

TITLE:	The Message Messenger Messiah	DATE:	2012-APR-29
TEXT	Mark 1:1-8	SPEAKER:	Pastor Steve Williamson

Mark 1:1-8

¹ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

² As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You."

³ "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: `Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'"

⁴ John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

⁵ Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

⁷ And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.

⁸ "I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

In Esther 6 we read about a forerunner to a very important man in the book of Esther. Mordecai had saved the King from a plot to take his life. And the King wanted to honor him handsomely.

So he had that wicked man Haman do for Mordecai what Haman dreamed was going to happen to him! Haman was told by the king to put a royal robe on Mordecai, which the king had worn. Then Haman was ordered to take a horse which the king had ridden, with the royal crest placed on its head, and parade Mordecai through the city square with these words "*Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!*"

Haman was a VERY unwilling forerunner to someone important. He was deeply ashamed of what the King asked him to do, and ran home with his head covered and his face blushing.

But John the Baptist was a joyful, willing forerunner for the mighty one who followed him. From his first meeting of the Messiah, he leaped for joy in his mother's womb. His words later in life about the Messiah were full of expectation and joy. He was glad that he was in the shadows, when the Messiah came.

John was used to prepare the way for the Messiah. He cleared the path of rubble, and readied the hearts of the people to receive their KING.

For this is what Mark's gospel begins with, a proclamation about the coming of the King! Mark gives a short & loaded intro: *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

Mark is about to give the faithful a account of the good news, news that is better, more relevant, and more amazing than all other news of all other coming kings, emperors and princes.

This news is about Jesus, whose name means Savior, for he will save his people from their sins. He will be their friend & teacher.

This news is about Christ, whose name means anointed, for he as the King of heaven will conquer his foes and crush the ancient serpent. He will reign forever as Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

This news is about the Son of God, an astonishingly bold term that goes beyond the popular understanding of the Messiah at that time. This is a claim of outright divinity. Have no doubt, by nature Jesus is fully God, the eternally begotten Son of God.

And so we come to our theme: *The humble forerunner of the mighty One* 1) The Prophecy 2) the Baptism 3) The Baptizer

First, the way for the Son of God to come by prophecy. The prophecy of verses 2-3 is a combination of two prophecies. We will look at the first prophecy in Malachi first, going back to the OT source.

Mal 3:1-2 says "*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, Even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap."*

Malachi spoke of the Messiah's first and second coming. Yet Mark, in writing his gospel, focuses on the first coming, and so he takes just a portion of the prophecy which relates to his topic. In so doing, Mark masterfully emphasizes a two-stage approach to the Messiah's coming. He will come again, and the second time will be incredible! But the first time Jesus came, he would come in an unexpected, humble way – like his forerunner.

The nature of the Messiah's first coming is highlighted by the second text which the gospel writer pulls from Isaiah 40:3 "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'*" The way of the Lord's coming is by a WORD. In creation's beginning, and in redemption's beginning, Words are powerfully used.

John came with the weapon of Word, the sharpest sword in our arsenal. He came preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. This message was not new, but it was urgent. Sin needed to be exposed and repented of! The wildness of our hearts must be tamed, and that only comes by the Holy Spirit who works in us this repentance, this internal transformation.

The people were being called to see their sin from God's perspective and, by God's grace, to reject it and run from it. This is what repentance is – looking at sin from God's perspective and turning away from it. Israel needed to be purified in advance of her coming KING.

John's preaching was reminiscent of Elijah the Tishbite. 2 Ki 1:8 Hundreds of years earlier, in a day of intense evil, Elijah had come with a word of judgment. King Ahab of Israel had done great evil in the sight of the LORD. Ahab more to provoke the LORD God to Israel than all the kings who were before Him, with his awful pagan wife and new alters for Baal.

Elijah's prophecy was harsh: *As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.* His prophecy was deadly accurate – The city of Samaria and the land were severely hit with famine. By his word* the city became comparable to a desert.

So also, John the Baptist had a courageous proclamation against the Pharisees and Sadducees "*Brood of Vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come!*" John flatly condemned the divorce and remarriage of Herodias, sister in law to King Herod. The call to repentance was the same, for kings, for Pharisees, and for all the people. But proud hearts were hardened *by his word*.

John's preaching was accompanied by a special sign:

And so we come secondly to "The Baptism".

This was a special baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins. This public sign was an early indication that the new covenant would soon be ushered in! Baptism was a purifying symbol, with the cleansing of water. The new covenant is inscribed on the hearts of God's people, and baptism is a fitting sign of this new covenant reality.

John's Baptism was preparatory. The baptism of repentance he administered was different than ours, for Christ had not yet come. In Christian baptism we retain the idea of repentance and purification, but we add to it the Trinitarian name in which we are baptized. We add to it the meaning of being buried and raised with Christ our LORD. Think of John's baptisms as being "preparatory" even as his message was "preparatory".

The Jews were being baptized in the **Jordan River**. The Jordan River was a distinguishing line, marking entrance into the land of Promise. This is significant; It symbolized the death of the wilderness wanderings and the life of the Promised land. As they were baptized, so they were passing through death to life. Think about that phrase "for the remission of sins"... You only gain life as your sins are forgiven. As sin is left behind, eternal life is obtained.

The truest way to create in men a longing for Jesus is to bring the consciousness of sin. The preacher of guilt and repentance is the herald of the bringer of pardon and purity. As the Belgic confession states, the hereditary disease, which infects even infants in their mother's wombs, is vile and abominable in the sight of God and is sufficient for our condemnation.

Men were roused to realize their issue was real and were readied to believe. The bad news of wrath must preface the good news of salvation! John made the people aware of their need for a Savior who would release them from the bondage and corruption of sin.

Thirdly, we come to The Baptizer.

John had a transitional role among the testaments. John is the end of OT prophecy, the beginning of the gospel, belonging to neither the old nor the new, but to both. He was martyred in his role, like so many prophets of the Old Testament. But he was more than a regular prophet, for he was prophesied of, and was so closely connected with the Messiah that his predictions of the coming Messiah became a reality during his life and ministry.

John sounded like Elijah who was strong in judging Ahab and Israel: *As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word. Thus says the LORD: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours."* (1Ki 21:19) Likewise, John's words were fierce, and had a fiery eloquence about them.

John looked like Elijah, A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist." 2Ki 1:8 The Gospel of Mark brings out John's personal asceticism. We see a grim, lean, solitary who stalks among soft robed men, even as Elijah had been in his day, a stalker in the king's court, the one who exposed sin and proclaimed wrath.

John Lived like Elijah, and made his dwelling in the wilderness. He looked wild, was clothed with camel's hair, and strapped a leather belt around his waist, eating locusts and wild honey.

John's courageous ministry was balanced in his humility. He would say of Christ, "he...whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose." "Stoop down" is unique among the four accounts, and emphasizes his humility. He believed that the Messiah must increase and he must decrease. His soul melted in joyful submission to the mighty God who would come after him.

Jesus loved and honored John and said of him, "Assuredly I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." How ironic & prophetic, that Israel's leaders rejected the greatest prophet born among women

John was hated by the elite, and they were hardened by his Word. This is the terrifying aspect of preaching and sacraments: 1) hearts of those who hate Christ are hardened, while at the same time, 2) hearts of those who love Christ are softened. *By a word* rough places are made straight. Deserts become blossoming gardens that abundantly rejoice. Streams break out in the desert. The lame begin leaping like deer. The mute begin singing for joy. The ears of the deaf are unstopped. And everlasting joy is known by the ransomed of the LORD! All through hearts that are conquered by the Spirit and the Word.

The humble forerunner baptized with water, but the Mighty One would baptize with the Spirit. And indeed, in the power of the Spirit, Christ will come to rule and renew the entire universe, and the glorious fulfillment of all the prophets' longings and visions. The glory and authority of the Mighty One was hidden the first time he came...but it cannot possibly be hidden next time. So may we all humble ourselves before his Majesty, and leap for joy at the same time. Our Mighty One was come! Amen.

April 29, 2012 PM

New Horizon URC

Name:

Text: Mark 1:1-8
Isaiah 35, 40:1-8

Title: The Message |
Messenger | Messiah

Theme: The humble forerunner
of the MIGHTY ONE.

1. The P _____ Mal 3:1-3 | Is 40:3-5

The prophet Malachi spoke of the Messiah's first and second C _____

Q. Why didn't Mark use the full quote from Malachi?

John came with the weapon of W _____ Eph 6:17

2. The Baptism

John's Baptism was P _____

3. The Baptizer

John S _____ like Elijah ¹ Ki21:19

John L _____ like Elijah ² Ki1:8

John L _____ like Elijah