

Mark
Part 1
“Disrupting Our Religion”
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You can turn in your Bibles to Mark Chapter 1. We are going to be starting a new series this morning that is going to take us throughout the summer.

I drive downtown from time to time and oftentimes take the Don Valley Parkway and as I am driving down the Don Valley Parkway, I love the view of the city that you have before you when you come around the bend, see the Bloor exit and you see the downtown core with the CN Tower sticking up.

And I usually go down to Richmond Street for some meetings there. And when you get off at the exit off the DVP onto Richmond Street and you hang right and keep to the right, there is a church there – it’s called Riverside Church. Many of you, if you have driven downtown and taken that exit, you know what I am talking about.

Riverside Church has this sign that has been there for years that says, “Prepare to Meet Thy God.”

And I always wonder to myself, what’s around the corner of this bend? Am I about to get into a horrific accident and meet my God? And depending where I am with my walk with Christ and how well things are going, I read that sign differently.

Sometimes it’s very ominous and I’m going, “Prepare to Meet Thy God – oh no!”

Other times when things are going well, it’s like, “Prepare to Meet They God, and I can’t wait to meet.”

As we look at Mark Chapter 1, you could almost entitle it, “Prepare to Meet Thy God” because John the Baptist is sent to prepare the way for God’s people to meet Him in the person of Jesus Christ.

We have spent the last number of months studying the book of Acts and it really chronicles how the Gospel goes into different regions and starts to impact cities and regions.

And it describes how God disrupted our systems of religion. We find a couple of weeks ago in Acts Chapter 15; we looked at how the Gospel disrupted the New Testament church’s understanding of temple, traditions and even the Torah itself.

But when you study the book of Acts you see whenever the Gospel went into a city that was a pagan city or a Gentile city, the Gospel would disrupt the temple traditions and religious understandings of every single region it went into.

If there is anything we note about the message of Jesus is that it disrupts mankind's religions. It changes them because He changes people.

And we have spent time looking at the message of the Gospel and how it spread throughout the book of Acts. Now I want to spend some time over the next few months in the summer to look at how it all started and examine how did Jesus make disciples, how did Jesus go about discipling people?

We look at both His message and His methods. What were the lessons He taught His disciples? But equally important is to observe how He went about teaching them.

In the Great Commission He gives them the mission to go into all the world and make disciples, baptize them, teaching them to obey everything He had commanded them.

It is important for us to remember that He doesn't tell them to teach them to know or believe everything He commanded them, although that it is true. He says, "Teach them to obey everything I have commanded."

So it begs the question: what are the hallmarks of Christ-centered community? What should a community of believers look like when Jesus is at the center of it? What values did He model for His disciples and what does He wish to cultivate in our lives by His Holy Spirit at work within us?

And we will begin this journey by studying the first year and a half of Jesus' ministry. We are going to look at His ministry in a chronological order. So depending on when the event took place, we might be skipping throughout all the Gospels to get an understanding of what He is training within His early disciples in that first year and a half.

And it all begins with God disrupting the normal patterns of His people's religion.

In Mark Chapter 1:1 we read this:

"The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

"As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way –

“a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'”

"And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

"The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

“John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

“And this was his message: ‘After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

“‘I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

“Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

“And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”

What I want to look at in our time together this morning is the Cry of the Prophet, the Confession of the People, and the Coming of the Christ.

Luke also records this event that takes place, and in Luke Chapter 3:2 he states it this way:

“During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.”

You have to understand for thousands of years the Israelites have been waiting for this moment that the Messiah would be sent to them.

God had made it clear from Genesis Chapter 3, as early as that event right when sin entered man’s condition, that He would send a deliverer, a Savior.

God has promised it through Moses. So for generations the Israelites have been praying and waiting for this moment.

Isaiah prophesied about it. Malachi prophesies about it.

So throughout the Law and the Prophets, we have been waiting for this moment.

In fact, during the time of Jesus they would fast and pray twice a week so that the Messiah might come.

And there has been a build-up to this moment and when I read this passage, when I read the opening of Mark’s Gospel, what I find fascinating is that out of all the ways God could have heralded the coming of His kingdom, of all the ways that God could have introduced this King of kings and Lord of lords, He sends John the Baptist, a man who was wearing the latest fashion of

camel hair clothing with a leather belt around his waist. He has not cut his hair or his beard his whole life. He is about thirty years old at this point so he's got a lot of hair streaming down (not like your pastor), wearing the latest camel coat clothing, eating bugs and honey. That is who God sends to usher in His kingdom.

Now think about that. All of the pomp and circumstance that presidents, prime ministers, kings throughout the ages, all the pomp and circumstance that we build up - usually a king is introduced with a red carpet. Usually there is a dramatic procession before him. Usually he is dressed in royalty. Usually, everybody; it's a black tie affair.

And what is God trying to say to His people and what is God trying to say to us by how He introduces His King of kings?

“Your ways are not My ways. What you value – all the pomp and circumstance; I don't value that.”

It's mysterious as you look at hundreds of years waiting for this moment, and God, even in how He ushers in His kingdom, is teaching us a lesson about humility.

John was in fact the son of Zechariah, who was a priest at the Temple in Jerusalem. John's mother herself descended from a priestly line. John, for all intents and purposes, was priestly royalty. He should have started his ministry in Jerusalem at the Temple, a very respectable profession. He should have been wearing the fine linens and the beautiful priestly robes. It would have been a distinguished calling, but God has got a different plan for John the Baptist.

The Word of the Lord comes to John the Baptist, and it's not to go into Jerusalem where there would be these beautiful robes. He is to go out into the wilderness and he is to preach a message.

And as we look at the Judean wilderness; if you have been to Israel, it's just fascinating to me that strategically I am not sure any of us would have come up with the idea of sending a camel coat-wearing, bug-eating, honey-eating prophet out into the middle of nowhere to reach the masses.

Strategically I wouldn't look at the region of Toronto and go, “Gee, I want to reach the region of Toronto, so what I am going to do is put on a camel coat, I am going to go out into the wilderness of Muskoka and I am going to start preaching a baptism of repentance.”

Again, God's ways are not our ways. And if there is anything we learn just from this passage alone; He doesn't need our strategic plans, He doesn't need our best thinking. All He needs is for us to listen and when His Word comes to us, to obey and do what He tells us to do.

And He will reach His people His way.

So the Word of the Lord comes to John and His message that he is given to prepare the way for the arrival of the Messiah is repent. Repent.

It's the Greek word metanoia. Literally it means, "have a change of mind." Have a change of mind that leads to a change in your path, leads to a change in your ways. Have a renewed understanding of your God and your position before Him.

He is preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Luke, again in his account in Luke Chapter 3:4 describes the ministry of John the Baptist with a quote from Isaiah Chapter 40 where it says this:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

"Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.

"And all people will see God's salvation."

The Word of the Lord has come to John the Baptist and the Word of the Lord is levelling the hearts of His people.

Every valley filled in, every mountain and hill made low, every crooked path made straight, the rough ways made smooth. God's Word is coming to His people and it is levelling them, it is putting them all on the same plain before Him and He is, through repentance, directing a highway to their hearts.

And repentance is the first order of business to prepare them for meeting the Messiah. And it is no different today. When God is at work in our lives, obviously and oftentimes it is in the area of bringing an awareness to ourselves of our position before Him.

Richard Lenski makes the following statement about the Word of the Lord through John in this way:

"Such preparation is spiritual. It consists in the deep conviction and confession that you are unfit, a sinner, poor, damned and miserable with all the works you are able to do."

And we are told that as John the Baptist dressed in his camel coat, eating locusts and honey; as he starts to deliver this message in the Jordan wilderness, we are told in Verse 5,

"The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."

That is a massive geographic region, and imagine all the people in Jerusalem - all the people in Jerusalem - leaving Jerusalem and making the long descent down into the Jordan Valley and going out into the middle of the wilderness because they hear that the Word of the Lord has come to John the Baptist.

There is a revival breaking out amongst God's people. And I have been to Jerusalem, and as you make that descent down into the Jordan Valley, you leave the lush gardens within Jerusalem and as you descend down into this arid region, it is desolate, it is a wilderness, there is nothing growing there.

And it seems to me that it might be the chief object lesson for the people coming from Jerusalem to realize their spiritual condition before God, that there is an aridness, a desolateness, in our spiritual lives before God.

And as John preaches this baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, who do you think is attracted to the message he brings, if it for the forgiveness of sins? Sinners.

God is moving through power in John's ministry. People are coming out by the thousands, acknowledging their sin, openly confessing their sin. And these are God's covenant people.

These aren't the Gentiles who are being called to repent; these are His religious people. These are the people who have the books of the Law, they have the prophets, they have the Temple; they have the whole religious system. And in order for them to meet their God, they needed to repent.

Luke's Gospel gives us a little insight into what John was explaining to the people. Now imagine this: in droves, people are coming out. They are confessing their sins. And then they ask John questions. "What should we do? What does repentance look like in our lives?"

And Luke's Gospel gives us a little information about the themes within John the Baptist's ministry. In Luke 3:10 it says this:

"What should we do then?" the crowd asked.

"John answered, 'Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.'

"Even tax collectors came to be baptized. 'Teacher,' they asked, 'what should we do?'

"Don't collect any more than you are required to,' he told them.

"Then some of the soldiers asked him, 'And what should we do?'

"He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.'"

As you look through John the Baptist's ministry, it strikes me that his message centered in on their positions, their possessions and their power.

"You who have an abundance: share with others. You have positions in commerce - tax collectors: be ethical; don't be greedy, be honest in your workplace. And you who have power

in government: guard against corruption. Don't extort. Don't accuse people falsely. Be content with what you have."

The reason John is delivering a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to these religious people is because they had His Word, but He was looking at their ways. And as He observed their ways, He sent His messenger to call them to repent.

And as I studied this text this week it made me ask the question: do I simply know His Word or are His ways evidenced in my life?

Does my life, if someone looked at me from the outside; does my life embody His ways or simply a knowledge of His Word?

There is a difference.

It reminds me of a church in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Urban Promise, the ministry I served in before coming to the Peoples Church, actually started in Camden, New Jersey.

Now most cities have a ghetto; Camden is pretty much all a ghetto. It is a very, very difficult, dangerous city. It is oftentimes listed as one of the most dangerous cities in the USA.

And this city faces immense challenges and Urban Promise started in that city through Tony Campolo and a man named Bruce Main. And they started to reach out to children in the neighborhood, provide after-school programs, summer camps, things of that nature, all Gospel-centered ministry to point people to Christ.

And God started to transform lives. And He raised up a generation of young people who were growing in their relationship with Christ.

Now Camden is surrounded by some of the most wealthy communities in the United States. There is a real disparity in the income levels when you go from Camden, New Jersey, which is high density poverty and you literally go across a bridge, you are in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, which is one of the richest communities in America.

And I have seen this myself. When you drive over the bridge from Camden into Cherry Hill, there are police cruisers that are stationed there. And if they notice that you are from Camden, New Jersey, they pull you over to ask you why you are coming into Cherry Hill.

The racial tension between these two communities is palpable in the air.

And God was moving in Camden, New Jersey, moving in so many of the young people's lives. And at the same time Urban Promise was building relationships with churches that were passionate about the work they were doing, that would support what they were doing in the city.

And there was one church in Cherry Hill, New Jersey that became a key partner in Urban Promise's ministry. And they thought it would be a great move to take some of the young

leaders that were emerging out of Camden and bring them to a spaghetti dinner for the youth group of this church.

And that on a Friday night they could gather together over dinner and get to know one another's stories and engage in some racial reconciliation to break down the divisions that existed with their two communities.

And so the church planned a spaghetti dinner, the youth were invited out; they filled the bus with young leaders from Camden, New Jersey. And they journeyed across the bridge into Cherry Hill, and they drove to that church.

Now the old ladies of the church had cooked a beautiful spaghetti dinner. It was a predominantly white community so a lot of cotton tops were preparing the spaghetti dinner (no offense to people with gray or white hair).

They were preparing this delicious meal and the bus arrived with all the youth from Camden. They go into the church. They get ready for dinner.

There was only one problem. None of the youth from the church had showed up for dinner. Not one of them wanted to eat a meal with a young person from Camden, New Jersey.

See the racial tension wasn't just out there; it was inside the church as well.

And the old ladies who had worked hard to prepare this meal were embarrassed that the youth hadn't showed up. So they served the young men the spaghetti dinner and they sat down and they broke bread with them and they talked and they laughed and they shared one another's stories.

And these youth were so fascinated with the stories of these ladies who had seen so much life experience and there was this beautiful exchange of lessons and it was a kingdom of God moment.

And they were laughing, they were embracing, they were hugging, and the youth got back on the bus because it was time to go home. And they left and friendships were made. It was a beautiful moment.

As they were driving back through Cherry Hill over to Camden, their bus broke down. And within a couple minutes of the bus breaking down, a police cruiser had shown up and asked what was wrong and saw that it was a bus full of youth from Camden, New Jersey. And all of a sudden four more cruisers showed up.

The director of Urban Promise got out, talked to the police officer, and the police officer was very abrupt with him. And he said, "If you don't get this bus moving, in five minutes there is going to be a big problem."

And the young men, seeing all the police cruisers come around, started to get very worked up because they have experienced some things in their lives. And tensions started to rise.

Fortunately one of the old ladies who had helped at the spaghetti dinner was driving home and happened to come across the bus that had broken down and she pulled over when she saw that it was Bruce and the youth from the community.

And the police, when she pulled over, kind of barricaded her from going near the bus. They said, “Ma’am, we have got this under control; don’t worry about it.”

And she kind of just pushed through them, walked up to Bruce and said, “What seems to be the matter?”

And he goes, “I don’t know what’s wrong but the bus won’t start. I have got to get out of here; things are getting crazy.”

And she shouldered her way back through the police, went to her car, asked the police to move, and she backed her car up beside the bus. She pulled out some jumper cables from her car, attached them to her battery, attached them to the bus’s battery and sure enough, he fired the engine and it started up. And they drove away and everything was fine.

It was a beautiful kingdom of God moment where God used someone to display to those in power that she was not only a person of His Word but she was also a person of His ways.

But sadly when you look at that story and you hear that story, that youth ministry, those youth who attend the ministry, certainly many of them would say, “I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, I believe that I am saved, I believe that I have a relationship with Him.” They could probably quote a lot of verses, they are people of His Word, but the question that John the Baptist is asking the people of God is: “Are you people of His ways?”

And we cannot be just people of His Word. We cannot just be people who memorize this book, although that is important for us. It also needs to be lived out in our daily interactions.

And God is preparing to meet with His people and His message to His people is: “You need to repent. You need to change your ways.”

And as I sat with this text this week, it made me look at my own life and ask the question, “In what ways, Lord, have I been a person of Your Word but not of Your ways? What do I need to repent of? What is that thing that I am holding onto that gets in the way of what You want to do in my life?”

It would be the question I have for every one of us this morning. Is there something in your life that is getting in the way of what Jesus wants to do? How have we as a church community been people of the Word but not of Your ways? Lord, where do we need to repent? What do You need to disrupt in our lives so that You can re-alter our ways?

Oswald Smith wrote this of the church: “People who are satisfied to meet together simply to have a good time amongst themselves are far away from God.”

That’s the danger for us is we can gather together, and it’s a beautiful thing to gather together, but if we are just looking to have a good time amongst ourselves, God looks at that after a while and just goes, “It’s not My heart, it’s not My ways.”

We can gather around His Word but He is looking at our ways.

Repentance isn’t just a one-time event in our lives.

Richard Lenski in his commentary writes this: “The way must be prepared so that the Lord can come to us over it. But the work will always continue since sins appear in us constantly. One preparation is not enough so that after that we may sit down and rest; the work goes on throughout life.”

When we put our faith in Jesus, we are delivered from the penalty of sin - that’s salvation. But for the rest of our lives we battle with the power of sin.

And the Holy Spirit is given to us for our sanctification, but memorizing His Word really doesn’t matter if it is not evidenced in a repentant changed life.

I am not saying memorizing His Word isn’t important because it is absolutely necessary, but He is also looking at our ways. And sometimes we think that Bible knowledge is what it is all about, but the Great Commission says, “Teach them to obey,” not teach them to know information. “Teach them to obey.”

Every Friday Steph and I go out on a date on Friday mornings. It’s my day to just unwind and relax at the end of the week or mid-week before getting into the weekend. And we oftentimes go down to the beaches. There is a Starbucks on Queens Street that I love to go to, grab a good book. Me and Steph were there on Friday and we are just enjoying some unhurried, unrushed relaxed time together.

And I was thinking about John the Baptist’s ministry, I was reading Lenski’s commentary, I was just making some notes, I was enjoying looking at repentance, and God was doing a Holy Spirit workover on my life, and just all the ways that need to be shaped and changed within me. That’s what repentance is; it’s a changed mind, which leads to a changed direction.

And as I am doing that, I am looking out the window on Queen Street, seeing people walk by. And there was a gentleman sitting across from me. And Steph and I had finished our conversation, we had enjoyed our coffee and it was getting time for us to move on, so we started to pack up our things.

And he looked over at me. And I had noticed he was reading a book. He had a commentary on the book of Romans. And it said, “Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace.”

And I thought, “Wow, he must be a Christian.” And he is highlighting the book and he seemed really into it.

And so when we were packing up our stuff, he looked at me and he goes, “Are you about to give up the best seat in the house?”

And I go, “Yeah, we’re about to leave.” I go, “That’s an interesting book you are reading.”

And he goes, “Oh yes, it’s a fascinating book. But are you about to go because you are giving up the best seat in the house?”

And I go, “Yes.”

And he goes, “Good, because I am going to sit there because you can stare at all the pretty girls from there.”

My wife is standing beside me and I look back down at his book. Sure enough, “Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace.”

And I am sitting there thinking to myself, “I saw you highlighting this book; how are you studying His Word but there is this disconnect with your ways?”

Now I have just spent about 45 minutes to an hour studying the ministry of John the Baptist. I’m all amped up and full of repent messages, right? And he says, “So that I might stare at pretty girls.”

What do you think I’m jacked up to do? “Repent!”

I didn’t do that. I looked at him and I said, “Oh, did you read about that in your book?”

And he looked a little awkward and he just said, “Oh yeah, it’s a really good book” and this awkward discussion just came to an end.

And I walked out and I thought to myself, man, we can be studying His Word, but is His Word transforming our ways, because I dare say that each of us in this room would acknowledge that there is oftentimes a disconnect between what’s in this book and our lives played out before us.

And so in preparation for God to meet with His people, He has one message for them: repent for the forgiveness of your sins.

And by coming out to the desert, the people who were confessing and getting baptized displayed that they had heard God’s Word and responded. They were people who hungered and thirsted for righteousness and wanted to be right with God. And they displayed humility before God by openly confessing their sins and being baptized. They confessed and they were forgiven.

Now if a revival like John the Baptist's was happening here in our region, if there was a wild man out in the Muskoka's preaching a baptism of repentance, and the city of Toronto was driving up the 400 to go hear this prophet speak, if hundreds of thousands of people were being baptized, do you think Twitter would blow up? Do you think Facebook would have some livestreaming covering it?

Well the same thing happens in the region of the Jordan in Jerusalem. All of Judea and Jerusalem are going, and as John the Baptist's ministry swells, the same thing happens.

A revival is breaking out and so the religious leaders, those who were in charge of the temple system that John actually was a part of and should have been working in; they send out an envoy to examine what is happening in the desert.

And what surprises me is when you study the Gospels and see those who had devoted their lives to the study of Scripture, those who were experts in the Law and their career was ministering before God; when they get out to John the Baptist in the desert, the Word of the Lord has come to John and the message is "repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins." And those who had spent their whole life studying the Word refused his message.

It makes me ask, how is that possible? Those who should have been the most astute to what God was doing because they had studied His Word all their lives - the religious leaders, the experts in the Law, the Pharisees, the temple elite; they reject His baptism of repentance.

They look out over the scene and they see tax collectors and they see soldiers and they see all the under-class of society being baptized by John and they stand there in their religious robes and they say, "Well, certainly they need to be baptized because they are sinners. But as for me, I'm good. I don't have sins to confess."

How is that possible? How can you study the Bible and not obey the Word of the Lord? How can you be a person of His Word but not a person of His ways?

And it is a danger for us today because as you study the Bible you notice that people respond to the Word of the Lord in one of two ways. It's either a posture of humility acknowledging their need or it is a posture of pride and resisting His truth.

The Word of God either makes you broken and contrite before Him or it hardens your heart. And it is a danger even for the believer today. We can hear His warnings and still harden our hearts. He can be putting His finger on something in our lives and we are refusing to repent.

Every Friday night we have family time together. We usually do pizza and a movie. It's a night that we all look forward to. Every Friday night we make our own pizza, we eat it and then we make some popcorn and go in the basement and watch family movie time. And I look forward to it every week. I love just being with my family, getting to watch a movie together and have precious time with my two boys.

And one Friday we were getting ready for movie time. It was a movie we were all looking forward to seeing. It was one of those that the kids had been waiting for, for months, to watch this movie. So we were all excited.

And one of my boys started misbehaving over dinner. And we're eating dinner and he's really being rude to me, he's being rude to his mom; he's just misbehaving. And I warned him; I said, "You need to stop son because this isn't going to end well. If you keep this up, you're not going to get to watch the movie with the family."

But he persisted in his disobedience. And I started pleading with him. I said, "Son, stop, take a moment. Calm down. Listen to my voice. Listen to me; I am trying to help you here. I want to watch the movie with you. I want to be with you. I want to have our family time on the couch. But if you don't change your behavior, it's not going to end well. You are going to be sitting in your room and we're going to watch the movie without you. It's not that we're going to not watch the movie. We're going to watch it; you'll be in your room. Would you please just stop? I'm trying to help you. I love you. I want to be with you. But your behavior has got to change."

Do you think he stopped? What's wrong with us?

And he just persisted and it's almost as though he got ruder and I started to feel the wrath of God boil within me. Literally the Holy Spirit descended on my table and said, "Yep, give it to him."

And I was just so upset, I started to shake. And then judgement was pronounced. I slammed my hand on the table and I said, "Go to your room. You're not watching the movie with us."

He stomps off to his room. He's all upset. He's all disgruntled that he doesn't get to watch the movie. And to be honest with you, as a father my heart was broken because I wanted to be with him. I wanted to have our family time. I get this once a week really where it's undistracted and I was looking forward to our time together. And his behavior had created separation between us.

Sure enough, we went into the basement and we started watching the movie and a quarter of the way through the movie I went up to his room and I said, "Son, what just happened?"

And he's crying, and all he could talk about was not getting to watch the movie. He still wasn't repentant. He was more concerned about the consequences of his sin than remorse for his sin.

And it struck me how many times in my life has that been the case where I am more concerned about the consequences and not concerned about the actual sins I commit and the separation relationally it causes between me and God.

And the Father is pleading and the Father is saying, "Don't harden your hearts. Hear the Word of the Lord. Repent. You have got to stop your behavior. You have got to change your ways."

And the Pharisees and the religious leaders are looking and just going, "That's nice."

The danger is when God's Word comes to you to repent, there's one of two reactions: broken by His Word and contrite before Him, or hardened. And that hardness leads to a separation.

We need to repent of our sin and real repentance is about a change in our actions and not simply tears about the consequences.

And God is calling out to His people but some refuse to acknowledge His Word. Their pride blocks their ears. And repentance and confession are God's highway to our heart.

Now John's ministry first and foremost was to prepare the way for the meeting of the Messiah, but we learn in Verse 7 that his message to the people was this:

“After me will come one more powerful than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

“I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Think of the things that John the Baptist said of Jesus. “He is more powerful. I am not even worthy to stoop down and untie His sandal. I baptize you with water; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

John's whole ministry is about preparing the people to meet their God and about pointing to the Christ.

And this is what is so profound about Mark Chapter 1 – Jesus who has no sin, Jesus, who created every single person that is being baptized, all those who have gone out to confess their sins and be baptized by John in the Jordan for the forgiveness of sins, Jesus created every single one of them.

Jesus, standing on the banks of the Jordan, staring at the multitudes being baptized; He knows every hair on their head, He knows every thought, every sin they have ever committed.

And as the Creator of the universe stands there on the banks of the Jordan, God's will is for Him to stoop down and be baptized in a baptism that He was the only human ever created that didn't need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins because He hadn't committed any sins.

Jesus, looking at His creation, willingly obeys the desires of the Father and gets baptized alongside sinners. What a beautiful name it is.

That is the mystery of our God. He who has no sin identifies with those who are slaves to sin.

And Mark's Gospel records what takes place and it is worthy of our notice. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn open.

The Greek word for torn is the Greek word *schizó* – it means to divide by rending, to split into factions. It's like when you grab a sweater and you rip it.

When Jesus is baptized alongside sinners, the heavens are torn open, the Spirit descends on Him and the voice proclaims, “This is My Son whom I love, with whom I am well pleased.”

The heavens have invaded the earth. That word schizó is only used one other time in all of Mark’s Gospel, and it is at the very end of his gospel when Jesus is hanging on the cross and He cries out, “It is finished!” The curtain in the Temple is schizóed – it is torn in two. Our access to the Father is secured by His finished work.

When Jesus gets baptized the heavens are ripped open and the heavens invade the earth. When Jesus dies on the cross, the curtain to the Temple is torn in two and our access to the Father is secured.

Isn’t that good news?

What a wonderful name it is. What a beautiful name it is. If God has been speaking to you this morning, touching a place on your life and saying, “We need to deal with this. I know you are a person of My Word, but you are not a person of My ways in this area,” just come before Him and openly confess it because Jesus stands there, who was baptized alongside sinners, who went to the cross for sinners, and there is forgiveness of sins in His name.

What a wonderful name it is. We are going to close singing that song.

Let’s pray together.

Father, we thank You. How do we even say Thank You? We who are so corrupt in our ways, we who need to repent and in Your mercy You are baptized alongside us who need You. Your grace is amazing and Lord, we ask Your forgiveness, we declare openly and we confess that we have been people of Your Word but Your ways are far from us.

And Lord, as a church we ask that You would disrupt our religion, disrupt the routines that we settle into and have Your way in us. Shape our hearts according to Your image, according to Your likeness and we declare together as a church, “What a beautiful name, the name of Jesus our Savior, our Christ, our King.”