read to them. So now, because of audiobooks and Bible apps, we can all sit down and just listen to a Bible text and you actually be surprised when someone's reading it to you and you don't have the ability to stop reading how quickly you can go through a book, and you'll find that you experience the book in a different way. So I hope that that's the effect of these introductory sermons, that we get to pause for a moment and say, What's Deuteronomy about? And now we get to pause for a moment and say, okay, what is what is Mark about? What's Mark trying to do now to understand Mark, we do want to understand him in light of the other evangelists. Actually, this unlike most of the rest of the Bible, this is one of those places where, by God's good pleasure and his good design, he chose to give us four voices reflecting on the same series of redemptive historical events. Okay, now that's not doesn't mean that these are the only times that happens. As a matter of fact, as you know, you can go back into the Old Testament and you can read two histories of Israel following the conquest. Really? Actually, two histories beginning in creation. You have what's known as the primary history, and that's Genesis through Kings. Okay. And that's an account very, very wrapped up with Deuteronomy particularly. But then you can also read the Book of Chronicles and then Ezra. Nehemiah. Some people call that the chronicle, the chronicler as in the author there the history. And if you notice, Chronicles actually begins with a timeline that starts with Adam. Two Chronicles is also a history of the Old Testament, but with a slightly different historical perspective. It's not contradicting the other history, but it's showing you a different angle, kind of like any of us when we see events take place and you sit down afterwards and you talk about it, I'm sure you've had this happen before, and you sit down and maybe, maybe there's a car accident that you witnessed on the way to work. And afterwards you and your friend who are in the car together talk about what they saw. And you realize we both noticed different things about what took place. Maybe you talk to your spouse about your wedding day and you realize you both remember different aspects of the wedding day? Well, the same is true with these gospels and these histories where people are seeing things from different perspectives. We get different emphasis. As a matter of fact, we get a richer, more meaningful understanding of the events that took place. So as we turn to the Gospels, we have Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It's interesting when we look at each of these individuals you have you have Matthew, who is very interested in the Old Testament. It's kind of nice, actually, that he's the first one, even though I don't think he's probably the earliest of the gospel writers. He is the first one to come to us in the New Testament. And it's interesting because he is the one who is the most interested in making clear, explicit connections with the Old Testament. He's writing to a Jewish audience who knows the Bible, and he's showing them in every place he can. You see how Jesus was connecting to what the prophets had talked about. You see how Jesus is fulfilling. Deuteronomy. You can see how Jesus is, is, is really, as we said this morning, the building that the blueprint of the Old Testament is speaking and looking forward to. And then we have Luke. Luke, who is the erudite physician. He seems to be influenced by Paul. As a matter of fact, when Luke tells his whole account, which is Luke and acts right, we realize that he sees the gospel account as something that begins with Jesus. And this, by the way, is correct. This is the correct, obviously way of thinking about it. It begins with Jesus. But Jesus himself said, my

apostles will do greater things than me. And so Luke takes that seriously, and he spans out the whole narrative, starting with Jesus, but ending with the gospel going out to the nations through the apostolic ministry.

But here's the tell. There are points in the book of acts which is basically Luke's Gospel point two, part two. There are points in that text where Luke slips, perhaps, and instead of talking in the third person, he starts talking in the first person. He says, well, and then we boarded a ship. And the suggestion there seems to be that Luke is one of the people who is going around with Paul on his missionary journeys. So there's a sense in which Matthew, who is himself a disciple and an apostle, he's giving his apostolic account. And then when we look at Luke, it's as if we're getting Luke's account. But it seems at least the suggestion is there that this is really Paul informing Luke's account. If we have a gospel according to Paul, that would be Luke. And then, of course we have John. John is the most likely the last of the gospel writers. He seems to be coming after the rest of them have written. He might even know about the rest of the gospel accounts, and he's offering his own account just to fill out some of the gaps he's filling in the theology. He's seeing some of the false belief that's bubbling up in the church. And he's saying, wait a minute, I was there. Okay, that's not what he meant when he said this. That's not what he meant when he said that. Mostly John is dealing with this problem. People thinking that Jesus isn't fully man and he goes, nope, he was fully man and the word became flesh. Right. But then the other problem is this is Jesus fully God. He goes, no, no, he was fully God. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. I and the father are one, says Jesus. You find these passages in John. You see, John the Apostle is giving his theological reflection on the gospel. And then that brings us to Mark. Mark, who most scholars not all. There's a bit of a debate, and we have to hold these things lightly. Most scholars believe that Mark is probably the earliest of the gospel accounts. Okay, Mark, unlike Matthew and unlike Luke and unlike John, is very to the point. Mark is the gospel writer who wants to make sure that if if nothing else happens, you get the main story of the Messiah. You get what he's doing and what it means to follow him.

Now, who is Mark? There is an individual who's named Mark. He's also sometimes referred to as John Mark in the New Testament. And it seems as if this John, John, Mark or this mark is the mark. Who is the gospel writer. Now, again, we want to hold these things lightly. The Bible doesn't make this exactly clear, and yet it's good for us to know what is out there in terms of information about these people, because it helps us kind of fill out our picture of what's going on. Specifically, we have this one source. It's from a historian, a gentleman named Eusebius, and he wrote a history of the church. And in his history of the church, he remembers he has this account or a manuscript of one of the Apostolic Fathers. Okay, now, if you know who the Apostolic Fathers are, they are not the apostles. You have the apostles, then you have the Apostolic Fathers, then you have the sub apostolic fathers. Just so you know, this is how we were in history. Refer to them. But it can be confusing because you think, oh, he's talking about apostolic father. And well, that's not an apostle. That's somebody who's under the apostle. And this particular apostolic father that Eusebius knows about is a gentleman named Papias. You can see how we're doing a little bit of historical, historical game of telephone. Okay. Bear with me. Eusebius knows about an apostolic father, Papias, who knows about an elder. And

the elder said this. Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote all that he remembered. Not indeed, in order of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him. But later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded, but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing, he gave attention to leave nothing of what he had heard, and to make no false statements to them.

Okay, so what is he saying here? He is saying that Papias knew an elder who said that Mark was writing as a scribe or amanuensis, as that technical word we use for it for Peter. In other words, Mark is Peter's gospel. Now, it is interesting that this elder also has the impression that it's not a very well organized book to which all New Testament scholars would say, are you crazy? This is a very well organized book, as I'm going to hopefully show you here in just a minute. So this is not just a haphazard laying down of facts, but rather it is a very Economical and I would even say rhetorically savvy articulation of the gospel in a very specific way that's meant to come right in, hit you fast with the teaching, so that by the end of the book you've come to the same conclusion that Mark has come to Mark, maybe even Mark, speaking for Peter, have come to, which is that Jesus is Messiah, and to follow him has a cost to the discipleship. So here we have Mark, who speeds into the text. Notice right away he doesn't even have a birth narrative as we just read. He starts right away with John the Baptist. He says, let other people handle the birth narrative. What we need is to see how Jesus is bringing about the restoration of the Kingdom of God. Now, how do we divide up the book? We come to it. We're reading Mark, and as we start to read, we'll notice a couple of things. One thing is this if you notice how the how it begins, what does it say? This is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ means Messiah, okay, the Son of God. That is the last time that we will hear the word Christ, which means Messiah. Until we get to mark chapter eight, it's notably absent. It's in the title, and I would argue that is the title, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. That's the title. And then we jump into the text. So in the title we see that Jesus is Messiah. And then interesting. Interestingly, we begin a series of chapters in Mark where you have story after story teaching after teaching, and you know what happens in those teachings. More often than not, when Jesus does something, people say, who can do things like that, right? Jesus raises. As we'll see in just a couple of weeks, Jesus raises the paralytic man up. But before he does so, he says, your sins are forgiven. And do you remember the Pharisees are watching along and they're taking note. And they say in their hearts, who can forgive sins, but God alone? You see the question mark, just let's hang there. No one answers. It just hangs there. Later, Jesus is on the in the boat and he's sleeping like a modern day Jonah. He's sleeping in the boat as the storm is coming over the gunwales, and he's about to drown them and they're about to sink. And they say, Lord, don't you care that we're perishing? And he stands up and he says, why are you afraid? Peace. Be still. On his own authority. Notice he doesn't say, father in heaven, please make the ocean be still. He doesn't say that. He just says, peace, be still. And the ocean says, yes, sir. And then you remember what the disciples do. They say, who is this? That even the wind and the waves obey him? And Mark just kind of lets it sit there. You see, for these first eight chapters, Mark is showing us who Jesus is without telling us who Jesus is. It's not until Mark chapter eight when Jesus says, who do people say that I am? And the disciples say, well, some say Elijah, some say a prophet. And Jesus says, who do

you say that I am? And Peter steps forward. Interestingly, again, think about it. The possibility that Peter is the one behind the gospel writing. Peter is the one who steps forward and he says, Your Messiah, your Christ. It seems as if Mark is telling us who Messiah ought to be, how Messiah ought to act before he tells us who Messiah is.

It reminds me of that part in The Lion, the witch and the wardrobe. When the children are going around in Narnia, this country that is buried in snow. It's always winter, it's never Christmas. And then they start to hear about this, this Savior who has come, this lion Aslan, who's going to come and is going to bring summer. And first they just hear about him, but they don't meet him, right? And what happens as Aslan is on the move, they start to see the effects of Aslan being on the move. They start to see the snow melting. They start to see the buds on the trees sprouting. They're hearing rumors of hope. They're seeing the ice on the river break up. And finally there's a flow again. Life is coming back to Narnia so that by the time they meet Aslan. Right, they already love Aslan, you see? They see who he is before they meet him. And the same thing seems to be the case here with Mark. Mark is painting a collage. He's giving us a kind of picture of who Messiah is. He heals the sick. He raises the dead. He forgives the sins. He gives himself on his people's behalf before telling us that's exactly who Jesus is. He's Messiah.

So in Mark chapter eight verse twenty nine, we have this turning point. As soon as Jesus is named as Messiah, there's a turning point. And now the text begins its decline down to the crucifixion and then finally the resurrection. Now, what's interesting about this decline is this this kind of movement. If you see chapter eight is the pinnacle of the book. You kind of work up to the pinnacle the declaration that Jesus is Messiah. And then now we move down to the end of the book. It raises the question, what's the second part of the book about? And the second part of the book basically is about this. What does it mean to follow this Messiah? Who is Jesus? What does it mean to follow him? Or we could put it this way, who is Messiah? What is discipleship under Messiah look like the rest of the book. Verses chapters nine through sixteen teaches us about the new identity that you have. If you are a disciple of Messiah, a new identity. You are now not about gaining riches and wealth and grandeur for yourself, but you're for giving it up for others around you, disadvantaging yourself to the advantage of others. You have new values. You now have the divine concern for the least of these the sojourner, the orphan, the widow. The Deuteronomy talks about the children that we find in Mark, where Jesus is welcoming the children into their midst. The fact that you have new values, the world has been turned on its ear, the weak are given the power, and the power are made weak. Finally, you're given new eyes as a disciple of Messiah. You see, we learn how the kingdom comes to us, and it's not through the power structures of this world, but rather it's in the weakness of this world.

So Mark really has two main parts. There's kind of two folding books of Mark. You have chapter one through eight. Who is Messiah Pinnacle at eight twenty nine and then nine through sixteen. What does it mean to follow Messiah? And yes, that includes the crucifixion itself. Finally, speeding forward to the crucifixion itself, where the disciples see the thing they couldn't quite bring themselves to believe beforehand, which is that Messiah did not come with a sword to take over Jerusalem for his kingdom, but rather he came with empty hands. A man of sorrows,

as we talked about over Christmas time. He did not ascend to a throne, but he ascended first and foremost to the cross. So that's how the book, The Gospel of Mark works. It's different. There's different ways to tell the gospel story, as we see with John, who first of all tells us about signs and then tells us about glory before moving into the Passion Week, or Matthew, who has sort of a series of stops where he's teaching his different Old Testament truths in Christ's life. Mark wants to focus on what does it mean to be a messiah? And what does it mean to follow Messiah?

So let's turn then in closing, let's turn to the verses that we just read, Mark chapter one, verses one through eight. Notice again how it begins. This is the gospel, the beginning of the gospel. There are hints of Genesis there, kind of like John in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. We also begin with that same word here in the gospel, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God. Now what do we make of that title? First of all, this word evangelion, which we translate into gospel and gospel, of course, is just an English word that means good spell and that spell meaning the with the Old English meaning of word. Okay, it's a good word. It's a good message. That's what the Greek means as well. The U and the EU there, which we which we now remember as Eve. Eve in our English when we say evangelistic or Evangelion. Okay. But in the Greek it's you. Just like eulogy or euphoria. It means good. It means a good thing. And then what's the Anglian that means? Message or report? It's actually just a Greek translation of a Hebrew word that means the same thing. Something like good tidings. We see it in Isaiah fifty two seven and elsewhere through Isaiah, where the prophet says, how wonderful it is, how beautiful it is when we see the feet of the bringer of good news of Evangelion. How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him. Now why is he say it like that? Why does Isaiah talk about good news in that way. Well, he's imagining in that text he's imagining a person standing up on the wall of Jerusalem. He's standing on the on the on the, on the wall, looking out over the fortifications. And he's staring up. And if you've ever been to Jerusalem, you know what this looks like. He's looking at the horizon. And what do you see? You see, as the sun goes down, you see the silhouette of the hills around you. And you're waiting. You're looking down, you're looking at the horizon. And you're waiting to see when will the messenger of good news come and give us report of some far off battle or other event that's taking place in Isaiah saying, isn't it just beautiful? Don't the mountains look beautiful when you see that messenger of good news run over the hill in the silhouette against the sky, doesn't that just make the mountains more beautiful? To see those feet coming running towards you, shouting out evangelion! good news victory.

It's interesting that the gospel writers lay hold of that word out of Isaiah to call, to name these accounts that they give for the story of Jesus Christ. But I would point something out. It's instructive that this is not notice Euangelion does not mean biography. Do you ever notice that we don't get a biography of Jesus Christ of Nazareth in his life and times? Okay, what do we get? We get a short bit of information about his birth because it's significant to the rest of his life. We get a little bit. We get tidbits, little bits and pieces about what it was like when they fled to Egypt, what it was like when he was in the Temple in Jerusalem, and he was training the elders there. But you notice we don't get a whole lot about his life. We don't know. It was like for Jesus, the adolescent to grow up. We don't know what it was like for him to be, you know,

underneath his father. And we actually interestingly, we don't know much about what happened to his father. Joseph kind of disappears from the scene. Mary plays a much more important role. What do we learn in the Gospels? We basically get the very beginning of his life, and then we get the last three years of his life, and then we get most of the attention on the last week of his life, and then the forty days that follow. Why is that? Why are we not getting the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth? Should we have as much historical data as we want? Because notice these are not biographies. These are evangelion. These are good tidings. These are reports of the victory of the King. The focus is on where the king has his victories. As a matter of fact, we have similar documents for Marcus Aurelius. We have similar documents for Caesar. Documents that list. Okay, even in the ancient Near East we have like the Sennacherib cylinder, which is a list of the victories of King Sennacherib. We have lists of the victories of Caesar. It actually would feed into the idea of, of the Caesar cult that Caesar is the king who's having the victories. And why is that? Because he is himself a semi deity. It was called the Roman imperial cult or the Caesar cult. There's actually a whole interesting line of studies that reads the Gospels as apologetics against the Roman Caesar cult. Okay. For instance, how what is the what is the augury? What is the omen that shows who Caesar will be? It's an eagle that descends out of the sky and lands on the shoulder of Romulus. Okay, but what is the augury that shows who the true king is? It's a dove that descends out of the sky and lands on the shoulder of Jesus. You see, there's all these little, little tidbits, little, little subterfuges, little subversive facts that the gospel writers are putting in there to say, don't think it's Caesar. Where is the true evangelion? Where's the true history of the King's victories? It's in Jesus Messiah, the true Son of God. So this is the gospel of Jesus Christ. And then notice right away, right away, he jumps right into the connections to the Old Testament. Now, I want to make this argument here, and I'll try to draw this out as much as possible. And it's not just because I'm an Old Testament professor in my previous trade. Bear with me. This is the view of most scholarship today. Matthew is very clearly connecting the gospel to the Old Testament. Mark does it too. He's just extremely subtle. He'll use just little turns of phrases. And you want to say, why did you say it that way? And then you go back and you go, oh, this is this is the way it's said in the Old Testament. He's very subtly drawing our attention to the whole of Scripture, but he's not subtle here at the beginning of this text. Notice how he starts off right away. He says the gospel needs to begin with the restoration prophecies of Isaiah, where Isaiah anticipated the coming return of the captives out of exile. And they were going to come right out of Babylon, because that's what he's anticipating, is that in Babylon they'll be captives, and the Lord is going to send them back, and it's going to be such a victorious march that they're going to march right through the desert. If you could look at a map of the ancient Near East, you'd see Jerusalem here and you'd see Babylon is here. Okay, but what happens?

No one marches straight from Babylon to Jerusalem because it's all godforsaken desert. That's why you have to go over the crescent, right? You all remember this from elementary school, the Fertile Crescent, right? That's how you get to Jerusalem from Babylon. But notice what Isaiah says. He says, we're going to make a highway in the desert. We're going to make a parade, and we're going to come through the desert, and we are going to knock down the mountains that stand in our way, and we are going to build up the valleys that stand in our way. And Messiah is going to march back into Jerusalem through the east, which is the only right

way to go into Israel. He's going to march back in from the east, and he's going to declare that restoration has come. But before he comes, he'll have a herald, a voice who's standing on the eastern edge of Jerusalem, and he's crying out, make straight in the desert the way of the Lord. You see how big of a promise that is for Isaiah? It's a big deal that's ushering in the next major phase in redemptive history. And can you see why? Mark says, let's start here. Let's start with what Jesus is doing when he goes out to meet John the Baptist. You see, John the Baptist is not just an ascetic or a hermit who's kind of out there in the wilderness, being the last of the Old Testament prophets. He is that harbinger. He is the herald who's standing where? Right there on the Jordan. I'm sorry, I wish I had a map up here. I could show you and point you exactly where I'm talking about. But he's standing right there on the Jordan in Moab, right next to right nearby, where Moses is giving his three speeches in the book of Deuteronomy, by the way. Okay. On the eastern side of the land, he's standing there just north of the Dead Sea, and he's saying, make straight in the desert the way of the Lord. Just to add to it, we know that that John the Baptist sees himself as bringing about restoration because of the baptism that he is doing. What kind of baptism is it? It's baptism of repentance. Confessing of sins. When we get to Deuteronomy 30, we'll see that the Lord says, When I've scattered you to the nations because of your unbelief, you will remember me. You'll be so forlorn, having been scattered out and dispersed amongst the nations. You'll be so forlorn that you will remember me, and you will return to me in repentance. And I will bring you back, and I will restore you. Not just you, not just to Israel, but to the whole world. And you will come, and you will receive the whole fullness of your inheritance that was given to you in Abraham, not just to take the land, but that all the families of the earth may be blessed. But you're going to have to remember me, and you're going to have to repent. Jeremiah says it this way. He's in Jeremiah twenty nine. He's talking about the exile himself, and he says, you will come back. I know the plans and the designs that I have for you, right? You know this Bible verse, you know the plans that I have for you. I know what they are. I'm going to restore you and you are going to seek me. And guess what? You're going to find me when you seek me with all of your heart. You're always quoting Deuteronomy. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart. When you seek me with all of your heart repently and in faith you will find me and be restored. Do you see why it's so important that Mark says, listen to this. John the Baptist is doing a baptism of repentance in all of Judea is coming out to him. All of Jerusalem is coming out to him. They're coming out in repentance. The harbinger is out there on the eastern shore of the Jordan. And he's making the way into the land. He's saying, prepare the way of the Lord, and all of the country is coming out to him. It's what Jeremiah told us. What would happen in Jeremiah twenty nine. They're finally coming.

And then Messiah King comes. And of course, this raises all kinds of interesting questions. How does Jesus do a baptism of repentance when he has no sense to repent of? If you notice in Matthew, we get the dialogue somewhat in depth. John says, I don't have anything to do for you, Jesus. I'm just declaring you're coming. My baptism isn't for you. It's not going to work. The cures don't work here because you don't have the disease. And what does Jesus say? Let's do this to fulfill all righteousness. And so Jesus is baptized for sins that he did not commit, just as he will go to the cross and be circumcised, right? Cut off from the land, cut off from the people for sins that he did not commit. And so we start to just get a hint of what it means to be Messiah. I just want to end with this, particularly as we go into an installation service here and

brief before the end of this service. Do you notice the difference between Jesus and John, by the way? It's an interesting profile. Our two last prophetic pair of redemptive history, at least thus far. We've had Moses and Aaron. We've had Elijah and Elisha. We've had, uh, even actually interestingly, we've had Samson and Samuel. These are all kind of pairs that we get through redemptive history. They're kind of doing the same thing, but the second one is always greater than the other. Okay. Then the previous one. And interestingly, with John the Baptist and Jesus, we get this prophetic pair. They're kind of peas in a pod. They're doing the same thing. One is closing out the Old Testament. One is introducing the new. And yet do you notice how different they are? John the Baptist is wearing a camel fur coat. He's living like a vagabond. He's. He's eating locusts, insects and honey. In other words, what is he eating? He's eating whatever's on hand. He's not going out. He's not investing. He's not going to the supermarket to get his food. He's just eating whatever he finds around. He's rummaging around the Dead Sea to find food. He's eschewed society. He's eschewed close friends. He's not one who's known for going to wedding parties. And then we have Jesus. It's typically frequently frequenting the cities. He's got lots of friends, friends in a lot of different areas of life. He's depicted sometimes kind of leaning back and laughing with his friends, telling jokes, attending wedding parties. You see the difference in the profile. There is an extent to which John the Baptist is embodying the Old Testament that he is bringing to an end, and there is a sense in which Jesus is embodying the New Testament of grace that he is inaugurating. And yet I think it's also important for us to remember what we talked about this morning how the Lord is calling all different kinds of personalities to his service. There's not one personality for a pastor. There's not one personality for an elder or a deacon, as we're about to see. There's not one personality for a Christian. You're not supposed to come in here and kind of force your personality into some kind of Christian mold. The question rather, is this are you using the personality that God has given you to his glory? Are you using your desires? Are you using your gifts? Are you using your resources to steward well who God has made you? It's an important thing to note as we think about the leaders in our church. We're not just looking for one kind of personality, one kind of M.O. we're looking for righteousness. We're looking for faith. We're looking for people who are loving the Lord their God with all of their heart and soul and strength, however it is the Lord has kind of set their interests, and they're the kind of jokes that they think are funny and the clothes that they wear. However, the Lord has made them. We want to see them stewarding it well for his glory.

So I'm excited to delve into the book of Mark with you all, brothers and sisters. I'm looking forward to discussing and exploring how it is that Jesus is Messiah, because there are some surprising things that we'll find at the beginning of Mark, but then, more pressing, I think, that we'll find, as we draw to the end of this series, in the end of the spring and in the early summer. More pressing for us is that cost of discipleship, what it means to follow the kind of Messiah who Jesus is? Let's pray for the Lord to give us grace as we continue on in this journey.

Heavenly father, we do come before you and I pray that you would open our hearts, that we would indeed be attuned to the voice of Messiah that we would be attuned to the voice of Christ. Lord, help us conform us to you. And yet we pray that with caution and with concern, because we know that when you conform people to your son, our Savior, that can be a very

difficult process. That can mean hardship. That can mean waiting of the type that we talked about this morning. That can mean suffering, because that's what it looks like to become cruciform. I pray, Lord, that even as you shape us and you form us for the callings that you have given us, you would do it gently and in grace to the power of your spirit. And I pray, Lord, that we would change on account of faith, that we would not have to experience the difficulties, but that we could just believe and have that be enough to conform us to you.

We pray this in Christ's name.

Amen.