Playing “Second Fiddle” To Jesus
Mark 1:1-8 (NKJV)

This morning I would like to begin a series of messages on the Gospel of Mark that I have entitled: “Making A Difference.”

Before we get into today’s message let me tell you a little about this Gospel and its author.

* As the name suggests, this gospel was written by MARK, the cousin of Barnabas “the encourager.”

MARK was in all likelihood led to Christ by the apostle Peter. In fact, we read in Acts 12 that after Peter was released from prison he went to stay in the home of Mark’s mother, Mary, where the Church was gathered together in a prayer meeting. In fact, in his first letter, Peter refers to Mark as his “son in the faith.” (I Peter 5:13)

The things Mark wrote in his gospel are actually first-hand accounts about JESUS that were told to him by Peter.

If you remember from our study of the Book of Acts, John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey; but he couldn’t take the rigors of the travel and he ended up going back home to his mother in Jerusalem.
As for the Gospel of Mark itself it is uniquely different than the other three gospels.

-It is believed that this was the first of the four gospels written. Notice how Mark begins his gospel......

v. 1a  The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

-Mark's gospel is the shortest of the four gospels with just sixteen chapters.

-Mark's gospel is primarily addressed to GENTILES, more specifically the Romans. Mark omits a number of things that would not have been meaningful to the Gentiles such as the genealogy of Christ.....references to the Old Testament Law..... and references to Jewish customs.

- Mark's gospel is very “fast-paced.” Whereas the other gospels contain a lot of Jesus' teachings, Mark’s gospel focuses more attention on Jesus' actions.

The Romans were “people of action,” and they respected people who were “movers and shakers.” So Mark portrays Jesus as “a man of action.”

Mark lists only 18 of Christ's 46 parables; and yet he records over one-half of Jesus' miracles; and even those accounts are more brief and to the point than those same miracles recorded in the other gospels.
The first half of this gospel shows Jesus **SERVING**, while the second half of the gospel shows Jesus **GIVING**....giving **HIMSELF**. This Gospel is about **SERVICE and SACRIFICE**.

Mark clearly demonstrates the **difference JESUS made in the lives of others**; and in our study of this gospel you and I will learn how GOD can use you and me to **“Make A Difference”** in the lives of others. Thus I have entitled this series: **“Making A Difference.”**

Well without any further delay, let's get into today's message: **“Playing Second Fiddle To Jesus.”**

Please follow along with me in your Bibles as we read **Mark chapter one, verses 1-8**.

**Mark 1:1-8 (NKJV)**

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.  
2 As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.”  
3 “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’”  
4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.  
5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.  
6 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.  
7 And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.  
8 I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”
INTRODUCTION

Illustration: Years ago the Oak Ridge Boys recorded a song called, “Nobody Wants To Play Rhythm Guitar Behind Jesus.”

The first line of that song went like this: “Nobody wants to play rhythm guitar behind JESUS. Everybody wants to be the lead singer in the band.”

As Mark begins his gospel he introduces us to a man who fully understood that Jesus is the real star of the show and that he himself was only a stagehand to pull back the curtain to reveal Jesus. That man’s name was John the Baptist.

In these verses Mark gives us three portraits of John the Baptist.

First of all Mark introduces us to......

I. John the PREPARER (vs. 2,3)

2 As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.”
3 “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’”

1. How did John the Baptist get the role of “preparing the way” for Jesus Christ? Did he just happen into that role by accident? Did he apply for it as one applies for a job? NO!
2. Mark tells us that hundreds of years before John was even born that GOD had already “ordained” him to be the one to prepare the way for Jesus Christ.

Notice the word “prepare” is used twice in these two verses.

In verse 2 the prophet Isaiah wrote: “Behold I send My messenger (that's John the Baptist) before your face, (now listen) “who will prepare Your way before You.”

And in verse 3 the prophet Micah wrote: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: (now listen) “Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.”

3. In ancient times when a king would travel to a foreign land, he would send someone or several someone's to “go ahead of him” to that country to make sure the roads were passable. “Preparing the way for the king” was a very important responsibility.

These “preparers” functioned much like our civil engineers of today. They would level out roads......and repair bad places in the road......and sometimes they would even build bridges so when the king traveled to the country he wouldn’t encounter any delays.
4. Today when our president visit a city here in America or travels to a foreign country, “preparation teams” are sent well in advance of the visit to lay the groundwork for the president's visit down to the tiniest detail.

5. When GOD prepared to send His Son, “the King of all kings” into this world for a thirty three year long visit, He ordained John the Baptist to “prepare the way” for the coming King.

6. But I want you to notice, John the Baptist didn't travel to Jerusalem or to Rome or to any major city to make these preparations. He did all of the preparation in “the wilderness.” It is interesting that in the original language of the New Testament “the wilderness” refers to “the barren, desolate badlands” covered with dust and rocks.

7. What a metaphor for the barren, desolate hearts of the Jewish people.

John was to “prepare the way” for Jesus by breaking up the “hardened hearts” of the people that Jesus Himself would minister to while on earth.
This brings us to Mark's **second portrait of John the Baptist**.....

**II. John the PROCLAIMER (vs. 4,5)**

4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.
5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

1. Notice Mark says, “**John came.**” That doesn't mean much to us, but the Jewish people **John's coming** was very significant.

The Jewish people had not seen or heard any message from GOD for over 400 years. For over 400 years there hadn't been a single prophet in Israel. The last prophetic voice to speak for GOD to the Jewish people was **the prophet Malachi**. So when Mark says, “**John came**” it is very, very significant. When **John the Baptist** came on the scene he broke **the 400 years of silence**.
2. And just like the prophets of old, **John proclaimed a message of “repentance” to the Jewish people.** Their hearts were hardened. Their lives were full of sin and evil. They were rebellious and disobedient. They were as far outside the will of GOD as could be. 

And **John** addressed this issue of their sins head-on. He didn't “beat around the bush”....he didn't “sugar coat” his message or water it down. He boldly proclaimed to the people that they needed to “repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

3. A lot of people today have no clue what **true repentance** is. Many believe that “repentance” simply means to tell God “I'm sorry” or “I apologize” for my sins. That is NOT true repentance.

**True repentance involves a radical change in one's mind that results in a radical change in one's behavior.**

**True repentance involves going in a radically different direction in one's life.** It involves a “turning away” from a life of sin, and a “turning to” GOD and a godly way of living.
4. That was the message John was proclaiming.....
   “REPENT......STOP SINNING......STOP REBELLING......
   because the Messiah is coming!”

5. We need more preachers like John the Baptist today!
   Preachers who will tell people the truth about
   sin and God's judgment against unrighteousness. We
   need more preachers who are bold enough to call
   people to repentance.

6. But notice John didn't just proclaim a message of
   repentance. Verse 4 tells us “he preached a baptism
   of repentance (now listen) “for the remission of sins.”

   That word “remission” means to have one's sins
   forgiven or remitted as though it had never
   happened.

   Acts 3:19 (NKJV) says, “Repent therefore and be
   converted that your sins may be blotted out, so that
   times of refreshing may come from the presence of
   the LORD.”
7. Can you imagine having every sinful thought you have ever had....every sinful word you have ever spoken...and every sinful act you have ever committed completely wiped off your record as though none of it ever happened?

8. Who would ever be so foolish as to pass up an incredible opportunity such as that?

Mark tells us in verse 5, "Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him (John the Baptist) and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins."

One commentator estimates that as many as 300,000 people were baptized by John and his disciples over a period of several months.

9. Remember John's calling from GOD was to PREPARE the way for the coming of the LORD. And that preparation required him to PROCLAIM the message of baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.
This brings us to Mark's third portrait of John the Baptist, and that is...........

III. John the PREACHER (vs. 6-8)

6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.
7 And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.
8 I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

1. In these verses Mark describes for us both the manner and the message of John the Baptist.

(A) John’s MANNER

Illustration: If you were to look at old black and white photographs of preachers back in the 1940's....50's....and early 60's......they all dressed basically the same way.

Black suits......white shirts......narrow black ties......white socks ......and slicked back hair.

There was nothing typical about the manner in which John the Baptist dressed. He didn't look like any of today's preachers or even like any of the preachers in his own day and time.
Mark tells us in verse 6, “Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist.”

As one commentator put it, “John's clothing was as rugged as his message.” In the tradition of the Old Testament prophet Elijah, John stepped into the wilderness looking like a wild man. Luke's gospel tells us John was under the Nazarite vow, which meant he couldn't cut his hair or shave his beard. This just added to his rough, rugged appearance.

And notice his diet: “locust and wild honey.” In other words “candy coated bugs!”

To say that John the Baptist wasn't your typical nicely dressed, fried-chicken eating preacher would be a gross understatement. When God created John the Baptist He threw away the mould.

But then notice.....
John's MESSAGE (vs. 7,8)

7 And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.
8 I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Remember earlier I told you that some estimate John may have had as many as 300,000 baptisms over a period of several months. But notice he doesn't say one word about his own success.

I love the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases verses 7,8 in The Message........

As he preached he said, “The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will change your life. I’m baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out.”

John the Baptist wasn't seeking to bring glory and honor to himself; he sought to bring glory and honor to Jesus Christ. He didn't boast of his own achievements, he boasted of the great achievement Christ would have through His soul saving, life changing death on the cross.
I'll never forget something the late Bro. Ben James said. He said, “God can greatly use the humble man or woman who doesn't care who gets the glory so long as Christ gets His.”

That was John the Baptist to a “T.” John didn't mind “playing second fiddle to Jesus.” When Jesus started His ministry it was John the Baptist who said, “He must increase and I must decrease.”

Brothers and sisters, that is today's message to you and me in “a nutshell.” If you and I want to be greatly used by GOD to make a difference in the lives of others we must be willing to “play second fiddle to JESUS.” JESUS must be #1 in our lives! We must seek to bring GLORY and HONOR and PRAISE to Him and not to ourselves. That must be our highest aim......our highest ambition in life. To “Play Second Fiddle To Jesus.”