

The King is Coming

Text: Mark 1:1-8

Big Idea: John the Baptist told the people that the Lord himself was coming and that they needed to get ready by turning back to God and being baptised.

Aim: To help the children feel the excitement of the Lord's arrival and their need to get ready to meet him.



Leader's Study Notes

Read Mark 1:1-8 taking note of the way Mark chooses to start his story about Jesus' life and what this might mean.

Use the following notes to help you think about the passage in more detail.

This passage is the introduction to Mark's Gospel, and it places the announcement of Jesus' coming in the context of the rescue plan that God first revealed to his prophets in the Old Testament.

1:1 — The word 'gospel' means 'good/important news'. When the Roman empire announced great events such as the birth or the appointment of a new emperor, it was known as a 'gospel'. It would have been marked with official festivals throughout the entire empire to celebrate the dawn of a new age.

Mark is deliberately using a provocative, authoritative word to introduce Jesus' life. His life will change everything throughout the world!

'Son of God' was a Roman title used for the emperors. It was the very highest title anyone could be given. Could Jesus really justify this title?

This important news is about:

- The man called Jesus, who looked like any ordinary man.
- The Christ (or Messiah); the final, perfect, ideal king, who would rule forever and rescue God's people from slavery and oppression.
- The Son of God. God's people, Israel, had been called the son of God in Exodus 4:22. King David had been promised that one from his family would be the Son of God (2 Samuel 7:12-14). Now we meet the one who will bear this title in all its fullness.

1:2-3 — The Romans would announce a gospel after the event had occurred, but Mark shows that this announcement was made centuries before.

Verse 2 is taken from Malachi, 400 years before, predicting the coming of John – the Lord's messenger.

Verse 3 is taken from Isaiah, 700 years before, predicting the arrival of the Lord himself.

Malachi was the last prophet God sent in the Old Testament. Since then, he had not spoken through a prophet for 400 years. Later the Romans occupied Israel. When would God keep his promise to David? Now John arrives to announce the arrival of the Lord.

1:4-5 — Baptism, repentance and forgiveness are all being offered so that each person can prepare for the arrival of the Lord.

It was not enough to be one of God's people (an Israelite) or even to have the physical sign of belonging (circumcision). The Lord now requires each person to prepare their hearts and to have a new sign (baptism). The old is gone, the new has come.

1:6 — John wore similar clothes to Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). Malachi 4:5 predicted, "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord".

Jesus spoke about John being 'Elijah' in Mark 9:9-13, explaining that he had to come first to prepare the way. So, like Elijah John was given the job of calling people back to God – and many did return.

1:7-8 — What anticipation! The crowds were pouring out of cities into the desert to meet with John, but he wasn't even fit to be the Lord's slave, untying his sandals.

The Holy Spirit was only given in the Old Testament to individuals to perform specific God-given tasks (kingship, prophecy and guidance). But the Lord that John speaks of will both have and give the Spirit, as only God himself can do.

Mark is making it quite clear from the start that Jesus is not merely another prophet or even the best prophet. He is the one about whom the prophets wrote. He is the Christ (the perfect promised King), and the Lord (God in the flesh).

The old covenant is finished. Rituals are finished. Sacrifices are finished. Now everything is focused on one man. There is no alternative. The "great and dreadful day" has arrived. Prepare to meet Him.

Reflect

- What did John think of the one for whom he had come to prepare the way? Imagine that you met John on the street today, what would you expect him to say to you?
- If these were the only eight verses of the New Testament that you had – what would you know about this man Jesus? How would you feel about him?
- It's so easy for Christianity to become ritual and religion for us. How would your life be different if Christianity was entirely about one man, the Lord and the Christ?

Series Intro Idea

Show the children a few newspapers and highlight some of the stories that they contain. Why do we need news? Who writes the stories? How do they know what to write?

Explain that the Gospel of Mark is a bit like a newspaper. Mark was not one of Jesus' disciples, but he heard many of the stories that Peter told about his time with Jesus, and he has carefully brought all the information together in his gospel, a bit like a journalist would do for a news story. The word 'gospel' means 'big or good news'. Mark believes that the stories about Jesus are incredibly good news. He wants everyone to know the truth that Jesus is God's promised king.



Introductory Idea - Option 1

Interview – you could introduce the series by interviewing another leader dressed up to be 'Mark'. An Interview Script is provided in the Media section of this webpage.

Perhaps give him a personality that is fast-paced, dynamic, active and punchy to reflect the style of the book. Get him to talk about his friend Peter and how he came to write the book (the Series Context in the Series Introduction provides this information).

[Younger children may find it confusing to be moving between Mark \(the writer\), John the Baptist and Isaiah \(another writer!\), in one lesson.](#)

[Use the Bridge Questions below to create a link with the lesson.]



Introductory Idea - Option 2

Prepare for the King – ask the children to imagine that a king was coming to visit. How would they prepare the room for his arrival? How would they make themselves ready?

Before the session, you could mess the room up a bit – have chairs and scraps of paper scattered around. Get the children to prepare the room for the king. You could even supply them with some decorations to put up and flags to wave. [Use the Bridge Questions below to create a link with the lesson.]



Introductory Idea - Option 3

Signs – show a selection of road signs similar to the ones provided in the Intro Idea Pictures in the Media section of this webpage. Can the children tell you what they mean? They are all warning signs. For each one ask, "What would you do if you saw this sign?"

Road signs tell you what is about to happen so there are no surprises and you'll know what to do when you get there. That was what the prophets in the Bible did – they told people what was going to happen so that they could make sure they were ready. [Use the Bridge Questions below to create a link with the lesson.]

Bridge Questions

The children must listen carefully to today's true story from the Bible to discover the answers to the following questions:

- Who was the special messenger God sent to get people ready for the king? [*John the Baptist* (Mark 1:2, 4)]
- How should people get ready? [*By turning to God and being baptised* (Mark 1:4)]
- What made this king more important than the messenger? [*He is more powerful and will baptise with the Holy Spirit, not just water.* (Mark 1:7-8)]



Teaching Plan

It might be helpful to use a timeline; this could be a washing line with pictures or props pegged onto it. Start with the following:

- **Creation.** The start of the Bible. God spoke and it happened. Place a picture of the earth on the left of the timeline.
- **John the Baptist.** In today's true story. Place a picture of John near to the right of the timeline.
- **Us.** Today. Still part of God's plan. Place a picture of yourself or your class on the right of the timeline.

Then add the following events. Everything below starts on the left, after creation and moves right towards John the Baptist.

- **Abraham.** The first of God's chosen people. God made promises to him. One of them was that all people from all nations would be blessed, or made joyful, because of his family.
- **Joseph.** His importance in Egypt meant that God's people could be safe there and grow in number.
- **Moses.** God used him to rescue his people (Israel) out of Egypt and bring them into the Promised Land.
- **David.** God's greatest king. He was promised a king from his family who would rule forever. 1,000 years before John.
- **Isaiah.** A prophet. Gave messages to God's people. Also told them how God would one day give them the Christ (promised king). 700 years before John.
- **Malachi.** A prophet. 400 years before John. Last part of the Old Testament. Then 400

years of silence. God said nothing. The people waited.

- Back to **John the Baptist**. 2,000 years ago.

There is a close match between the prophecies in Mark 1:2-3 and the story of John the Baptist in Mark 1:4-8. An obvious lesson plan that reflects this is to have two characters or stories; one for the prophet (who could represent both Isaiah and Malachi), and one for John the Baptist. See below for an outline of how these two stories could fit together.

The prophet wrote Mark 1:2-3	John the Baptist did it Mark 1:4-8
I will send my messenger ahead of you	And so John came, wearing clothes made of camel hair, with a leather belt, eating locusts and honey
Who will prepare your way	He told people to get ready for the coming of the Lord by repenting of their sins and being forgiven. He baptised people in the River Jordan as a sign of how God had cleaned their hearts The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him
A voice of one calling in the desert	He baptised in the desert region And this was his message
"Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him"	"After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

To convey these similarities and comparisons to the children, you could have a leader dressed as a prophet who speaks and explains as he writes on a scroll. Either one of the prophets or another leader could write some sort of checklist as the prophet speaks of what God's people were to expect in the future. Then a leader can dress as John the Baptist (a furry coat, a belt and perhaps a rough beard), speaking, explaining and doing some of the things from the passage. He can pause while he or the leader with the checklist ticks off as he goes, perhaps giving a sentence of explanation each time.

For younger children – you will need to simplify the above.

For older children – a simple Bible study could involve your group filling in a table like the Teaching Table in the Media section of this webpage. The first page contains the answers for leaders, and the second is a blank table for the children.

Be prepared to help the children understand baptism in a way that is consistent with what your church teaches on this subject. It could perhaps be described as publicly saying that you love Jesus and are trusting him. Children, therefore, do not need water baptism in order to receive the Holy Spirit, only repentance and faith.

One big danger with this lesson is that the focus becomes the prophets and John the Baptist. This lesson must focus on the coming Lord, which is difficult as he doesn't actually physically appear in this story!

There needs to be a strong sense that we're on the edge of the most important moment in history – the arrival of the Lord, who is Christ. So the prophet needs to speak and write with excitement and enthusiasm.

John needs to speak with real urgency and a touch of fear. The people are getting baptised because they're afraid of being caught unprepared. They are all obsessed with the coming Lord, not themselves.



Game Idea - Option 1

Get ready – divide the class into a number of groups. Draft a list of activities or professions that require particular clothing or equipment. Have a selection of dress-up clothes and equipment that reflect the list you have made e.g. a chef needs a hat, apron, whisk, mixing bowl, etc. Place all the items in a mixed pile in the middle of the room.

Give each group a specific activity or profession and select one person in each group to be the model. The children collect items from the pile and dress their model accordingly. There should be no items left in the middle of the room.

When they are done ask each group what their model is now ready for? Have they got all they need for the job? Have any of them got an item they do not need?

In today's true story from the Bible John told the people to get ready to meet the Lord by turning back to God and being baptised.



Game Idea - Option 2

Wet 'n' Wild – one for outdoors or a safe area with towels. Divide the group into teams. Each team is given a range of dirty items to clean – a bucket of water and a sponge.

The teams are seated in a row opposite their buckets and dirty items. In a relay, the teams each send one child at a time to the bucket. There they clean one item and return to the group. The first team to wash all the items properly wins. The leader can wear a crown and inspect each item to see if they are clean enough to be used by a king. Declare the winners. **Be safe and only use non-breakable items.**

In today's true story from the Bible, the people needed to be made clean before the king arrived. This could not be done with soap and water – they had to repent and be baptised.



Discuss and Apply

This passage shows how God sent John to prepare people for the Lord's arrival. John told the people he met to prepare by repenting (turning back to God), being forgiven and being baptised. We want to discuss with our groups why this is the right preparation for the Lord's arrival.

We would love our children's hearts (and our's), to feel that same sense of urgency to repent and be forgiven. We get ready for the Lord by having our hearts ready!

Draw out the similarities between what the prophets said would happen and what John did.

This helps to review the story as well as pick up on the key issues.

With all age groups, you may want to discuss the way John the Baptist told people to get ready and why he chose that way.

You may choose to illustrate repentance, forgiveness and baptism as three connected ideas. Repentance means saying sorry and changing direction: saying sorry for doing what we want to do and saying that from now on we will live for God by following and obeying him. Forgiveness is when God 'cleans our hearts' and makes us want to obey him. Baptism is a sign that God has 'washed our hearts' clean. John washed the outside of the person to show what God had done on the inside. **For younger children – to only explain baptism may be enough to make the point.**

You could refer to a game you played about getting ready, to compare ways people normally get ready for people or events.

Plan some age-appropriate questions to explore John's preparation for Jesus.

With older children – you will need to work hard to plan a discussion that helps them understand the urgency and the need for a response. You could explore the response of John's original hearers.

- What might be a wrong way to have prepared for Jesus?
- How do you think the people John spoke to felt about the Lord's arrival?
- How did they respond? Why was that the right response?

Then ask similar questions of your group:

- How do some people get it wrong and 'get ready' for Jesus in the wrong way?
- Are there things we do that make us feel like we're ready for Jesus, but perhaps are not really helpful?
- Do we need to get ready? How? Is this the same as it was for the people John spoke to (this is very difficult, but you know your children best so tailor it to their needs).
- How do we feel about Jesus? Does anything in this story change how we feel or what we think?



Prayer Idea

Give each child a square of paper. They write, 'Jesus' on one side. On the other side they write or draw something they need to turn from. This could be bad words; bad attitudes; or an area of sin where they keep falling. Encourage them to pray about this as they turn the paper over to reveal Jesus' name. Help the children to understand that we need to turn from sin and trust in Jesus.



Activity A

For younger children choose either this activity or Activity B.

From the Media section of this webpage print Activity A onto paper for each child.

The children colour the picture. You can also provide them with some hessian cloth for John's tunic; wool or raffia for his hair and beard; and blue cellophane for the water.



Activity B

For younger children choose either this activity or Activity A.

From the Media section of this webpage print Activity B onto card (one copy for every two children).

Before the lesson cut away the hatched area.

The children colour in John the Baptist.

Help the children to glue as indicated and roll to produce a tube person. Use brown wool or raffia to give John a woolly beard and hair!



Worksheets

For older children choose either Worksheet C or Worksheet D from the Media section of this webpage. Print whichever is appropriate onto paper for each child and use it to reinforce the lesson or as a discussion starter.



Memory Verse

Use one of the memory verse ideas in the Series Introduction to help the children memorise the following verse:

Mark 1:15 – *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"* [NIV]

Copyright © 2024 by TnT Ministries
Mustard Seeds is a product of TnT Ministries
www.mustard-seeds.net