



DAILY  
READINGS

JANUARY 28 –  
FEBRUARY 1

MARK

## **Day 1 – We’re Supposed to Listen to this Guy?**

### **Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)**

#### **Scripture Reading – Mark 1:1-8**

It might seem strange that this gospel of Jesus Christ doesn't start with Jesus Christ himself, but rather with the significantly dishevelled, slightly unappealing character of John the Baptist, a wild prophet living wild in the desert on locusts and honey, wearing clothes made from animal skins and proclaiming a message that, frankly, many people would have found weird if not distasteful. Why has Mark started his gospel like this? Two reasons immediately present themselves. First, Mark was most likely writing to Roman Christians, and they would know that when important Roman officials came to town they were always preceded by messengers sent ahead to herald their arrival: someone of real prominence is on the way, prepare yourselves for his coming.

Second, the biblical quotes Mark uses give the other reason, the first from Malachi 3:1, the second from Isaiah 40:3. The quote from Isaiah is more than appropriate. The second half of the book of Isaiah is all about God's promise of salvation to his people. Much of this part of the book is taken up with the coming of God's anointed one, the Messiah, and also the one who would go before him, announcing his coming. God promised Isaiah that a Redeemer would come, and that a messenger, "a voice of one calling in the desert," would prepare the way for him. John is the herald that God has promised all along, the one who would point to the arrival of the Messiah that God had promised all along. John may not have been what people were expecting, but he was part of what God had promised.

#### **Questions to Consider**

Why was the messenger important? What was God's reason for one?

#### **Prayer**

Lord God, thank you for the call to turn back to you, thank you for the opportunity given us to return to you and ready ourselves for a place in your kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)**

## **Day 2 – An Old Story with a New Twist**

### **Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)**

#### **Scripture Reading – Mark 1:1-8**

Scripture-reading people might have been expecting John, or at least someone like him, but they would not have been expecting his message. Whether looking out for a prophet or a Messiah, most people would have been praying and hoping for someone to come and rescue them from their oppressors (the Romans) and return to them control of their ancient land (Israel). A Messiah or king, a leader with a sword and a plan – this would have been the predominant hope. But what they got was John the Baptist. And rather than a message promising the destruction of their enemies, they heard a call commanding, urging, pleading for repentance, a call for people to turn from their sins and turn back to God – a call that seemed to shift the problem from external enemies to internal disobedience.

John was calling the people to leave their sinful lives behind them, and turn back to God. His message was one of repentance, repentance as the only appropriate response to the one who was coming after him. People needed to renounce their sins, give up their sinful, selfish, evil ways of living, throw themselves on the mercy of God and seek his forgiveness. By doing so they would not only (re)establish a relationship with God, but also open themselves up to God working in their lives through his Spirit. God was doing a new thing in Jesus; John was pointing the way towards Jesus and calling people to prepare themselves for this new thing, this new life.

#### **Question to Consider**

Why did John focus more on our internal dispositions and habits?

#### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, help me remain in you and within the bounds of the new life you have called me to. May I leave – and always seek to leave – the sinful way of living behind. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)**

## **Day 3 – The Baptism**

### **Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)**

#### **Scripture Reading – Mark 1:9**

Everyone in Jerusalem probably ended up hearing about the wild preacher called John, who had set himself up near the Jordan River and had started calling all people to turn from their sins and be baptised in preparation for the Messiah's arrival. Jesus obviously heard about him too, as almost immediately at the start of Mark's gospel we read of Jesus seeking out John in order to be baptised. Jesus was baptised right at the start of his ministry. It was his first public action. He could have made his mark immediately among the established religious leaders in Jerusalem. Instead, he deliberately headed into the wilderness to associate with ordinary people as they repented of their sin. He preferred to identify with the common people of the land, rather than the religious leaders.

Being innocent of any sin, Jesus did not need baptism. So why did he choose it? To identify with us in our humanity and to receive the public approval of his Father and to show that he was part of a community, not some random individual of on his own, calling from an exalted position to those beneath him. Jesus obeyed the will of God the Father, who in turn poured out his love and the gift of the Holy Spirit upon him. This was the beginning of Jesus' public mission, one that he did not start until the eternal community—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—was reunited at the time of his baptism.

#### **Questions to Consider**

What message would people have seen in Jesus' baptism? What kind of barriers might Jesus have had to overcome in being baptised? What about you?

#### **Prayer**

Almighty Father, thank you for joining with us in humanity and in community. Thank you for your solidarity with us and example to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)**

## **Day 4 – “This is My Beloved Son...”**

### **Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)**

#### **Scripture Reading – Mark 1:10-11**

It seems like it might be a strange thing for God to say. Maybe some other heavenly pronouncement would have been better. We might think that a more far-reaching, influential thing for a voice from heaven to say would be, “This is the Messiah you have long been promised, finally come to rescue you and sacrificially save the world from its sins.” That’s the kind of clear message that might make the path for Jesus a little bit easier to tread. But that’s not what God is interested in here. That’s not the message he wants people to hear, and not the message he wants his son to hear. And not the message he has always wanted us to hear either.

Jesus is the Messiah and the Messiah represents his people. As God spoke of Jesus on the day of his baptism, so God speaks of every one of us. He doesn’t look at us just as we are on our own, in ourselves, but as we are in Jesus Christ. It can be difficult to understand this and even more difficult to remember it each day, especially if we have not experienced love, encouragement and support like this from our earthly parents. But we are God’s beloved children and we need to make that the first point of reference in our view of ourselves and in our view of each other. Being a follower of Jesus means living by this new reality, this new way of understanding ourselves and our world, and learning to see things as God sees them. And that includes how God sees us.

#### **Questions to Consider**

How do you know you are a child of God? How are you continually reminded of this? What implications does this reality hold for you?

#### **Prayer**

Loving Father, thank you for calling me a child of yours, thank you for loving me and drawing me back to yourself. Remind me again and again of your love, especially when I forget and look for validation in places where I should not. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)**

## **Day 5 – Into the Wilderness**

### **Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)**

#### **Scripture Reading – Mark 1:12-13**

We've only just got the story underway, we've spent some time with John, Jesus – saviour of all humanity, the one sent to redeem us all – has now turned up, and yet almost immediately he's driven out into the desert on his own, away from the crowds and the noise, away from those who would have heard John's message and heard the voice from heaven, away from anyone looking to hear what he has to say. Under the influence of the Spirit, Jesus has gone into the desert wilderness.

What is the point of the wilderness? Why are there times in our lives when it feels like we are in a barren place, a hard land, alone and unsure of what is coming next? These wilderness times or 'desert places' can, if we let them, serve a very important function in our lives. They are times of refining, of sifting, of working out what is really important, away from the distractions of all the things that clamour for our attention and make us think they are important. The wilderness helps us sort out the important from the unimportant, the essential from the unnecessary. These times are times best experienced and worked through alone, away from relationships and people that can (however good in themselves) sometimes distract us from what God would reveal to us. Wilderness times are important, as long as we are open to them, and embrace them for God's purpose. When hard, dry times come, we should not always seek to avoid them. Remember, Jesus went into the desert at the Spirit's prompting. It was something that he needed to do.

#### **Questions to Consider**

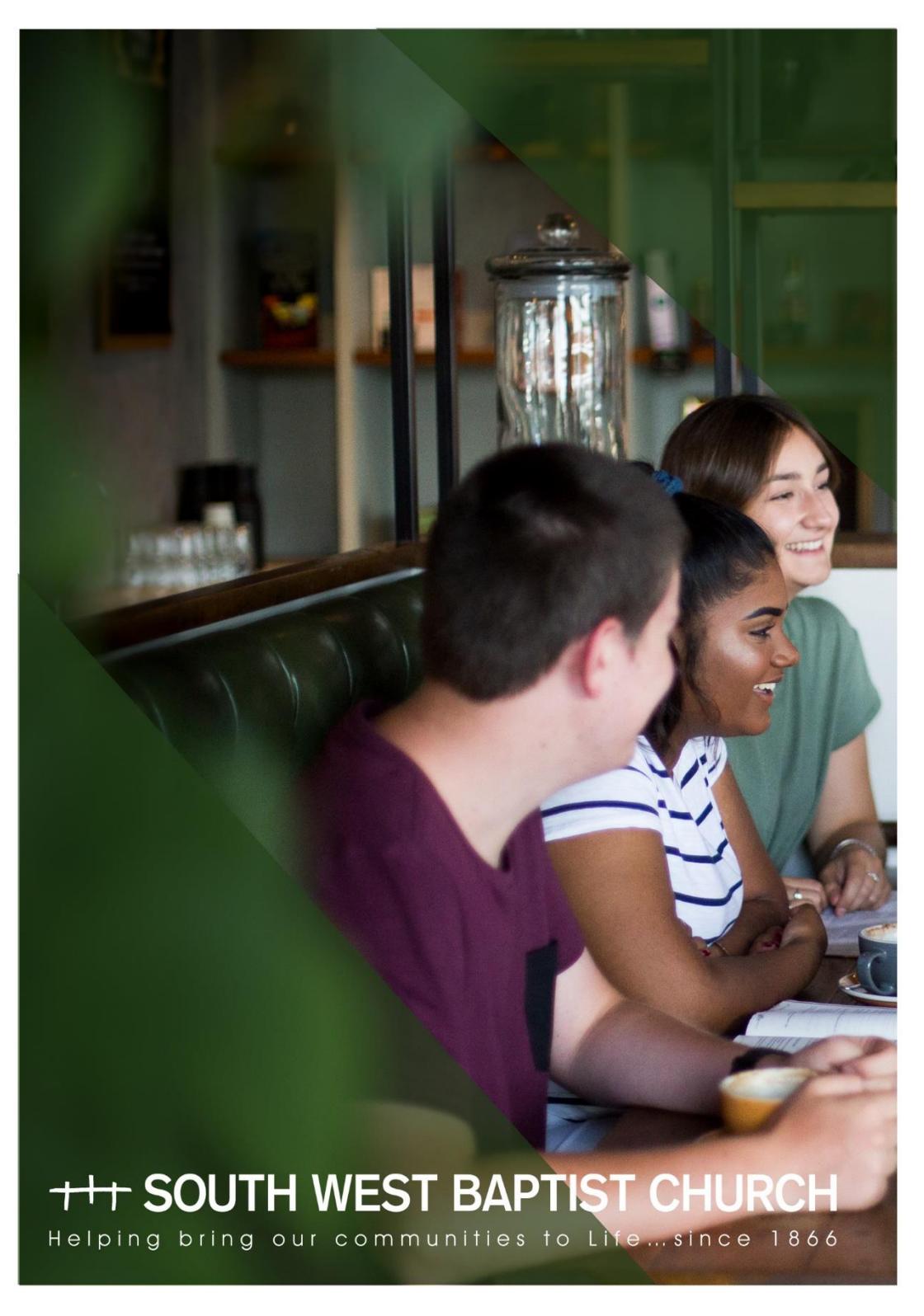
Why did Jesus need time in the wilderness? When have you experienced such times? What was the end result?

#### **Prayer**

Gracious God, help me see the potential worth of these wilderness times, and not shy away from what you would say to me in these times. Amen.

### **Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)**

## **Saturday/Sunday Notes**



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