LESSON *one*

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

Mark 1:1–45

Getting Started

How did you respond the first time you heard about Jesus?

Setting the Stage

It is believed that Mark's Gospel is the first written record of the life of Jesus Christ. For that reason, it's been called "the most important book in the world." It is the shortest and easiest to understand of the Gospels. The average reader can finish it in less than an hour.

Although Mark wrote the book, the story he tells is not his own. Mark served as a secretary and translator for someone who was not only an eyewitness to the events described but also one of Jesus' closest friends—the Gospel of Mark is actually the apostle *Peter's* account of his days with Jesus. In creating this account, Mark had unique credentials. From the time he was young, his house was a center of Christian activity. His cousin was Barnabas, the traveling companion of the apostle Paul. In time, Mark himself became a trusted confidant of Paul, but Mark's most significant friendship was with the apostle Peter.

In Peter's first letter, he refers to Mark as his son (see 1 Peter 5:13). Although Peter was speaking in spiritual terms, the connection between the two men ran deep. In fact, that relationship is the key to understanding the Gospel of Mark.

Peter was a man of action, and Mark's Gospel reflects his restless energy. The book moves quickly from one event to the next. The word *immediately* appears frequently in the text. Through Mark's pen, Peter places himself at Jesus' side throughout the narrative. He is not, however, trying to burnish his own reputation. In many stories, Peter is portrayed in an unflattering light. In the end, the Gospel of Mark is a collection of the extraordinary experiences of a simple fisherman who followed the Son of Man.

Exploring the Text

John the Baptist Prepares the Way (Mark 1:1–11)

[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."

9 It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. 11 Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

1. What was the purpose of John the Baptist's ministry (see verses 2–3)? What are the specific ways he fulfilled his calling (see verses 4–11)?

2. How would you describe John the Baptist's appearance and his attitude toward Jesus (see verses 6–7)?

Jesus Calls His First Disciples (Mark 1:14–20)

14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

16 And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 17 Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." 18 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

19 When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. 20 And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

3. Most of the people who heard Jesus' message had little hope. They were oppressed by the Romans who ruled over them and by the religious leaders who demanded they follow hundreds of rules and regulations. How do you think they reacted to Jesus' message?

4. How did Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John respond to Jesus' call to follow Him (see verses 18, 20)? What do you think they expected when they made this decision?

Jesus Drives Out an Impure Spirit (Mark 1:21–28)

[21] Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. [22] And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

[23] Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit.
And he cried out, [24] saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with
You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who
You are—the Holy One of God!"

[25] But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of
him!" [26] And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out
with a loud voice, he came out of him. [27] Then they were all amazed,
so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this?
What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even
the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." [28] And immediately His fame
spread throughout all the region around Galilee.

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5. The people who spoke at the synagogues in first-century Israel were usually laypeople who read the Torah and shared their thoughts about it. Why did Jesus' teachings have such an impact on His listeners (see verses 21–22)?

6. How did the people in Capernaum react when Jesus healed the demon-possessed man? What impact did this have on Jesus' ministry (see verses 27–28)?

Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place and Heals a Leper (Mark 1:35–45)

35 Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight,
He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.
36 And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him. 37 When
they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You."

38 But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I
may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth."

39 And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all
Galilee, and casting out demons.

40 Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to
Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."

41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand
and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." 42 As
soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was
cleansed. 43 And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once,
44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your
way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those
things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

45 However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.

7. Simon (Peter) and his companions wanted Jesus to return to Capernaum and embrace His burgeoning celebrity status. Why was it important for Jesus to move on to other towns (see verse 38)?

8. In Jesus' day, if someone was deemed to have leprosy, that person had to live in isolation from the community and shout "unclean" whenever others approached. How did the man in this story go against that custom? How do you think the people reacted when they saw Jesus actually reach out and *touch* the man (see verses 40–42)?

REVIEWING THE STORY

Jesus received His heavenly Father's blessing at His baptism and then immediately got to work. He had much to do in a very short time. Like any good leader, Jesus surrounded Himself with people who were hard-working, committed, and willing to be taught. He announced the good news with His words and actions. He spent His days calling people to repentance, healing their sicknesses *and* their disabilities. He also took care of Himself by retreating to solitary places where He could commune with His heavenly Father, rest, and recharge for the work ahead.

9. How did John view his ministry and baptism as compared to Jesus' (see Mark 1:7–8)?

10. What did Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John leave in order to follow Jesus (see Mark 1:18–20)?

11. What was the reaction in Capernaum to Jesus' miracles (see Mark 1:36–37)?

12. What happened when the word spread about Jesus' healing power (see Mark 1:45)?

APPLYING THE MESSAGE

13. What have you—like the first disciples—left behind in order to follow Jesus?

14. If you were to freely proclaim what Jesus has done for you, as the leper did, what would you say?

Reflecting on the Meaning

Jesus was an incredibly busy man, but he never seemed to be in a hurry. There was a quality about His life—a quiet center—that was observable wherever He went. As these passages in Mark reveal, this inner peace in the midst of chaos may be attributed to three things.

First, Jesus was *devoted to the practice of prayer.* According to Mark 1:35, Jesus rose well before dawn and found a solitary place to pray. This in itself was no small feat. The day before, Jesus had preached in the synagogue, driven out a demon, healed Peter's mother-in-law, and then, after the Sabbath ended, stood in front of Peter's house and healed everyone who came to see Him. The crowd kept Him busy until the early hours of the morning. He must have been exhausted, but that wasn't His concern. Sleep could wait. Prayer could not.

Second, Jesus was *committed to what God wanted Him to do.* At one point, His disciples came to escort Him back to the crowds who awaited him in Capernaum. But Jesus opted to move on to the next town, where He could preach. "For this purpose I have come forth," He explained to them (verse 38). When you know what God wants you to do, you won't be persuaded by others who have their own ideas about your purpose.

Third, Jesus was *driven by the passion He had for people in need.* While most people went out of their way to avoid lepers, Jesus literally reached out to them. He touched their infectious skin. He made them whole—physically, spiritually, emotionally, and socially.

You may or may not be able to lessen the chaos that swirls around you every day. But you can maintain a calm center by following Jesus' example and devoting yourself to prayer, committing yourself to God's will, and stoking a passion for people in need.

Journaling Your Response

What might Jesus say to you about addressing the chaos and increasing the peace in your life?