

December 04, 2011

Lights, Camera Action

As we continue in this advent season we want to take a moment to remind you of the focus of Christian sermons during this season. Last week the sermon was about Jesus' future coming and how he gave his disciples then and now the task of carrying on his work of salvation. After telling the disciples what the world would be like over the centuries to come, "wars and rumors of wars" etc. he warned them to not be deceived, he gave them the task of doing his work and keeping an eye on his house until he returns.

This week we will talk about his coming in our lives on a daily basis, beginning with Jesus baptism, which opened the door for us to be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. Our scriptures will be from Mark 1:1-8. Mark = Lights Camera Action!

YES... "Lights, Camera, Action!"

These are words we have all heard at one time or another. But what is their significance? Why use these words to start a scene of a movie or television show?

Before one frame of film can be shot, hours and hours of preparation are required to make sure the scene is perfectly set. The production crew would like to get the scene on the first take. The two things that are crucial for filming the scene are the lights and the cameras. The camera's aperture needs to be set in a specific way because too much light could wash out the key features of the actor or overshadow a key prop that needs to be displayed. Too little light and one would not be able to see the slight movements or facial expressions of an actor that could be crucial to the scene. Also, the cameras are important because they need to be in certain positions and at certain angles to catch the flow of the action. There may be as many as six or seven cameras for one scene.

The director is the person who coordinates the position of the cameras and tells the camera operator when to come in for a close-up or when to back away. Each camera has to be ready to do its job on command. Therefore, once the preparations are made and everything is set, the director says, "Lights, camera, action," as a verbal check-off to start the scene. The director is basically saying, "Get ready—it's time to roll the film."

Mark, in essence, is uttering, "Lights, camera, action!" In the Gospel of Mark he is the directing our attention to each action packed event in the life of Jesus as he records it in the book that bares his name. The focus of Mark's gospel is the message he has been given about Jesus Christ and he records this message through the events about Jesus. The camera is focused on Jesus throughout Mark's gospel. Even though Mark is the shortest of the four gospels it contains the most events in the life of Jesus, that's why it is an action packed gospel. It moves from one

event to another, just like a camera can view a landscape but can stop to record each separate event. Mark is the most chronological of the gospels in recording these events in the life of Jesus, but the reader can find himself or herself suddenly going from one event to the other. Just like on a movie set the director will holler “CUT!!” and move the camera and lights to a new location for another scene so it is with Mark’s gospel. It changes scenes and events at a fast pace.

In his opening verse, Mark introduces Jesus Christ to his audience as the hoped for Messiah and the Son of God, the one who came from the Father to serve all of mankind. Then he goes on to introduce us to John the Baptist, who plays a critical role preliminary to the sudden appearance of Jesus in the book.

Our first scene and camera setting sets the stage by positioning our focus on the Old Testament prophecies from Isaiah and Malachi. John the Baptist is the messenger who will fulfill this prophecy. John heralds the message of the coming Messiah, John also prepares the people through the act of baptism for the soon coming appearance of the Messiah. John the Baptist declares that he is not the *light*, but he has been positioned in such a way that when Jesus appears everyone will know that *Jesus is the light* and the main player in this ongoing drama.

The *cameras* are in position to start the filming; they will first film the ministry and message of John then go on to film the baptism of Jesus, his blessing from the Father, and his temptation and defeat of Satan in the wilderness. From every camera angle we are led to see that this is not just another person to be baptized; this is the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

The focus of the *action* begins when Jesus starts his ministry of service in the synagogues of Galilee preaching the “good news” and performing a series of miracles: casting out demons, healing Peter’s mother-in-law, and healing a leper. The stage has been set, the cameras are rolling, and the drama has begun with incredible action.

As Christians, we often forget that God is just as concerned about the “lights and the position of the camera” in our own lives, God wants our camera to be focused on Jesus and he wants our life to be lived “in Him” as the Holy Spirit directs *the actions* that follow. God is a God not only of action but of preparation. Just as God set up events in the life of Jesus, the Lord painstakingly sets up events in our lives and prepares us personally for what lies ahead so that when “action” is necessary the scene will come together for the first take. We usually need more than one take, but God is patient with us, as we shall see later on with the disciples of that day.

We hope that you will take time to read the book of Mark as we go through it this next year through a series of sermons. We learned a great deal from the Gospel of Mark, in the class that Tom took and we want to share with you this inspiring and action packed book. We know this book will help you understand the great power and action of our Lord in our lives as our personal savior. You may feel that there is not much “action” in your life right now. But don’t fret, God is “preparing the way” and preparing you so that when it comes time for action you will be ready. God is always with us, focusing and directing our lives. Right now He’s saying, Lights, Camera, Action!!

Prayer: At this season of the year, Father, we want to thank you for sending the very best. Thank you for Jesus Christ, our Savior. Grant that we may live like Jesus and express your love as Jesus did in the days of his flesh. Help us first of all to ask what we can give rather than what we can get. May we improve in our service and impart the same sense of value to those around us as you imparted to us through the sacrifice of your Son. In Jesus name we pray, Amen

JESUS SENT TO SERVE

Let's begin this sermon about Jesus who is *the unique Son of God* in Mark 1 verse 1.

1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

1:1 Mark wastes no time in setting the lights and the cameras and the theme of his book. It is the message, the good news of Jesus Christ, the unique Son of God. Since Mark is writing to a gentile audience in the Roman Empire, he has no need, like Matthew or Luke, to establish Christ's lineage to prove his credentials as the Son of God to his readers. There are two reasons the gentiles did not need such information. First, the gentiles living in the Roman Empire were not so much interested in qualifications as they were in actions. They lived in a fast paced society that was at the height of its domination in the civilized world. They were more interested in the "actions" of Jesus, not the circumstances surrounding his birth.

Second, since Jesus is being portrayed as a "servant" or "slave," there would be no need to show his genealogy since, from a Roman Empire standpoint, slaves do not have genealogies.

By stating Jesus' name and position first of all Mark makes it clear that Jesus is unique. The personal name of **Jesus** was common among the Jews, being the same as "Joshua" and meaning "the salvation of Jehovah." **Christ** (the Greek form of Messiah) is an official title. This title declared to all that Jesus is the "anointed one" who came to save us from our sins. **Son of God** expresses the divine nature of our Lord. Mark wanted his audience to focus on the fact that this was no ordinary servant, no ordinary man, Jesus was not just a good man or an excellent teacher—this was the **Son of God**, who had come to save the world and take away our sins.

Right off the top Mark has positioned the **lights**, the **camera** and the **action** to focus on **Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God!** Next our focus is changed to the one who sets the stage for Jesus, John the Baptist.

John the Baptist Prepares the Way for the Sacrificial Servant

John the Baptist fulfills the Old Testament prophecies, he is the messenger who will prepare the people for the ministry of the sacrificial servant.

1:2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: **"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way,"**

3 “a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

1:2–3 Now the lights, the camera and the action will focus on John the Baptist. Mark quoted from two Old Testament prophets to show that Christ’s coming had been foretold long ago. There had been no authentic prophet sent to Israel for at least three hundred years. No word had come from God in all that time. Then suddenly John appears on the scene, there where people who recognized him as a prophet. The two prophets that Mark quoted from were **Isaiah (40:3)** and **Malachi (3:1)**. Mark combined the sayings of these two prophets but named only Isaiah probably because Isaiah emphasizes the **servanthood and salvation** of the Messiah whereas **Malachi highlights the judgment** of the Messiah. In both cases, a messenger was sent to **prepare the way** for Christ’s coming.

The figure of speech, **prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him**, refers to the custom of sending an officer before a monarch who was to make a royal journey. This person was to level and smooth out any ruts in the road so the monarch’s journey would be smoother. The **messenger** being sent to **prepare the way** was John the Baptist.

1:4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

1:4 Now the camera will move in for a closer focus on John the Baptist. The action that takes place and the scene he appears in is set in the wilderness. This was the most important event in the life of Israel for more than three hundred years. The “word from God” was being fulfilled by John. The **desert region** in which John started his ministry of **baptism** is probably between Judea and the Dead Sea. This area is known for its stark surroundings and rugged terrain. John was no city dweller; he was a man of the wilderness, and he performed his ministry in the wilderness to make a point.

The wilderness in Israel’s history symbolized rebellion and disobedience. The nation of Israel, after **Israel’s deliverance** by God and the **Exodus** from **Egypt**, they **disobeyed God** by not going into the Promised Land. As a result they wandered in the wilderness for forty years before they actually entered the Promised Land as God’s people. None of this understanding was lost on John, having been born into a priestly family; he knew very well the history of Israel. By coming to the wilderness to be baptized, the people were **admitting** their **wandering** from God and their **rebellion** toward God and their **desire for a fresh start**.

Also, John’s preaching of a **baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins** was highly unusual. Jews believed that only Gentile converts to Judaism needed to be baptized. The baptism of Gentiles was a ritual washing from all the defilement of their past. The Jews were being asked to do something they had never done before. To call all Israel to be baptized meant that in some way **all of Israel was defiled and needed cleansing**.

The baptism by John was a baptism of **repentance**. By his message and by his “action” of baptism, John was urging Israel to turn away from its **disobedience and rebellion** and to start

anew by **turning toward the coming Messiah**. By doing so they would be forgiven—released—from their sins and would experience the grace of God through the Messiah.

1:5 The whole Judean countryside and all of the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

1:5 The camera pans across the country side, and we see a multitude of people who were affected by John's message as they came to him to be baptized. This verse says that **The whole Judean countryside and all of the people of Jerusalem went out to him**. It is estimated that as many as three hundred thousand people coming from the area of Jerusalem and Judea could have been baptized by John during his ministry. **Confessing their sins** demonstrates **their acknowledgment** of disobedience and rebellion toward God. The location of the baptism was the Jordan River, which was several miles outside Jerusalem. To bring Judea and all of Jerusalem out to this **wilderness area** is a clear demonstration that the message given by John of repentance and baptism was in itself a very powerful message and ministry.

1:6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

1:6 As we see John preaching in the wilderness, the camera will move in for a closer shot and will focus on John's clothing. The script will emphasize his diet which was definitely not *mainstream*. As we look at John's clothing we realize that John did not fit into the society around him. John's dress and lifestyle were a contrast to the godless and self-serving materialism of his day. For a person to go out to be baptized by this wilderness man meant a reassessment of the religious and cultural life of Israel. His clothing and food were those of the very poor. John wore clothing made of **camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist**. His camel-hair robe and leather belt were the kind worn by the very poor.

His clothing was reminiscent of another man of the wilderness who was also a prophet preparing the way—Elijah (**2 Kings. 1:8**). The explicit identification of John with Elijah will be established in **Mark 9:9–13**. Not only did John dress like Elijah, but he also understood his ministry to be one of **reform and preparation**, just as Elijah's was. A popular belief of the time was that Elijah would return from heaven to prepare the way for the Messiah (**Mal. 4:5–6**). John reminded the people of Elijah because of his fearless and powerful message and his wilderness lifestyle. As Jesus will say, John did come as the Elijah forerunner to the Messiah.

His food was **locusts and wild honey**. This was the food of the poorest of the poor. John's diet was very simple, everything about John was unpretentious. John goes on to say.....

1:7 After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

1:7 The camera and the lights are set to capture this crucial scene and message from John. John makes it very clear that he is **heralding** the coming of **one more powerful**; John makes it clear that he is the servant of the coming great Servant. John's task was to **prepare** the way and then **step out** of the way. Even though John appeared as a powerful figure, in this scene he

makes it abundantly clear that he would pale in comparison to the Messiah when he appeared. He showed his insignificance compared to the Messiah by saying, **the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie**. To remove the sandals and wash the feet was the job of a slave. John was saying that he was not even worthy to be a slave and do that much for the One coming after him. Compared to the coming Messiah, John knew that he was less than nothing. Will we strive to be just as humble?

1:8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

1:8 For our final scene in this sermon the camera is still focused on John. John makes it clear that his ministry was only preparatory, symbolic, and temporary. His baptism was **with water**. John was administering an external rite that symbolized moral cleansing and a desire to break away from the current society and away from the sins that had separated people from God. John also wanted to show the superiority of Jesus' baptism. The one to follow him would **baptize you with the Holy Spirit**. John was pointing out that the Messiah's baptism would bring about lasting change. The Messiah's baptism would be internal, changing a person from the inside out. Jesus' baptism would secure purity of heart and life everlasting. Jesus' baptism would deliver his followers from the guilt and power of sin, and bring them into fellowship and communion with God. Jesus' baptism by the Holy Spirit would change peoples desire to break away into reality.

The lights, the camera and the action will now be set up to focus on the appearance of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. So as we close down our production for today let's not forget the unfolding scenes and events that we have witnessed. Let's look forward to traveling along with Mark as he moves us from one action packed event to another. Let's travel with him as participants in the promised life of the Holy Spirit that we received when we were baptized into the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

PRINCIPLES

- Believers can trust in the perfect timing of God.
- Believers can trust in God's Word. He is faithful to do what he has promised.
- Believers must consistently repent and confess sin as God works in and through them.
- Believers can trust God to protect, preserve, and provide for them during the "desert times" of their lives.

APPLICATIONS

- Trust in the fact that God keeps his word and submit your fears to him.
- Select a special place you can go to daily for quality time with the Lord.
- Recognize that God is at work on your behalf. Thank him for what he is doing and look expectantly for him to work.
- Recognize that there is no wasted experience for a believer. Rejoice that God will use all your experiences to prepare you to be more effective for him.

Service Is His Business

Many years ago the Prince of Wales (this would have been Queen Elizabeth's father) visited India. A formidable barrier had been set up to keep back the masses of people who wanted to catch a glimpse of royalty. When the prince arrived, he shook hands with some of the dignitaries who were presented to him. Then, looking over their heads to the crowds beyond the barriers, he said, "Take down those barriers." They were quickly removed and all of the people, regardless of social rank, had free access to the heir of the British throne. Some time later when the prince came to that district again, ten thousand outcasts waited under a banner inscribed with the words, "The Prince of the Outcasts." What the Prince of Wales did in that moment sounds very much like what Jesus would have done in the same situation. He is a king to be sure but a king who demonstrated his power through service to his people. The entire Gospel of Mark captures the servant heart of Jesus, and chapter 1 starts us on our way.

Service is Jesus' business. Mark is essentially saying this in chapter 1. Whether confronting a fever, demons, or the crippling curse of leprosy, Jesus displayed the power and love of God for lost and hurting people. Jesus was willing to do what it took to meet our needs. Jesus came to meet our needs, especially our primary need to hear and live in the good news of our salvation in Him.