**Starting with a change of mind**

Text: Mark 1:9-15

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** 2 Peter 3:8-13; Isaiah 42:1-9; Mark 1:9-15

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 107, 455, 319, 51b, 523

**Series:** The gospel of Mark (#3)

**Theme:** Mark begins his revelation of Jesus Christ with His baptism, temptation and Galilean gospel preaching ministry which are all linked together by the theme of repentance – a change of mind about who we are and who Jesus is and what He has done - that results in a change of behaviour.

**Proposition:** Hear the gospel of God and be ready to change your mind about yourself and Jesus Christ.

**Introduction**

Have you ever changed your mind about something? - perhaps reversing a previous decision, opinion or viewpoint? Most, if not all of us, have. To be someone whose mind is completely unaffected by others is to be dangerously isolated and particularly prone to error. God has designed our brains to be ‘plastic’ – mouldable, malleable, teachable. If your mind is not changing as you grow in knowledge, understanding and wisdom then you are not learning and developing. Having said that, changing your mind constantly is not wise. James writes about the ‘*double-minded man, unstable in all his ways*’ (1:8).

As we progress in Mark’s gospel today the theme of the three events we focus on in the early ministry of Christ is **repentance**. In the Greek language, the word translated ‘repentance’ literally means to ‘have another mind’. To repent is to change your mind about sin and about Jesus Christ. To repent is to see sin as a deadly poison to be avoided - not as a momentary pleasure to be played with. To repent is to be deeply sorry when you to yield to temptation. To repent is to see Jesus Christ, not as just a good teacher, a moral person, a prophet. To repent is to know Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour to whom you cling and your Lord whom you love and worship.

A person who has truly repented of his or her sin and exercised faith in Christ will give evidence of a changed life in their attitudes and behaviours (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:19–23; James 2:14–26). That is why John the Baptist called people to “*produce fruit in keeping with repentance*” as Matthew records (Matthew 3:8). So we could rightly say that the gospel – the glad tidings of Jesus Christ, the Son of God – begins with repentance – a change of mind.

We’ve already seen from the first part of Mark’s gospel that John was a ‘forerunner’ of Christ. He was an Old Testament type of prophet who prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. Mark records that “*John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*” (1:4). John’s work was to call people to change their minds about their own sin: to see that their rebellion against God made them unclean, impure and unholy and to accept that they needed to have their sin removed in order to be acceptable to God. John’s baptism in the waters of the river Jordan visibly showed the people’s need for a radical change of mind. Similarly, the baptism, temptation and preaching of Jesus Christ also reveal that the gospel starts with a foundational change of mind.

When a ship at sea, subject to ocean currents and winds, journeys from one port to another, constant corrections are necessary in order to keep the vessel pointing in the right direction. It has rightly been said that ships at sea are off-course almost all the time – either to the left or right, that is port or starboard. It’s like that in the Christian life – we need constant correction of our minds to bring us back to the gospel, because we tend to drift off course as tribulations, persecutions, the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches draw us away from Christ.

For those who do not yet know Christ as their Lord and Saviour, coming to Him starts with a complete change of mind – both about themselves and Him. We’re going to look at the baptism, temptation and the gospel call of Christ today from Mark 1:9-15 under three headings:

1. Jesus identifies with us
2. Jesus was tempted like us
3. Jesus calls people like us
4. **Jesus identifies with us**

Some people employ cleaners to keep their houses spotless, washed and unsoiled. However, they don’t want the cleaners to think that they live in a dirty house, so they clean the home before the cleaners come. So, why we might legitimately ask, have your house cleaned if it is already free from spots and stains? It’s a good question. It’s actually the same question that the Baptism of Jesus raises.

Why was Jesus baptised in the Jordan by John, receiving a ‘baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’ when there were no sins of His to be forgiven? Why be baptised when He had no need of a change of mind about sin or salvation? Mark, in his characteristically brief account, doesn’t directly reveal the answers, but Matthew records that “*John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness*” (Matt 3:14-15).

John knew that he himself was a sinner who needed to be forgiven. He also knew that Jesus was not a sinner and therefore Christ needed no forgiveness. He knew that Jesus is the ‘*Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*’ (John 1:29). Yet Jesus submitted Himself to be baptised by a sinful man ‘to fulfil all righteousness’. In his baptism, Jesus was identifying – that is showing His close association with - each one of us. He is the divine Son of God who was ‘*born in the likeness of men*’ (Phil 2:7), ‘*born of woman, born under the law*’ (Gal 4:4). A fully human person of flesh and blood like us, born under the curse of the law in order to associate Himself with lawbreakers like us.

In being baptised by John, Jesus did more than show an example of ‘doing the right thing’ by receiving the physical sign of the need for spiritual cleansing. He substituted Himself under the waters of baptism for others. In our Reformed churches we use the term ‘vicar’ to describe a man who is in training for the ordained ministry of the Word and sacraments. A ‘vicar’ stands in the place of a minister, without actually being one (yet). So Christ vicariously stood in the place of sinners in the river Jordan when He was baptised.

It is also important to know that baptism is not only a sign of the need for spiritual cleansing, it **also** points to God’s judgement. Later Jesus would ask the sons of Zebedee, James and John, “*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?*" (Mark 10:38). Here Jesus links the Old Testament symbol of the cup for suffering and wrath (Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17-22; Jer 25:15; Eze 23:31-34) to baptism which was also a sign of judgement. We see this when the waters of the Red Sea closed in on Pharaoh and his army (Ex 14:28) but the Lord enabled His people to pass through the waters on dry ground. They were ‘baptised…in the sea’ (1 Cor 10:2). The Apostle Peter later connects baptism to the global flood in the days of Noah (1 Pet 3:21) in which almost all of humanity at the time perished, but eight people were saved by God’s grace.

The same water was the means of survival for some and death for others. You know that water itself can be both life-giving and life-taking. We must consume this incredible substance regularly to live. However, if we are submerged beneath the same liquid for longer than a few minutes, we die. When Jesus was baptised, He pointed forward to the coming judgement upon Himself on the cross when He would vicariously stand in the place of sinners as He died for the transgressions of many.

Jesus is a human being, but not an ordinary one. Nobody else who was baptised in the Jordan, or in any other water anywhere before or since, has received unqualified divine approval for their own life and conduct. Mark records the opening of the heavens as Jesus rose from the waters of His baptism. A dove – a symbol of gentleness and peace - descended on Jesus as the Holy Spirit came down on Him as the consecrated Servant of the Lord. A voice, that of God the Father, came from heaven declaring “*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*” (1:11). Jesus is both the representative repentant believer in need of forgiveness and the truly faithful Israelite who completely pleases God the Father.

In three verses Mark reveals that Jesus is both like us and not like us. He was willing to stand in the place of those who have changed their mind about their sin and turned to God for help. On the cross, He would be willing to die in the place of many as the only ‘*faithful and true*’ (Rev 19:11) human being.

Have you ever struggled with your sin, with trial and trouble, sorrow and pain? Have you ever experienced great pain, loss, sorrow and sadness? Have you ever thought or said, “nobody else understands just how hard it is to be me in my life?”. Well, I have some good news for you. Jesus fully understands you; better than anyone else – including you!

If you have changed your mind about your sin and turned to God for help and cleansing and believe that Jesus suffered God’s fierce judgement on your behalf, then know that Jesus was baptised by John in the river Jordan for your sake. He identifies with you, just as you are. He was also tempted, just as you are, which brings us to our second point.

1. **Jesus was tempted like us**

It is clear from Mark’s gospel that Jesus was on a journey. He moved from the waters of the river Jordan where He was baptised into the wilderness. He went from a wet place to a dry one. He followed a parallel pathway to the Israelites who were delivered by the Lord from their captivity in Egypt. **Just as** Israel was ‘baptised by Moses…in the sea’ (1 Cor 10:2 cf. Ex 14:13-31) and then led by the Spirit in the pillars of cloud and fire to be tested for 40 years in the desert (Ex 14:19-20), **so**, Jesus, after His baptism, is ‘driven’ by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for 40 days.

The word ‘drove’ is a strong term meaning ‘to force or drive out’. This conveys the necessity of Jesus being tempted by Satan just as Adam, the first man, was in the garden of Eden. Whereas Eden was a place of peace, harmony, security and safety, the wilderness into which Jesus entered was inhabited by ‘wild animals’. Mark’s inclusion of this detail shows that the wilderness was a threatening place where Satan was also ‘prowling around’. Just as angels went with the people of Israel in the desert (14:19; 23:20; 32:34; 33:20) so angels ministered to Jesus (v13). In a few words, Mark clearly shows that the Enemy did not defeat Jesus, despite the lengthy and arduous duration of this period of testing.

Jesus would later be tested by Peter’s suggestion that He avoid the cross (8:33) and in Gethsemane by the temptation to give into his sorrow, distress and trouble and so save His own life (14:33-36). Temptation is pressure to change your mind from resisting sin so that you surrender and indulge yourself. The battle of temptation comes as Satan tries to change your mind. That is exactly what He did in the garden of Eden. “*Did God actually say?*” (Gen 3:1), “*You will not surely die*” (Gen 3:4)

Changing your mind from trusting God to disbelieving Him can be very attractive in this world, a place described by puritan author John Bunyan as ‘Vanity Fair’. Here at all times, Bunyan writes one can see "jugglings, cheats, games, plays, fools, apes, knaves, and rogues”. In Bunyan’s Pilgrims Progress, Vanity Fair did not deliver on the lasting joy and satisfaction that it seemed to promise to all who would indulge in her goods and services.

Likewise, this world is not all it seems. This is now a fundamentally broken, groaning place, continuing for a time under God’s judgement. Violent weather patterns, destructive winds, flooding, earthquakes, wars, suffering and death all testify to this reality. This earth where we now live is the arena in which Satan tempts all who will listen to him to change their mind about who they are and about who Christ is. The deceiver bids you see that you are a worthy person who deserves more than you have and that if God really cared for you then your life would be easier and more pleasurable. Or that your sins are too great for God to save you. The Adversary wants you to change your mind about Jesus – any lie will do, for example: Jesus was just another human being who is long dead; Jesus is God, but has no interest or connection with you; Jesus doesn’t know you or relate to you in any way. You are nothing to Him.

Jesus faced the lies and deceit of Satan as a man who had emptied Himself of the privileges of being God (Phil 2:7). His mind was/is that of a humble, obedient servant who looked out for the interests of others (Phil 2:4). It was, and is, in the interests of others (people like us) that Jesus was tempted as we all are. As in His baptism, so also in His temptation, Jesus identifies with us. He is closely associated with us. He is the God-man who set aside His ‘God-ness’ (divinity) to be tempted as a mere man.

He does not demand of us that we replicate His time of testing in the wilderness and come out with a 100% success score as He did. He knows that, even though there has always been a way of escape for you and me from the temptations we have faced (1 Cor 10:13), we have not always taken that path, but instead we have failed our Lord repeatedly. He knows your struggles, your failures. He knows your mind and heart (John 2:24; Psalm 139:1-5). He understands your temptations, He has the ability and experience to sympathize with your weaknesses (Heb 4:15) without, in any way, approving of your ongoing sin. He is full of grace and truth (John 1:14) perfectly just, merciful and kind. He is calling you now, today, to come to Him.

1. **Jesus calls people like us**

I remember, as a young boy growing up in England, standing by the side of the road with a large crowd waiting for the Queen to drive past on a visit through the town where we lived. There had been days of build-up, making ready and anticipation. Police and other officials prepared the route, clearing traffic and keeping the crowd to carefully designated areas. I recall my fleeting glimpse of the Monarch as she smiled and waved from her Rolls-Royce Phantom V when it drove past me. Her arrival was surrounded by all the ceremony that you would expect for such an important person.

Mark simply records in His gospel that “*after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God*” (1:14). Jesus did not come dramatically descending from the clouds of heaven with thunder and lightning and a host of angels. He did not arrive with an army of warriors under his command. He did not appear in the Temple in Jerusalem with his face shining like the sun. He went to Galilee. This had been the northern part of the territory of Israel, occupied by the tribes of Naphtali, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun and Dan and later dominated by foreign nations so that the region was known as ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’. It was from this obscure outer region that the Messiah was to come, as foretold by Isaiah (9.1).

In the Old Testament the prophesies foretelling the Messiah and His forerunning herald, who would prepare His way, are interwoven and interconnected. So also in their lives, the pathways of John the Baptist and Jesus had crossed very early on. Inside his mother Elizabeth’s womb, John leapt when Mary, who was pregnant with the baby Jesus, came to visit (Luke 1:39-45).

As we’ve seen John baptised the One who had no need of repentance, spiritual cleansing or salvation. In Mark’s gospel, as the public ministry of Jesus begins in Galilee, the preaching and baptizing work of John ceases because he is arrested; later to be executed under Herod’s rule (Mark 6:27-28). It was an ominous, threatening beginning for the public ministry of the Messiah.

The preparation for the Lord’s coming was now complete, as Jesus said, ‘*the time is fulfilled*’ (Mark 1:15). All the plans and arrangements that God had carefully and purposefully put in place throughout history had come to realisation in Christ who proclaimed, “*the kingdom of God is at hand*” (v15). The Greek word translated ‘at hand’ means ‘is near’ or ‘approaches’. The ‘kingdom of God’ (also called ‘the kingdom of heaven’ in the Bible) is a central theme of the gospels, but also in the rest of both the New Testament (e.g. Acts 28:31; Romans 14:17, 1 Cor 15:50) and the Old (e.g. Psalm 103:19; Dan 4:3).

In the broad sense, the Kingdom of God is His sovereign rule over all that He has made. With the coming of Christ, the Kingdom of God has a more directed focus. It is God’s spiritual rule over the hearts and minds of all those who willingly submit to His authority. Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). His kingdom is not a temporary reign. His is not yet a physical kingdom; that will come when He returns to earth.

To be part of His kingdom it is necessary to change your mind. It is necessary to see your natural self as part of the earthly kingdom that is passing away. This is the kingdom of darkness, of Satan’s rule and of death. The thing about physical darkness is that you cannot see. In Satan’s temporary worldly kingdom, that is the spiritual reality. The Apostle Paul explains this to the Corinthians, writing about those who refuse to receive the good news of the gospel: “*In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*” (2 Cor 4:4).

Given this reality, it is not surprising that Jesus begins with a call to change your mind – about yourself and about Him. Here are His words “*repent and believe in the gospel*” (v15). If you desire to be part of the perfectly good Kingdom of God, a realm where you are ultimately safe, secure and satisfied, then all that you need to do is to respond to the call to repent and believe in the gospel.

There is a sense in which we are all like ships at sea. Some people are drifting aimlessly; lost on the ocean of life. Some people are charting a course towards a coming storm that is so ferocious that it will sink any vessel overtaken by it. These people need to hear that what they must start with is a change of mind about themselves and about Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist is no longer on this earth to call people to repentance in preparation for the coming of Christ. Jesus is no longer on this earth proclaiming the gospel of God. In God’s continuing, unfolding plan of salvation in history, we are here. Today we, brothers and sisters, are the prophets of God; His mouthpieces to speak into a dying world. Today we are partly scattered, yet gathered together in multiple small groups. Worshipping together as the Lord through His Word and Spirit directs us back to the right course, the pathway of following Christ as His disciples.

Like a captain carefully adjusting the rudder to bring His vessel back on track, so the Lord is at work in us all to correct our thinking through ongoing repentance and faith. Today, we are reminded that at its core, the gospel is a simple call to change your mind about yourself and about Jesus. Each of us needs to hold up the mirror of God’s Word and remember who we are and the pathway we are called to follow – that of holiness and godliness (2 Pet 3:11). Each of us needs to hold up the window of God’s Word and see Christ for who He is. He alone, identifies with our need for repentance and forgiveness, but has no need of this for Himself. He alone, identifies with our ongoing temptations, weaknesses, failures and sin, but has resisted temptation at all times. He alone, provides for entry into His Kingdom.

Congregation, today the Kingdom of God is at hand so ‘*repent and believe the gospel*’. Be prepared this week and into the future to call others, on behalf of your Lord, to repent and believe the gospel. If we don’t think that this is our task, then we need to start with a change of mind! In the words of Psalm 51 (10-13): **“***Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you*”.

AMEN.