

HOW IT ALL BEGAN
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MK. NIV¹The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"—

³"a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' "

⁴And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

⁵The 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.

⁶John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

⁷And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

¹⁰As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

¹¹And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

We start a new year—2009—and we start an old story found in the New Testament in the Book of Mark. Scholars, conservative and liberal, agree that Mark was the first written Gospel of Jesus, so we start with the start of the Gospel. Mark wrote this Gospel to persuade the Gentiles that Jesus is the Christ; and so doing, he was not concerned with genealogies or stories that surround the other Synoptic Gospels. So, he starts with the beginning of the proclaimed Gospel, the beginning of the Gospel of the Son of God, the first time the Gospel was preached by the Prophet John the Baptist, the first time men were indiscriminately called to repent and believe. As the Romans would read this Gospel, it was stylistically short, dramatic, and dynamic; and it told of a very human Jesus, as well as Jesus the Son of God. The Romans, particularly, could understand this.

From a human perspective this is how it all began. The arche, the beginning of, the start of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark points to the prophetic voice of the greatest prophet in the Old Testament, the Prophet Isaiah. "This is what Isaiah prophesied..." But he quickly, or should I say, he 'straightway' turns to Jesus Christ, His coming to John for baptism, and then, swiftly, His temptation in the wilderness. Then Mark whisks us through the other events of the 'story of Jesus,' showing us particularly His human side, being hungry and thirsty, being tired, and even getting angry. But when we're speaking of how it all began, we must not just start with Mark, we must not even start within time, but within eternity.

Someone said there are three beginnings recorded in Scripture. Let us put them down in chronological order.

1. “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). This goes back to a dateless beginning, a beginning before all time. Here the human mind can only grope. It is logical rather than chronological because in my thinking, I must put my peg somewhere in the past in order to take off. If I see an airplane in the air, I assume there is an airport somewhere. I may not know where it is, but I know the plane took off from some place. So when I look around at the universe, I know that it took off from somewhere and that somewhere there is a God. But I don’t know anything about that beginning. God comes out of eternity to meet us. I just have to put down the peg at the point where He does meet us, back as far as I can think, and realize He was there before that.

2. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). This is where we move out of eternity into time. However, although many people have been attempting to date this universe, no man so far knows. Man’s guesses have ranged from six thousand years to three billion years. We know so little, but when we come into His presence and begin to know even as we are known, then we will realize how we saw through a glass darkly. I’m sure we will marvel at our stupidity and our ignorance. Our God is a great God. He has plenty of time.

3. “The beginning of the gospel ...” (v. 1) is the same as “That which was from the beginning ...” (1 John 1:1). This is dated. It goes back to Jesus Christ at the precise moment He took upon Himself human flesh. Jesus Christ is the gospel!

Then Mark, who has very few quotations from the Old Testament, quotes two prophecies. The Romans knew very little about prophecy. He does this to show them that this One about whom he is talking doesn’t need a genealogy, but He does need references. So Mark shows that His references go back to Isaiah and to Malachi. Both Matthew and Mark declare that the coming of John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecies of the one who would be the forerunner of Christ.

I. THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL OF THE SON OF GOD STARTED IN THE HEART AND MIND OF GOD.

A. WHY MAN? We are not sure why God created man, or, for that matter, how God created man. The story of creation simply puts man at the apex of creation, the end product of the created order. We know that we were created by the Word of God, but we are not told more than that in Genesis. We must assume that we were created for the pleasure of God, just as were the other members of creation. God was pleased to have created us. The Bible says that God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion....” Then, after giving man dominion, and a charge to be responsible, Genesis says, “It was very good.” God was pleased, very pleased, with His creation.

John 1 tells us that Jesus is the Word of God, the Creative Word, that brought us into being. Colossians says:

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

God created man for His good pleasure, for the sake of His Son Jesus, and for fellowship with Himself. Since God is love, love that seeks someone to Love, God created that 'someone,' namely humanity.

B. THE PRICE OF LOVE. To love is to give freedom to the one loved. If love itself cannot hold us, then love must continue loving in order to draw us. We human beings understand the price of love. We know that it cannot be bought, forced, or demanded. We know that it can only be given. Love itself is the greatest freedom of all. Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son demonstrates that. As parents we must give wings to our children, for, like it or not, they will leave the nest. The entire purpose of parenting is to teach the child to be a responsible adult and show a love that is willing to turn loose. The children that we keep too close to the umbilical cord remain infantile throughout their lives. Freedom is the price of love. That is the freedom God gave to us.

C. THE PAIN OF LOVE. Again the Prodigal Son is a good reminder of the pain of love. As parents we know that our children, each child, is 'the apple of our eye.' They are precious. When we produce them, they become so much a part of us that when they hurt we hurt, when they bleed we bleed, and when their choices destroy their lives, they largely destroy our lives as well. The Bible tells us that this pain we know so well is infinite pain in the heart of God. Calvary is the greatest expression of that love and that pain. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Again, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

How did it all begin? It began in the heart and mind of a God who is Love.

II. HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN? IT BEGAN WITH THE SIN OF MAN.

A. THE FACT OF SIN. One cannot look at human behavior without realizing that sin is a reality in human beings. Nor can one view history without accepting the truth that it comes to us on the ocean of blood and suffering. For those my age, who were alive during WWII, during the Korean War, during the Viet Nam War, during the Afghanistan War and the two Iraq Wars, how can we deny the sin of man? What makes it so sad are the needless wars in Africa, India, Pakistan, the Middle East, and the various genocides that have taken place in the last decade! The fact of sin is a reality.

B. THE FACE OF SIN. Where do I look to find the face of sin? Is it the face of Adam? Is it the face of Eve? Is it the serpent's face? Adam said, "It's the face of Eve." Eve said, "It's the face of the serpent." The serpent said, "It's the face of God." What do you say? Is it the face of Hitler? Mugabe? Stalin? Mao? Whose face do you see as the face of sin? Look into the mirror: there you will find the face of sin. It is interesting how we speak of original sin as being the responsibility of Adam. No! It is my responsibility! I am the original sinner; and so are you. Sin doesn't wear the face of Satan; it wears your face; it wears my face. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

“There is none righteous, no not one.” “There is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good and sinneth not.”

C. THE FALLACY OF SIN. If the first fallacy of sin is to blame it on someone else, or on God, the greatest fallacy of sin is to believe that human sin is not important. It is so important that God sent His Son to die for sin. The Bible declares that human sin is a wounding shaft in the heart of Love. The Bible declares, “Your sins have separated between you and your God, and your iniquities have hid His face from you that He will not hear.” Self will, sin, rebellious behavior, separated our first parents from God; and sin separates us from God. God created us with self-consciousness; God created us with a moral compass; God created us in His Image: we know when something is morally wrong and we choose the wrong anyway. We transgress the laws of God, written in Old Covenants and New Covenants, and written within. “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not: to Him it is sin.” And, to him that knows to refrain from the wrong, but does it anyway--to him that is willful sin. The only way to beat your sin is to repent and to believe in Jesus as your only Savior. And that’s how it first began.

III. THE GOSPEL!

Now we get back to Mark—“The beginning of the Gospel of the Son of God.” Gospel is an interesting word. It is a translation of announcing, or proclamation of a great event. The word is evangelism. In English it is the translation of godspiel, or ‘good news.’ So the Gospel is the Good News that heaven has sent to earth! It is a call from God. It is Love sending His only begotten Son.

A. A CALL TO REALITY. The first thing the Gospel is saying to human beings is ‘Get Real.’ Get real with yourself and get real with God. The reality of our being is that we are human beings, weak, sinful, and dependent. The reality of our being is that we need to depend upon our Creator, the very Source and Sustenance of our Spiritual and physical lives.

HYMN, by: Joseph Addison (1672-1719)

The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
Their great Original proclaim.
Th' unwearied Sun from day to day
Does his Creator's power display;
And publishes to every land
The work of an Almighty hand.
Soon as the evening shades prevail,
The Moon takes up the wondrous tale;
And nightly to the listening Earth
Repeats the story of her birth:
Whilst all the stars that round her burn,
And all the planets in their turn,

Confirm the tidings as they roll,
And spread the truth from pole to pole.
What though in solemn silence all
Move round the dark terrestrial ball;
What though nor real voice nor sound
Amidst their radiant orbs be found?
In Reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice;
For ever singing as they shine,
'The Hand that made us is divine.'

The Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God is how it all began, and it began in the mind of God, and began with a call to Reality. The Hand that made us is the Hand of God.

B. THE GOSPEL IS A CALL TO ACCOUNTABILITY. The call to reality is also a call to Accountability. Human beings are not animals that seek survival as the only option of life; human beings are not robots that move according to a programmed path; human beings are not puppets moved about by the 'great puppet-master of the stage.' Human beings are created in the Image of their Creator, and are therefore accountable to the Creator for their actions. We will one day answer the Author of our Being, the Creator of our individual Units, the Maker of our Souls. The Bible says, "Every knee shall bow of things in heaven and things in the earth and things under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." John preached accountability; Paul preached accountability; Peter preached accountability; and Jesus preached accountability. Jeremiah preached accountability: "All souls are mine, saith the Lord; as the soul of the father is mine, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die." We belong to God; we were made for God; we will return to God to be accountable to God. That's where it all began.

C. THE GOSPEL IS FINALLY A CALL TO MEANING. John the Baptist found the meaning for his life in playing 2nd fiddle to Jesus of Nazareth. Listen:
^{Jn. 1:19} Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.
²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, I am not the Christ.
²¹ They asked him, Then who are you? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not. Are you the Prophet? He answered, No.
²² Finally they said, Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?
²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'
²⁴ Now some Pharisees who had been sent
²⁵ questioned him, Why then do you baptise if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?
²⁶ I baptise with water, John replied, but among you stands one you do not know.
²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to

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²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'

³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.

³² Then John gave this testimony: I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.

³³ I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.'

³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.

Jesus was the One who gave meaning to St. Mark's life; Jesus was the One who gave meaning to St. Paul's life; Jesus was the One who gave meaning to John the Baptizer's life; and only Jesus can give meaning to your life.

If you will repent, turn from your sin, and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, you too will find the very purpose, the very meaning of your life. People search for the Ark of the Covenant and for the lost Chalice from which Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples. The Ark of the Covenant is not the meaning they seek. The Chalice is Jesus Christ Himself; and He is the True Ark of God. Those who find Him find Meaning for their meaningless lives.

That's how it all began! And it can begin again for you!