Shattering the Silence

Mark 1:1-8

Introduction

January 12th 1888 was the year a historic blizzard struck the Great Plains states – Nebraska / Dakotas / Minnesota / parts of Iowa. The Blizzard left over 150 dead, many others having to have limbs amputated from frostbite and hypothermia.

One reason this particular blizzard was so deadly was the fact that it caught everyone off guard. Weather warnings were not too advanced in the day and that particular morning the people enjoyed a relative calm, warming trend for a few hours. The moderate temperatures left everyone poorly prepared for the onslaught of a blizzard.

As the front began moving across the region, temperatures dropped 20 degrees in minutes and a blinding, powdery snow was unleashed with winds whipping at 60 mph. One farmer and his wife who were taking advantage of the calm weather that morning had gone out to chore, leaving their children in the house with their grandmother. About 3:30 P.M. the husband said that he heard a hideous roar in the air. At first they thought it was the Omaha train. They looked up at the sky and snow descended like it was sliding out of a sack. Hurricane like winds blew and it became instantly frigid as well as dark as a cellar. They could not see their hands in front of them, let alone their home. All they could see was blinding snow. They became disoriented as to their directions. In fact, some of the people who froze to death in this storm were within 5 or 10 yards of shelter; others were blown way off course

The grandmother, inside with the children, sensed their danger and grabbed a cow bell in the house. She then stood in the doorway and began clanging it as loud as she could. The couple heard the sound and followed it home like a beacon to safety.

When we come to God's Word, we find that humanity is caught in a deadly storm of sorts - a self -inflicted storm of sin and rebellion against God. Left to ourselves we simply are blown further off course moving further and further away from God - We cannot find our way back on our own

Into this storm – the gospel message rings out like the grandmother's cowbell – sounding out the way home for man who has lost his way

In the first chapter of Mark's Gospel – the one ringing the cowbell is none other than John the Baptist!

This morning we come to 1st century Israel

Israel has had 400 silent years without a prophetic voice on the scene – not since Malachi had the people heard the punctuated cry of a prophet saying, 'Thus saith the Lord.'

John the Baptist will shatter that silence

He was the voice of one crying out in the wilderness – make ready the way of the Lord

i.e. – the Messiah is coming

It seemed that all Israel was running out to hear this prophet and to be baptized by him

What was the meaning of all this commotion?

Mark tells us that the coming of John the Baptist marked the beginning of the gospel age

Mark 1:1 – 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.'

One cold night in a New York jail cell – a man by the name of Eduardo – wrapped a bed sheet tightly around his neck and was preparing to take his own life. Looking at a sentence of 15 years to life – he believed death was preferable. As the sheet tightened on his throat – he heard a voice – a voice that shattered the awful silence. What did the voice say? 'Eduardo – Don't do it. There is hope for your life. The voice was enough to cause him to untie the knot – and listen to what the prison guard had to say.

Shortly afterward – the guard gave him a Bible and told him to read the gospels first. Eduardo read the gospels with great interest – then moved on to a vigorous reading of the epistles of Paul. His eyes latched onto II Corinthians 5:17

II Corinthians 5:17 – 'Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.'

Eduardo was changed - - - He had heard the cowbell! - - - Today Eduardo is married with children – holds a Bible degree and serves as a chaplain in a Tennessee maximum security prison – offering the same hope that rescued him to other inmates

Eduardo: 'Life has not been easy – but I have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, even to those who make terrible mistakes like mine.'

That salvation is available to sinners yet today – who put their faith in Christ the Messiah

I. The Good News – vv. 1-4

The word gospel ευαγγελιον – means good news / good tidings

The Gospel begins in the program of God with John the Baptist – the divinely appointed forerunner – sent to prepare the hearts of Israel to become ready to receive their Messiah

The coming of John was not an arbitrary / unplanned event in the course of human history

This was the dawn of the time appointed by God for the coming of the Redeemer

In fact – Mark quotes from Malachi 3:1 / Isaiah 40:3

Mark 1:3 – 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord.'

John was calling for people to prepare the way for the Savior

The manner in which John carried this out was with a baptism of repentance

We might note a couple of items about Mark's Gospel

Mark is the gospel of action

Ευθυσ – [used 42 X in the gospel of Mark] – straightway / immediately
Only 12 X in the rest of the NT

Mark's gospel dives right in and moves at a rapid pace

If you like action movies – like Mission: Impossible - - - Avengers - - Mark's Gospel is for you

If you like Terms of Endearment / Christmas Romance – made for tv movies – not so much

Mark moves quickly to take us to the public ministry of Jesus – [no birth narrative]

Who was Mark? / Who is writing this gospel

He is an interesting figure

Papias [2nd century] – said that Mark had followed Peter – and that this was essentially Peter's gospel

John Mark – his more formal name – His mother owned a house in Jerusalem – where the early disciples gathered at times for prayer

Acts 12:11, 12 – 'And when Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." And when he realized *this,* he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.'

Mark was the cousin of Barnabas - - - and became the source of some friction between Paul and Barnabas

Acts 15:36-40 – 'And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord,

and see how they are." And Barnabas was desirous of taking John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and departed, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.'

It seems that later on Paul had a change of heart about Mark

II Timothy 4:11 – 'Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.'

H.A. Ironside: 'It is just like God to select the one-time unfaithful servant Mark to tell the story of the ever-faithful Servant – His own blessed Son.'

Mark was reconciled back with Paul

He would go on to write – what many believe was the first written Gospel

Tozer: 'Maybe you have failed recently. If so, there's no reason for you to keep saying to yourself, "I'm no good." No, you're not good. None of us are. Still, we have one who loves us despite our failures, so much so that He died to secure our salvation.'

God uses flawed people – redeemed by His grace / cleansed by His blood

It doesn't matter what you have done – if you repent and run to Christ - - - He will cleanse you / wash you / forgive you – quite possibly put you to service

Mark tells us – at the beginning of the gospel – it all started with John the Baptist – the forerunner

This is the dawn of the gospel era

Israel has gone for 400 years without a prophet [not since Malachi] - - - John the Baptist explodes on the scene - - - calling for repentance

Matthew 3:2 – 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

Robert Stein: 'With the coming of John the Baptist the voice of prophecy was once again heard in Israel. The spiritual drought of the past four centuries had

come to an end. God was again visiting His people. Yet John's message was not an end in itself. Integral to (and the highlight of) his message was the announcement of the Coming One. A person greater than the greatest of the Old Testament prophets was present in John the Baptist, but a far greater one was at hand. John labored to prepare the people for this person. [Jesus the Messiah, p. 100]

There was another period of Israel where the voice of God was quiet

Go back to a day in Israel's history [1100 B.C.] - - - we are told

I Samuel 3:1-5 – 'Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent . . . and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God *was,* that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am." Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, lie down again." So he went and lay down.'

Here is this boy – the miracle baby born to Hannah whom she dedicated to the Lord – and he is hearing God's voice – he is being called upon to be a prophetic voice to Israel

I Samuel 3:6-9 – 'And the LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him. So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy. And Eli said to Samuel, "Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Thy servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.'

That was the beginning of Samuel's prophetic ministry to Israel – that would span the career of King Saul – and included the anointing of David

Another OT prophet Amos would later predict years of drought upon the land – of hearing God's voice

Amos 8:11-12 - "Behold, days are coming declares the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the Lord. And people will stagger from sea to sea . . . they will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord but they will not find it."

The absence of the Word of God was a judgment upon the people for their hardness

If we stop listening to God – He stops talking

Davie Jeremiah: 'Today, the Bible is available nearly everywhere, but deaf ears can still produce spiritual drought.'

You and I are a blessed people – we have our own copy of the completed revelation in our homes - - - on our computers

Do we read it / do we listen to it? Are we practicing it?

I Peter 2:2 - 'Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.'

The fact that John required baptism of all – points to the fact that God was preparing to establish a new covenant with Israel

Baptism was the outward sign of an inward repentance

In fact, John rebuked some of the Pharisees telling them to make their repentance genuine

Matthew 3:7, 8 – 'But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"' Therefore, bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance.'

If their repentance was not genuine - - - it didn't matter how wet they got!

Baptism would become the outward sign of the New covenant / along with the Lord's Table

Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost was a message of repentance and baptism for the church

Acts 2:37-38 – "Brethren, what shall we do?" and Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

Repentance = turn back to God - - - turn away from sin

Martin Luther – when he nailed his 95 theses

Martin Luther: [Theses # 1] – 'When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent", He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.'

The RCC had mistranslated the word for repentance [μετανοιεω] as 'do penance'
Luther said – 'No' – this refers to reformation of life / conforming to the Bible / turning from sin

God's Word to man today – is "Repent - - - and believe the Gospel"

Jesus said:

Luke 5:32 – 'I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'

II. It's Not About Me – vv. 5-8

John was the first prophet to appear in Israel for over 400 years

So – there was active interest in what he had to say – and what his message was about

Many were coming out to be baptized

John's camel hair clothing and coarse diet would remind the people of Elijah and his ministry to a wayward Israel

What did Elijah do?

He called a wayward nation back to God

If we remember – the kingdom of Israel split into two after Solomon - - - with the Southern kingdom being ruled by a descendant of David [some good kings like Josiah / Hezekiah] - - - but the northern tribes went far afield - - - with Ahab marrying Jezebel - - - a pagan woman from the Sidonians - - - she introduced Baal worship – and sought to put the prophets of the Lord to death

Elijah came on the scene and rebuked Ahab and Jezebel / demonstrated the futility of Baal worship on Mt. Carmel

So now – John comes to Israel with a similar kind of call

'lay aside your idols' – those empty / vain things you worship and turn back to the one true God

John functioned in the spirit and power of an Elijah - - - John's rebuke of Herod would eventually get him killed

There was a woman who went into missions a few years back – she went to Iraq – to work with a Christian organization – she understood the risks and the difficulty

She gave an envelope to her pastor before she left – she said, 'I want you to open this and read this if anything happens to me while over there.'

He filed it away – didn't think a whole lot about it

But – then it happened – she was killed [car bomb or something like that]

He opened her letter – it said, 'Pastor – if you are reading this – it means that I have gone home to be with my Lord. I want you and everybody at the church to know that I have absolutely no regrets about going into mission work.'

Those are the words of someone whose focus was upon the kingdom

We can't stay in this world [we all are going to die some day] - - - but we can do what we can for the Lord while we are here

John knew his role – He was here to promote Jesus

John says, 'I'm not worthy to carry his water bottle!' / to carry His tennis shoes

You and I are here to promote Jesus / God

Life is not about us – it's about Him and His glory - - - we kick against the goads until we figure that out – like Saul on the Damascus road

Max Lucado: 'God does not exist to make a big deal out of us. We exist to make a big deal out of Him. It's not about you. It's not about me. It's all about Him.'

When we enter the stream - - - the gospel flow - - - live to the glory of God - - - we find life as it was gloriously meant to be

John says: Water avails for the cleansing of the flesh – but the Spirit cleanses the soul

In the New Covenant God promised to pour out His Spirit upon His people – to write His laws on their hearts

The baptism of the Spirit took place in a grand fashion on the day of Pentecost

Afterwards – we find that when a person puts their trust in Christ – they receive the Holy Spirit

Conclusion

The Great Hymn – Hos Firm a Foundation – was published anonymously – ascribed only to the letter K

This was apparently the author's way of saying - - - it's not about me – it's about Him!

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

John the Baptist has come

God's own Son has made atonement for sins – and left behind an empty tomb

We are called to come and rest in the finished work of Christ

MLJ: 'We know what would happen to the kind of person who thinks that he can walk into Buckingham Palace and appear before the Queen at any time he likes; he would very soon be dealt with and thrown out, and perhaps cast into prison, as he would deserve to be. And yet people imagine that just as they are, without any meditation or mediation, they can go into the presence of God. There is only One who can introduce you, there is only One who can countersign your visiting card. It is the Son of God, and He has written His name with His own blood.'