

# 1b - The Gospel of Mark | Isaac Langmead

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### Introduction

Welcome to the first Sunday of 2026. It's hard to believe we're already here.

My name is Isaac. I'm an intern here at All Saints, and I've been interning since September. It's great to be able to share a message today as we kick off our new series in the book of Mark.

The series is called *No Nonsense*, and I love that because I'm someone who likes to get straight to the point—directly into the Word and into what it means for our lives. Mark lends itself really well to that, and I'm excited to dive in.

Before we get into Mark, it's helpful to set some context.

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### Overview of the Gospels

The Gospels are the first four books of the New Testament. They detail the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and everything in between. Each Gospel was written by a different author, for a different audience, offering different perspectives on the same true events.

### Matthew

Matthew was one of Jesus' twelve disciples and spent nearly all of Jesus' ministry with Him. He had been a tax collector, a role that required precision and attention to detail under Roman authority. Because of this, Matthew's Gospel is very detailed and intentional. He

preserves a deep and careful account of Jesus' life, particularly emphasising lineage and fulfilment of prophecy for a Jewish audience.

## **John**

John was part of Jesus' inner circle and one of His closest disciples. His Gospel was written later than the others, likely when many of Jesus' stories were already circulating. Because of this, John focuses more on who Jesus is rather than just what He did, with reflective statements like the "I am" sayings.

## **Luke**

Luke was not one of the twelve disciples. He was a close companion of Paul and also wrote the book of Acts. Luke was a doctor, a respected and detail-oriented profession. He carefully researched accounts from many sources and wrote primarily to a Gentile (non-Jewish) audience, often explaining Jewish customs.

## **Mark**

Mark was also not one of the twelve disciples. He was a close friend of Peter, and much of his Gospel likely reflects Peter's eyewitness testimony. Mark's audience was broad, and he explains Jewish customs, making the Gospel accessible to many. Mark moves quickly, focuses on action, and highlights both Jesus' authority and His suffering.

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## **The Gospels as Historical Accounts**

All four Gospels are written as historical narratives. They don't begin with fictional language or fairy-tale framing. They present events as things that actually happened. The authors are making a truth claim.

The disciples claimed they spent their lives with Jesus, witnessed His crucifixion, and saw Him alive again after His death. Many of them were killed for holding to this claim. These were not casual stories—they were testimonies that shaped and cost them their lives.

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## Mark's Audience and Context

Mark was likely written to Christians in Rome during a time of intense persecution. Under Emperor Nero, a great fire broke out in Rome, and Christians were blamed. Persecution followed and continued for centuries.

Mark is writing to believers living under pressure—faithful people who needed encouragement. This explains why Mark moves quickly, stays focused, and highlights Jesus' suffering and vulnerability. It speaks directly to people enduring hardship.

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## Blessing Reconsidered

Our theme for the year is *The Year of Blessing*. When you hear the word "blessing," it's easy to think of comfort, ease, or things going well. But biblically, blessing doesn't always mean comfort. Often, it means being shaped through hardship in a way that draws us closer to God.

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## Jesus' Baptism and Temptation (Mark 1:9–13)

<sup>9</sup> At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like

a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' <sup>12</sup> At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, <sup>13</sup> and he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Immediately after being affirmed by God, Jesus is led into the wilderness. He fasts for forty days and is tempted by Satan. Blessing, here, does not look like comfort—it looks like testing.

Hardship does not mean Jesus was off track. Difficulty was part of God's forming work.

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## **Trials and Relationship with God**

We often grow closer to God through trials more than through ease. Jesus Himself lived a life marked by suffering—from His birth to His crucifixion. When we experience hardship, we often relate more deeply to Him because He understands suffering.

Sometimes what feels like a setback becomes a blessing in disguise.

### **Personal Example**

Last year, I moved back to the UK sooner than planned after living in the US. A series of difficult events forced me into uncertainty. I didn't know what was next, and I had to trust God in a way I hadn't before.

In that season, God provided—housing, community, and new connections here at All Saints. Looking back, I can see how that trial strengthened my faith and deepened my relationship with God in ways comfort never could have.

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## **The Beatitudes (Matthew 5, KJV)**

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (v.4)*

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (v.5)*

*Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (v.12)*

Jesus shows deep care for those who suffer. He goes after the one who is lost. He values meekness and humility. We are blessed not because life is easy, but because God is present with us in it.

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## **The Calling of the First Disciples (Mark 1:16–20, KJV)**

*16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

*17 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

The disciples respond with immediate obedience. They do not negotiate or delay. They leave their livelihoods and follow Jesus.

They didn't know where they were going—but they knew who they were following.

Jesus doesn't call them in a spiritual setting. He meets them in ordinary life. He takes their existing skills and redefines them for God's purposes.

They don't add Jesus to their lives—they reorder their lives around Him.

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## **Application: Practical Steps for the Year**

### **1. Expect Challenge**

Difficulty does not mean failure or abandonment. God often uses hardship to form us.

### **2. Trust God's Timing**

Delay is not absence. God's timing is purposeful and bigger than we can see.

### **3. Read the Bible Regularly**

Scripture is the primary way God speaks to us. Regular reading shapes our hearts and minds, even when we don't realise it immediately.

### **4. Let Jesus Reorder Your Life**

Don't just include Jesus where it's convenient. Invite Him into every area of life.

### **5. Trust Who Is Calling You**

Clarity may be lacking, but Jesus' character is trustworthy. Like the disciples, follow Him even when the path ahead is unclear.

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## Closing Prayer

Lord, thank You for the opportunity to start this new year knowing that You love us and have plans for our lives. Be with us through trials and joys alike. Help us to trust You, follow You, and grow closer to You in every season. Bless each person here today. In Jesus' name, amen.