

## **“New reality has begun” Mark 1:1-8**

**The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,” John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mar 1:1-8)**

Today we heard the very beginning of the gospel according Mark. And actually, we'll focus only on the very first sentence, and how are we to understand it. **The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** It is very unusual, if you compare it with the beginning of the three other gospels.

Thus, for example, Matthew begins his gospel account by creating a link with the Old Testament, showing that Jesus Christ, indeed, is the same Savior whom God Yahweh promised to his faithful servants Abraham and the king David.

Luke begin his gospel account as historians usually did it at that time, explaining how he got all the information gathered in his gospel account, and then proceeds retelling the story.

What about John? John opens his gospel account by looking back to the very beginning, to the Creation. He describes how everything was created by the divine Word, which later became flesh and dwelt among us as Jesus Christ.

Now, the gospel according Mark. Our today's focus. The first verse, or the first line is very abrupt. “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Very simple sentence. No verbs. Just this one statement. “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Now, think about this Mark's beginning. Isn't it a little awkward? Or confusing? When you begin to read any gospel account it is clear that a beginning is a beginning.

There is no reason to say that this is the beginning. When you write a letter, or email, you don't start it by writing ‘the beginning of my letter to you’. Right? So, how can then we explain what Mark has written?

There is an explanation, and a very good one. The key to understand why Mark wrote this way is hidden in the meaning of the word ‘gospel’ as he used it. This word ‘gospel’ is so familiar to us. We don't think about it much.

In the Church and in Christian circles we use it all the time. The Gospel here and the Gospel there. For we are sent to preach the Gospel, to share the Gospel with all the nations of the world, and with our neighbors to begin with.

How do we usually understand the word 'gospel'? What does it mean? In a narrow sense we understand the Gospel as the good news that the Triune God forgives you all your sins. In a broader sense we understand the word 'gospel' as God's unchanging attitude towards us.

This is how we usually understand what this word 'gospel' means. But now we'll try to look at how Mark used this word 'gospel' and what it means in this first sentence of His gospel account.

The thing is that this word 'gospel' was not uniquely Christian word. There were two contexts from which first Christians borrowed the word 'gospel'. First of them was the Old Testament. There the word 'gospel' meant a good news, usually in the context of the battle.

It is difficult for most of us, but let's try to imagine that there is deadly enemy approaching and our army is going to meet them. If we are not able to protect ourselves, that the enemy will come and destroy us, plunder, slaughter, rape, will do everything that is done in situations of war.

In context like this a gospel was a good news that our army has won, victory is ours, we are saved, imminent danger is over, we are free, we can rejoice and celebrate. There is nothing more that needs to be done.

The second context where the word 'gospel' came from was a political realm in the context of Roman empire. Whenever a new emperor came to power, he sent his messengers to spread the news across the empire.

A good news, *a gospel*, that now this new ruler has come to power, a new age has arrived, a new order. This gospel message served to inform everyone that something significant had happen, and they needed to be aware of.

It is important to realize that this gospel message didn't expect anyone to agree or disagree with it. It didn't matter. A new ruler had ascended on the throne. This was a reality everyone had to live with.

We can think about analogy with today's political leaders. Once they are elected and results are announced, that is a new reality. A new situation. You may like it, or you may hate it, your attitude doesn't change a thing.

You can put it this way, that our attitude to reality doesn't change it. It is how it is. This is exactly how the gospel message was understood. Information about facts, about a new reality.

Just to remind once more, first meaning of the word 'gospel' comes from the Old Testament, as a good news about a victory. The second one comes for Roman culture, where it meant ascent of a new emperor, a new king.

A victory and a new ruler, a new lord and king. These are two meanings which help us to understand how Mark used the word 'gospel'. 'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.'

Mark didn't write saying that this is beginning of what I am going to write. No, he wrote that this is how this new reality, the victory and reign on this new king, this new Lord Jesus Christ begun.

We can rephrase what Mark wrote saying that - this is how the victory of Jesus Christ, the Son of God over death begun. This is how Jesus Christ begun His ascension on the throne as the Ultimate Ruler. This is how all authority in heaven and earth was given to Jesus Christ. This is how this new reality came about. *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

**So, what does it mean for us today? What does this understanding of the word 'gospel' mean for us, for you today.** Two things. Victory and a new reality. *First.* About victory.

The Gospel of Jesus is, indeed, at the best news anyone can receive. There is one enemy whom we can't defeat. That is, and you can guess it, - death. We try to protect ourselves from it, from its effects all the time.

We try to care for our health, we try to provide for our daily needs, to secure our future, so that only we have some kind of security, but in a sense all our efforts during our lives are futile, for at the end, death robs us of everything.

We may conquer the world, as many have done, but then we ourselves are conquered by death. We were doomed to lose this battle, but now, Mark announced to us these good news, this Gospel, that someone has actually won the battle.

Death had no power over Him. Jesus Christ, the Son of God proved it by rousing from the dead and appearing to several hundred eyewitnesses. He won this victory for you. So that you don't need to fear death anymore.

If you are in Christ, you have eternal life. If you are baptized in Jesus name, if you have been adopted in God's family, then you are going to reign together with Jesus when He returns in His glory.

Besides, He not only won this victory over death, but also received all authority on earth and in heaven. Now He is in control over everything. What does it mean for us? Everything...

For this is not like a situation with mighty rulers, everyone know about them, but they care mostly about themselves. Not at all. You are no stranger to this King. He knows you.

He knows each of you and He is here to use His authority for your benefit. He already sent His messengers to you, to announce the good news of His reign. That's how you found about it.

And He has made clear what His attitude towards you is. How can you know it? For He came to give up His life, so that you can live eternally. He sacrificed Himself for your sake.

What kind of love is this, when someone gives up His life for you?! And this is His attitude to you. This is how dear, how precious and valuable you are to Him. Each of you. Take this thought with you as you walk home.

*The second* important thing for us, that comes from this particular meaning of the word 'gospel' as Mark uses it is this – *the new reality*. The new almighty ruler Jesus Christ has ascended on His throne, and this is our new reality.

Jesus Christ is now seated above all powers in heaven and on earth. Remember these words, - this is our new reality. The new reality of this world. Nothing is going to change it.

The Gospel is a proclamation of this new reality. We didn't contribute to it. We didn't help Jesus to overcome death. We didn't help Him to ascent to His throne. None of this depended on us. But now this is how things are.

He is Victor and Lord. And as the new King Lord Jesus sends His messengers to announce these good news to everyone, to prepare everyone for His coming, for He desires that everyone knows about it. And You are His messengers, each of you.

He has chosen you to make you a blessing for others, so that others may learn and acknowledge this new reality. Today so many are hostile to this message. So what? There is nothing that they can change. If they chose to rebel against true God and Ruler of the Universe, that's their choice and they will bear its consequences.

But - we are here to deliver the message, the Gospel about Jesus victory and the Gospel about God's reign, we are here to prepare the way for the Lord. How do we do it? This is so good season for it. The message about Christ is almost in the air...

In this season of Advent and Christmas it is more difficult to avoid the message of Christ, that to announce it. We all have neighbors and friends who haven't got, or haven't accepted this message.

This is the time, when we can remind them about the Gospel again. The reign of God's Son has begun. He is the one to whom all authority is given. And He sends you to tell about this to your neighbors.

For He is coming back and He wants all to be saved. All people, even those who think they are not worthy, even those who don't know Him, even those who hate Him... He never gives up on anyone. Neither should we.

Just tell this message... That's all we need to do. Amen.