

The One He Uses

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 1, verse 1 simply says, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

! Well, today we begin a journey together. This will be the longest study that we've done together. But don't worry, there are breaks along the way.

And Mark reads really fast. He moves fast. Matthew wrote to the Jews and wanted them to know that Christ was in fact the Messiah that they were waiting on.

And Luke writes a very detailed account. He even states it that way. He was a doctor. He dealt with specifics. And you see that in the gospel of Luke.

And then John's the theologian. He writes like a theologian in both Big John, the gospel of John, as well as the three little Johns.

[1 : 10] First John, Second John, Third John. And then, of course, that powerful revelation of Jesus Christ that ends out the New Testament. But John states why he writes. In John 20, verse 31, he says, these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

He makes a similar comment at the end of 1 John. He writes so people will come to know the Lord Jesus. That's why John writes. Mark, however, is in a hurry. He don't deal with a lot of details.

You don't see him dealing with the dialogues of Jesus like you do in Matthew. You see the Sermon on the Mount. And in Luke, you see the Sermon on the Plain. And in John, you see John 13 through 17 in the upper room of Jesus speaking with the disciples.

The longest discourse in the gospels that we have of Christ. Mark, not Mark. He don't deal with that. He deals with the works of Christ, the miracles of Christ. He moves in a hurry.

And he has a point that he's trying to get to. And that's in the middle of the book. We won't deal with that today. But it's in the middle of the book. And then once he gets to that point, he makes a beeline toward the cross to get to the cross of Christ.

[2 : 25] Very deliberate in what he does. What's interesting to me is that Mark is not a disciple of Christ. And I don't mean, I mean an apostle. He was not called by Christ to follow him.

He did not walk with Jesus. I don't mean he didn't love Jesus. I mean, he didn't walk with him.

Literally, he didn't walk with him on earth. He was a teenager during the ministry of Jesus.

And what he saw of Jesus and what he heard of Jesus was from afar. He writes during the days that the book of Acts cover.

And that is why he entitles the gospel, the beginning of the gospel. Now, he's writing to Christians in Rome.

So what does he mean by the beginning of the gospel? Well, he writes to them. He writes for them to know the background of what God is doing among them.

[3 : 23] If you look at the book of Acts, you'll see the preaching of Peter and the great revivals of the early church. And then you'll see the missionary journeys of Paul. And you'll see the spread of the gospel throughout the known world.

Well, Mark wanted those folks to know, do you know where all this began? It began with Jesus. I want you to see the beginning of the gospel.

Now, that word gospel is a Greek word, euangelion. And the only reason that's important is because that comes from the word evangelism. That's where we get our word evangelism from, which means good news.

Gospel is actually an old English translation of the word godspell, which means good story. So if you ever hear an old fellow tell you, why don't you sit down for a spell?

Well, that means sit down in time for me to tell you a story. And so Godspell, the gospel, is the stories of God.

[4 : 31] It's the stories of Christ. There is no better story to tell than the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's a story, my friend. However, Jesus didn't write a story about his life.

We don't have any record that Jesus wrote anything. Those that did write and that are in the canon of Scripture that we have today were led by God in what to write.

I want you to listen to how Peter describes it. 2 Peter 1 verse 21 says, My friend, that's why I love the word of God.

It is, as the apostle Paul puts it, spirit breathe. It comes from the breath of God. It is alive with God moving in it. Yet, yes, Mark wrote it, but it came from the Lord.

So who is Mark? Well, I told you he's not an apostle of Christ. Wasn't called by Christ personally. Not a disciple in that way. He's much younger than Jesus.

[5 : 44] So most of what he witnessed was from afar. It's interesting to me that sometimes we get this in our mind the wrong way because of the order of the New Testament books.

But the reality is that some of the letters that follow the Gospels were actually written before the Gospels were written. Galatians, for instance, one of the early books was written before the Gospels.

James was written before the Gospels. The reality is that people were hearing so much about Jesus in the decade or two after his ascension that no one really saw the need to write it down.

The oral stories were so strong in a very oral society. They were so strong that they didn't bother to write that down. Paul focused on how do you live out your faith in Christ that you've heard of, these stories of.

That was the focus of so much of the writing. But the Jews were missing it. And they didn't see Christ as the Messiah.

[6 : 54] So as I said, Matthew was to show, was to, wrote to show them this is, this is the Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah. Let me show you in Matthew 1 the genealogy of Jesus.

Let me show you where he came from. Let me, you'll see him often reference Old Testament passages. Let me show you how he fulfilled the passages that you lean on.

That was the burden of Matthew. And Mark was written at a very similar time as Matthew. We're unsure of exactly the dates, but it was written at a very similar time.

Luke came about a decade later. And then John came at the end of the first century. Now, now think about this for a moment. At the end of the first century, we believe Jesus was born about 4 B.C.

That may blow your mind. We're not dealing with that today. But it's about 4 B.C. And he died in about 30 A.D. Okay? That's what most theologians will tell you. And so when you get to the end of the first century, you're 70 years out from the life of Christ on earth.

[8 : 06] Okay? Where were the eyewitnesses? Well, if they were adults when Jesus was here, a lot of them is in glory by that point.

Think about this. I thought about this this way. We're about 80 years out from the end of World War II, if I'm not mistaken. How many World War II veterans do we have left?

A handful. A handful. Very few. The oral stories of that are gone. Thankfully, some historians have restored those and put those on video so we can see those.

And there's a multiplicity of books that have been written that tell those stories. But we don't get the chance to hear that firsthand anymore.

And the same scenario happened in the first century with the eyewitnesses of Jesus. And so there become this compelling, we've got to write this stuff down.

[9 : 13] We want people to know what Jesus did because the oral traditions will go away as they die. So John wrote in the late first century.

And again, he wrote five books of the New Testament, but all of them came very late and he was very old when he wrote.

But these gospels, a lot of things were written. But these gospels were validated by the first century church. The church knew that the gospels were written by the Spirit of God.

But they were penned by these authors. Now, there were other, quote, gospels that were written. They were false. They were not true.

They were not inspired. But they were written later. And they were often attributed to strong followers of Christ. There was one called the Gospel of Thomas.

[10:16] It was heresy. And it didn't come from Thomas. But they just put his name on it. There was another one called the Gospel of Peter. It was heresy. It didn't come from Peter. They just put his name on it.

So there were other things written. But the first century church knew they were not valid. Knew they were not of the Spirit of God. Did not include them in those things that they paid attention to. When I was in seminary, I was working. When I first got there, I was working security slash telephone operator slash host at an Ethan Allen gallery in New Orleans.

Now, if you think about that for just a moment, you'll understand why I was so uncomfortable in that setting. But I worked that for a while. Lock up. And when somebody would come in, they needed a designer. I'd line them up with a designer.

And then I'd lock up the building and all that stuff. And I'd go back to the seminary and pray, dear God, let me do some ministry. You know. I had been active in ministry in college.

[11:17] And had served in my home church in my last year of college. And I left everything, put everything I had in that Civic and drove 600 miles away from my mama crying and thought this must be the end, you know.

And working in the Ethan Allen gallery in New Orleans will make you think it's the end. But anyway. And so I went home with a friend for Thanksgiving.

And we went to see a Christian concert. And I went home with a friend. And his father said, will you go for a ride with me one day? I said, sure. So we rode. We rode to a little church. And he said, this is my church.

And this is the circumstances of my church. And it was horrible circumstances. The church had split twice in the last 15 years. They had very little left in the church.

And they were looking at going from a full-time pastor to a half-time pastor. And he said, this is our situation. What would you do about it if you were the pastor of the church?

[12:15] Well, I was 23 years old. Had no pastoral experience at all. And so I gave him the wealth of my wisdom in about 15 seconds. I preached at that church the following Sunday.

I preached again the next Sunday. I went home for Christmas to see my parents. And they called me in South Carolina. The church did. And said, will you come and view us as a pastor? And I said, let me pray about it.

Yes. Yes, I will. And they learned how to deal with a guy who never pastored. And I learned how to preach multiple times during the week while I studied Greek and Hebrew and commuted back and forth in New Orleans.

It was quite an experience. There was a dear lady in that church that there used to be a page. And I don't know the details. I'm kind of making them up as I go along.

But there used to be a page in the back of a magazine. In the back of a magazine. I don't know what kind of magazine it was. Magazine magazine that sold all these little things for like 99 cents. You can get an apple peeler, a plastic apple peeler.

[13:21] You can get something squeezed out of an orange for 99 cents. You can get all these 99 cents. And they all came from Carroll Stream, Illinois. I don't know what the significance of Carroll Stream, Illinois was. But it all came from Carroll Stream, Illinois. And this lady loved that stuff.

And so every now and then she'd bring me some weird plastic tangent that she had bought for 99 cents. And she was like, oh, my God. And I took it home and it didn't.

But one day she came to me and she had a paperback book in her hand. And she was carrying it like it was Tiffany Glass. And she walked up to me and she said, Pastor, I found the lost books of the Bible.

I didn't know what she was talking about. I took the book from her and looked at it and realized these books wasn't lost from the Bible. These books never were intended for the Bible.

They were these false gospels is what they were. They were a multiplicity of things that were written during the first century and the second century that attributed themselves back to faithful followers of Christ from the first century that never were acknowledged.

[14:31] There was a lot of that going on in that day. But the gospels that we have in Scripture are those that the church said, this is valid.

This is of God. God led this. And that includes Mark. Now, Mark was younger, as I said. So what was his human source?

Historians tell us that it was primarily the stories of Peter that Peter shared with Mark and that Mark wrote down. Papias of Hierapolis was a historian that wrote in early second century.

And he said this. He said, and I quote, Mark, in his capacity as Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately as many things as he recalled from memory, though not in an ordered form of the things either said or done by the Lord.

For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied him. But later Peter, Peter who used to give his teachings, Peter had no intention of providing an orderly arrangement of the narrative of the Lord.

[15:46] Consequently, Mark did nothing wrong when he wrote down some individual items just as he related them from memory. For he made it his one concern not to omit anything he has heard or to falsify anything.

Justin Martyr of the second century called Mark the memoirs of Peter. Other well-known and reliable historians backed it up.

Euseppius of Caesarea of the third century said that Mark wrote it because Peter's hearers wanted him to record it. And he goes on to say that Peter was pleased with what Mark wrote.

He said, the apostle, knowing by the revelation of the Spirit to him what had been done, was pleased at their zeal, at the writings of Mark's zeal, and ratified the scripture for study in the churches.

Now, Peter was killed in 67-68 under the reign of Nero. But from historians, he at least had a knowledge of what Mark was doing.

[17:01] We don't know if it was all compiled. We don't know if he saw it in pieces. But we know that Peter saw what Mark had done, was pleased with what Mark had done, and, quote, ratified the scripture for study in the churches.

Now, what I want you to understand is this. The unique perspective that Mark had. The book of Acts helps us with that, and Paul's letters help us with that as well.

When you look at Acts, the first 12 chapters of Acts deal with Peter's ministry of spreading the gospel throughout Judea and Samaria.

It began in Jerusalem, spread to Judea, spread to Samaria. What does that sound like? It sounds like the Great Commission. Well, listen, the Great Commission in Romans, excuse me, Matthew 28, 18 through 20, the Great Commission is carried out in the book of Acts.

You can see it. It's continuing to be carried out today. But you can see it carried out because it starts in Jerusalem, just like the end of the Great Commission says, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost.

[18:03] Peter dealt with Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria from Acts 1 through 12. Paul dealt with the uttermost, as scripture puts it, in Acts 13 and continuing.

And so you see that worked out. Now, in Acts 12, Peter is locked up. He's in prison. As James, he's in prison, King Herod put him in prison.

King Herod killed James, who wrote the book of James. And Peter is in prison at about the same time. And while he is in prison, the church in Jerusalem is praying for his release.

That they've met together, and they are praying for his release. And an angel of the Lord came to Peter and released him. And he went straight to the house where the church was praying.

Now, Acts 12, 12 says this. He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

[19:11] Now, that's our Mark, okay? John is his Hebrew name, and therefore he was known as John to the Jews. Mark was his Latin name.

He was known as Mark to the Gentiles, sometimes called John Mark. But John Mark's mother was a widow, probably well-to-do because she had a house large enough to house a church.

Mark's mother was a widow who had a church of means. She had a room for the church to meet there. And Peter had probably been there many times because when Peter was in prison and was released by the angel, where'd he go?

He went straight to that house. What were they doing? They were praying for his release. Now, listen, if Peter had been there, if Peter had taught there, Mark had probably witnessed those things.

He had witnessed what Peter had said. Peter knocks on the door of the house, and while the church is praying for his release, I hope you all get this, while they're praying for his release, and

the servant Rhoda comes to the door, she is so excited that Peter's out there.

[20 : 21] She don't have enough sense to open the door and let him in. And she goes back in and tells the church that she interrupts the prayer session to say, Peter is standing outside free at the door.

And they said, you're out of your mind. Ain't it interesting that the church was praying for his release? And then when God released him, they said, there ain't no way in the world he's been released. Listen, when you pray about something, believe it.

Believe God can do it. It makes a difference. I promise you that. Acts 11 tells us that Barnabas and Saul are taking a famine relief offering to the church in Jerusalem from Antioch, and they take John Mark with them.

Galatians 4 verse 10 tells us that Mark is Barnabas' cousin, and Barnabas is called the son of encouragement in Acts 4.

Barnabas is a Levite. And if he's a Levite, that means that he served in the church often. He may have been serving the priest. He may have been a priest.

[21 : 27] But either way, he was serving in the church. And he was a good example for his cousin, Mark, because he was busy serving.

And it tells us that Barnabas believed that Mark was useful. And so when Paul and Barnabas set out on what's called Paul's first missionary journey, Barnabas said, let's take Mark with us. He'll be useful for us. Mark goes with them. But not long after he had been on the trip, he leaves them. He returns to Jerusalem.

And no justified reason for his desertion is mentioned in Scripture. He quits. He deserts them. He goes home. In Acts 15, they set out on the second missionary journey. Barnabas tells Paul, I want to take Mark with us.

[22 : 42] Paul refuses to take him because he deserted him last time. Scripture tells us that Barnabas and Paul got in a sharp disagreement about it to the point that Mark and Barnabas went one way.

Paul picked up Silas and went the other way. And we don't hear from Barnabas for two years after that split. We don't hear from Mark for ten years after that split.

His reputation is scarred and at least some refuse to use him. And he does not come up again in Scripture until Colossians chapter 4 verse 10.

When the Apostle Paul said this, In other words, sometime within that ten years of absence, Mark has now caught up with Paul and he's with Paul or he's at least close by.

Paul's in prison. Mark's not in prison. So he's close by. It was the first of two imprisonments of Paul that's recorded in Scripture. And that's when he most likely wrote the book of Ephesians.

[24 : 07] It's when he most likely wrote the book of Colossians. It's when he most likely wrote Philemon. And when he writes Philemon, he mentions Mark in that letter as well. So Mark has been missing for ten years.

But at some point in that ten years, he has got up with Paul. Time has healed the wound between them. Now, fast forward about five years to Paul's second Roman imprisonment when he writes to Timothy.

In 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 9, the Apostle Paul says, Do your best to come to me soon. And then in verse 11 he says, Get Mark and bring him with you.

For he is very useful to me for ministry. That is written over 20 years from the day when Peter knocked on the door of the house that was praying for his release at Mark's mom's house. Mark, the deserter, is useful for ministry. Not only was Mark with Paul, he has a real unique perspective.

[25 : 34] He was also with Peter. Some of those ten years that is missing in Scripture, he is with Peter. He was a companion to Peter.

He was a confidant to Peter. When he deserted Paul and Barnabas, he went to Jerusalem, but he didn't stay there. He was in Rome with Peter.

In 64 AD, Rome burned. And it was awful. I've heard it compared to the damage that Katrina did to New Orleans.

To put that in a regional term, what Hugo did to the coast of the Carolinas. That kind of damage is the kind of damage that was done to Rome in the burning.

R.C. Sproul said, The burning was so bad it took 1,900 years to get electricity there. Nero blamed it on Christians.

[26 : 37] He probably burned the city himself. But he blamed it on Christians and began torturing them. He took bloody wild animal skins and wrapped them around Christians' bodies and turned wild dogs on them for an audience to watch.

He impaled the bodies of Christians. While they were alive, dipped them in tar and lit his garden with the bodies of Christians.

He fed them to the lions in the Colosseum for the citizens to watch. Peter was executed during those days.

And so was Paul. Paul. But in 1 Peter 5, verse 13, Peter calls Mark his son.

Mark's gospel is the eyewitness account of Peter. It is written to those that live in Rome. He used a lot of Latin.

[27 : 50] That's what Romans spoke. If he uses Aramaic, which is what the Hebrews spoke, he explains it for the Romans. Because that's his audience.

He's not a pastor. He's not an apostle. He's not a teacher. He's a helper. Yet God used him to transcribe the testimonies and the account of Peter and write a gospel.

God used him to be a help to Paul after he deserted Paul. Mark was an ordinary guy. But God used him extraordinarily.

He put him in the path of Peter. He put him in the path of Paul. Both of which he helped. Even though he had deserted them earlier.

God uses deserters. God uses sinners. God uses failures.

[29 : 01] And thank God. He does. Because my friend, that's all of us. But for the grace of God, none of us would have hope. But by his grace, he welcomes us to come as we are.

And if you've never come to Christ, you've never surrendered your life to Christ. Don't wait until you get it all figured out. Don't wait until you get it all cleaned up. You'll never get it done.

You can't do it. Matter of fact, the acknowledgement that you can't do it on your own is the reason why you need to come to Christ. And it is a prerequisite to come to Christ. When you acknowledge that, Lord, I'm a sinner and I can't fix myself.

I need you to forgive me, to cleanse me, to come into my life, and to change me. And from this day forward, I commit my life to follow you from this day forward. And if that's never happened to you, it's the best decision you'll ever make.

And it's the first decision you need to make. And you need to make it today. And thank God scripture tells us today is the day of salvation. He'll meet you where you are. He'll change your life.

[30 : 07] If that has happened to you, in the gratitude that you have of Christ changing your life, be like Mark.

Be a helper. We have a variety of places for you to serve. And when all pitch in, no one gets overwhelmed.

I've heard a statistic for 30 years in ministry that 20% of the people in the church do 80% of the work. I don't know what church that was.

They come up with that. And I don't know how accurate it is. But I've seen the trends. It sounds similar. And the reality is it shouldn't be. We all have a gift.

If you're a child of God, he's gifted you. It may take you time to figure out what that gift is and to put that into use. But he has gifted you from God, a gift from God to use for his glory.

[31 : 14] So don't waste it. Be a helper. Be used of God. Listen, I realize that some have come into this church and you needed a break.

You wore out. I get that. And some of you have got the break. It's time to serve again.

It's time to get after it. God didn't save us, sanctify us, give us the strength and the authority and the power to be able to do what he's called us to do for us to sit by the wayside and not get busy.

Let's get after it. Some of you have been serving for years. And you need a break. Take a breather when you need it. But then get back after it. It's a pit stop.

It's not a lifetime. It's a pit stop. And the reality is nobody needs to be overwhelmed with what they do.

[32 : 19] When everybody, and Apostle Paul talks a lot about the body of Christ and how we all work together, when everybody works together and does their part, the matter is taken care of.

I can't help but think about, I heard somebody, a pastor one time in a capitalist stewardship campaign say, the good news is we got all the money that we need to accomplish this project. The bad news is it's still in your pockets. We got everybody that we need to take care of every responsibility in this church and to not have to do it week in, week out, week in, week out. Would you take four Sundays a year? To hold a baby in the nursery? Would you take four Sundays a year to lead kid worship that goes on underneath us right now? Would you take five Sundays a year? Would you take five Sundays a year? Would you take five Sundays a year to greet folks?

[33 : 46] Smile at them? Act like you're glad they're here? Pleased to them? On and on. I could go on through every ministry and there's a lot of people that want me to, to promote the need that they have for us to get this done.

I just ask you to be a helper, be used of God and be willing. Be willing. You were handed a card as you came in. If you wasn't handed a card and you didn't raise your hand when we asked you to, shame on you.

You should have. The reality is when everybody does their part, God will give us help where it's needed to make every ministry as full and wonderful as it can be.

To give all a chance to serve and I believe that we're all to be servants in the family of God.

Because that's what we are to do. It's an obedience matter of serving the Lord.

So, this is what I want you to do. In addition to any decision the Lord may be leading you to make, I want you to take that card.

[35 : 03] Maybe you don't know what all these ministries are. We didn't use all the names and things like that of these individual ministries because people wouldn't necessarily know what it means. So, we tried to give a simple explanation.

But if you don't know what all the ins and outs are, but you're interested in finding out, just check that block and put your name. You ain't signed up for nothing. You've signed up for an interest. Just check that block. And then as you leave today, there are offering boxes on this side. There's an offering box on that side. There's offering boxes at the doors. And nobody's watching you and nobody's paying attention to you except the Lord.

And he's eyeing you. So, you take this card and put it in one of those slots. Okay? Don't put an empty card in there. God sees that.

I don't need your empty cards. Ain't nobody keeping a record but God. But you put that in there and say, look, I'm willing to serve. I can't do it all the time. I don't want to do it all the time. We don't want you to do it all the time.

[36 : 07] You know what I want? I want nursery volunteers to be able to come to church. I want to be able to be in here. I want people who work kid worship to be able to be in here during this time.

People who serve in other capacities around to not be able to have to miss corporate worship on a regular basis. We don't need to be doing that. God's enabled us to have everything that we need.

And so, let's just be faithful. I am thankful that God took a man like Mark who had very little, if any, eyewitness testimony of what Christ had done on the earth for himself.

There's some interesting situations in the Gospel of Mark that we'll deal with. But he listened to what others said.

He had the opportunity to be a part of powerful ministries just as a helper for Peter and for Paul that make up the activities of the first century of the Gospel getting out to the known world.

[37 : 20] God used Mark as a helper. He was not a perfect man. He had made mistakes. He had let people down.

But I'm thankful that God uses such as that. Let us be faithful to let him use us. With every head bowed and every eye closed, I mentioned a few moments ago that if you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus, it's the most important decision you make and forget everything else I said, that's what you need to deal with.

If you have done that, but you've never acknowledged that publicly, then I encourage you to do that today. Acknowledge that publicly. Come down and say, I know I've given my life to Christ, but I've never acknowledged that publicly.

I've never told anybody else about it. And I've never been baptized as a believer. Jesus, by his commission and by his example, told us that was the way to follow that up. We won't do that this morning, but we'll line it up in the coming days if you'll come.

Maybe God's leading you to First Baptist Church. I'm thankful that God is doing a wonderful work in the life of this church. He's given us great growth and expanded our ministries and expanded the needs of our ministries.

[38 : 36] And I'm thankful that he will provide. He always does. God's leading you to be a part of Pickens First Baptist Church. You come, I'll be happy to guide you in what that process looks like.

Maybe you're here and you just need to hold a card up to the Lord and say, Lord, I don't even know what I'm asking about, but I want to be used of you the way you'd have me to be used.

I don't want to be overwhelmed, but I don't want to be overwhelming either. I just want to serve as you give me an opportunity. Help me to be faithful to walk through the doors that you open.

My friend, that'll honor God. That'll honor God and God bless us such as that. Lord Jesus, I love you and I thank you for the love that you have for us. Lead us, Lord, this morning to be obedient to follow as you lead.

In Jesus' precious name, amen.