

Title: BEFORE IT BEGAN, MARK 1:1-8
(Chatham, NJ; 12/07/14, AM) [E – Topical]

Theme: The Gospel of Mark narrates the beginning of the Gospel, but before he could do that, God used the prophets and wise men of old to prepare for that moment.

Purpose: To demonstrate the lengths that God went to in order to bring His plan to completion, and to help us grasp the magnitude of the work.

Introduction:

1. Have you seen the commercial for ExxonMobil that states: "Boiling an egg takes more than just boiling an egg"?
2. A lot goes into that simple act of turning on the stove.
3. When Mark proclaims that he writes about "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," we must also appreciate what went on before it could begin.
4. Mark draws on the work of the prophets who set things up for the Gospel.
5. Today, we'll remember that the Gospel was many years in the making.

I. Before the Beginning

A. A voice is heard

1. Isaiah is recruited to be a spokesman for God, Is. 6
2. He becomes a herald, a messenger with words from God
3. His message in chapter forty begins with comfort and consolation, 1-2
4. He moves to the wilderness where a voice cries out, 3-5
5. Part of his message reveals that though life is transitory and fragile, God's word transcends it, 6-8
6. Finally a "herald" climbs the mountain to proclaim God's coming, 9-11
7. Isaiah's voice helped set the plan of God in motion

B. Mark also quotes Malachi 3:1

1. Some manuscripts replace Isaiah's name with "the prophets."
2. It was not uncommon for a Jewish writer to name only one prophet when citing several prophetic passages, and Isaiah would be the most prominent of the two.
3. Malachi 3:1-4 speaks of the "herald" or messenger who will arrive to purify and cleanse.
4. Malachi 4:5 specifically mentions Elijah, the prophet.
5. We could go all the way back to his ministry in order to establish an even older foundation for the beginning of the Gospel.
6. The prophets were men "carried along by the Holy Spirit," 1 Pet. 1:21.
7. God has been at work a long time before Christ ever appeared (and before the egg was able to boil?)

II. The Way Passes through the Wilderness

A. John's voice

1. John the Baptist satisfies Isaiah's proclamation
2. He is the voice in the wilderness that prepares for God's coming
3. He is also the Elijah of prophecy
4. His appearance marks the dawn of a new day and time.
5. However, he can only foreshadow the real presence of God: "After me comes another who will baptize you with the spirit."
6. So with John we are not quite there yet.

B. In the desert – this is where John asks us to stand

1. The wilderness is a place of austerity and purification, Deut. 8:2-4

2. For us it becomes a metaphor for stripping away all the pretenses about self-sufficiency and self-righteousness
3. John calls upon humanity to see the human soul as a vast expanse of dryness, lifelessness, and death
4. When faced with such a wilderness, we are called to repentance, to remove our sinful behaviors.
5. Confronting this wilderness and walking through it with God, we learn to live on every word that comes from His mouth.
6. On the other side of this wilderness, we are ready to meet him and the Good News that his heralds have proclaimed.

III. The Gospel: a Beginning and a Completion of Previous Work

A. A Beginning for Mark's Account

1. Mark narrates the events that make up the Gospel
2. He begins with John and moves quickly past the temptations into those things that characterized Jesus and his work
3. Though the climax and essence of the Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection, the events of his life support and confirm the message

B. A Completion

1. "Good News" used of Caesar Augustus – his birth also claimed to effect salvation for the Roman empire
2. Along with Mark, heavenly hosts proclaimed good news at the birth of Jesus, Luke 2:10
3. Which good news will you accept?
4. This Good News tells the Gospel of the *Son of God*
5. John, the herald, prepared for God to come (Isaiah 40:10-11)
6. He has come and is here now through the preaching of the Gospel.

Conclusion:

1. Be grateful for the hard work of those who have gone before to prepare for this time.
2. Rejoice in the comfort and consolation of God.
3. Prepare the hearts of others to receive the Good News.
4. Be patient as you wait for him to return for you.