

Gospel Beginnings

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[0 : 00] But what I like to do now is go straight into looking for a short while by way of introduction to Mark's Gospel. Mark chapter 1.

So, we're doing a series, but it's not going to be scholarly and it's not going to be in depth. We're not going to go through every section of Mark's Gospel.

It's a 16-part taster into Jesus, into the life of Jesus. And I'm going to do something which is very mischievous. I'm going to take the last few chapters of Mark's Gospel and I'm going to study them. We're going to look at them in the middle of the series during Easter time, because Easter deals with the death and resurrection of Jesus. So, we're going to take the last few chapters and we're going to move them into Easter.

And then we're going to come back to the other chapters and finish them before the summer. So, the challenge I hope for you, one of the challenges I hope is that I'm not going to read every verse in every chapter in every service.

[1 : 02] Some of the chapters are really, really long and I would like you to read the chapters before you come. So, it will be quite easy because it will be a, we're going to deal with bits of each chapter, one to 16, in the next 16 weeks.

But you can read and prepare by looking at the chapter. That would be very helpful. I want to give you a flavour of what Mark's Gospel is like, because Mark wrote the Gospel in a hurry.

He was keen for people to know about Jesus. He was in Rome and he was bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles and to the Romans. And he really is in a hurry to get that Gospel message about Jesus over.

And so, he kind of cuts a lot of things out and he goes straight in the beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ and speaks about John the Baptist coming. There's nothing about the incarnation, there's nothing about the birth of Jesus and the angels and the temple and being a young boy and all the things that lead up to it.

He just wants to go straight into the work of Jesus. It's so important. He's in a hurry to get that message across. And so, that's the kind of way that we're going to look at it. We're going to look quickly through this Gospel because it's so important to know about Jesus Christ and what Jesus is saying.

[2 : 15] It's all about Jesus, the beginning. What a great way to start. The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And what we get from Mark and from the early verses that we studied together, there's a great sense of what is a priority to Mark.

He's come through as a believer and as he sees the young church growing, what's really, really important is the sense of priorities. He's bursting. What's he bursting to do? To share the good news. That's what Gospel means, isn't it?

To share the good news. That's what he wants to do. I want to share the good news about Jesus. That's what's really important to him and he goes on to explain who Jesus is.

And I wonder today, if we've lost sight of that, come a church today dragging our feet on our Christianity. It's such a dragon abode and I'm scared to share it with anyone because it's no longer any good news to us.

It's not tremendously significant. We've lost sight of that. We live in a society where good news is a premium. It's important. There's lots of bad news around but it's important good news today and people love good news.

[3 : 30] And I wonder if Christians today, as we sit up under the Word of God as we sit under the Gospel, are we living our lives? Not here, but are we living our lives as Christians who have accepted the Gospel, the good news about Jesus?

Do we live as those who believe that the Gospel is good news or is it really bad medicine that must be good for us because it tastes so horrible?

Is it good news? Is it good news in our lives? And do we live as if it's good news? Do we get up in the morning as if we have the good news of Jesus Christ that has transformed us and made such a difference?

The good news that there is a God. There's a good news that God can be known. There's good news that this is a loving and just and fair God. The good news that this God became a human being in order to bring us back to Him because we rebelled against Him.

The good news that He has come to heal us and to redeem us and to build that relationship with us again. That's what Mark is all about. Is it good news? Is your relationship with Jesus Christ good news?

[4 : 40] Or if you're not a Christian, is it good news at all? Or do you see the Gospel and the message as kind of, I don't know, legalistic or prescriptive or keeping us back?

Something that's just a drain on the freedoms that we want to have. But it's certainly, you never consider that as good news. That is what Mark wants to get across here.

This is the beginning you want to tell about the good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There's a sense of priority. But there's also in these early verses a sense of expectation. He quotes Isaiah and one or two other Old Testament prophets who prophesy about the coming of John, who will prepare the way of the Lord.

So he prophesies about John and the coming of the Lord, the coming of the Messiah. So he's building a sense of expectation in the readers and those who hear about it. That Jesus coming is not random. It's the fulfillment of prophecy.

It was always in God's plan. Jesus is the saviour of divine promise and of divine purpose. And that His coming was expected.

[6 : 04] John is the one who lives in the desert, the voice of one calling in the desert. In a sense there's a way in which this kind of is symbolic, I think, of the other side of the coin, the bad news.

That it's people we are in a desert, spiritual desert as it were. And we're estranged from God. And without Christ we're in that place that is dry and where there's no growth and there's no life really. And there's often a sense in the Bible that the desert symbolizes that spiritual condition we're in, that we're unborrowed time.

Our life is ebbing away until we deal with Jesus Christ. And the voice comes from that, that the Lord is coming to bring life and bring fruitfulness and hope.

So there's that expectation built into what He's saying. But then along with that expectation there's a sense of anticipation when John does come. Well, if John comes like this, what's the Messiah going to be like?

[7 : 14] What's Jesus going to be like? Because John is a really colourful figure, isn't he, in these verses 5 to 8. Lots of people went out to hear him. He was really popular. He was probably a great speaker.

He was known as a prophet. He had great things to say. He was colourful. He was eccentric. He ate locust and wild honey. He was just a kind of wild man but had a great powerful message.

And people were thinking, this is amazing. He's got something different to say. And he's authoritative and he's popular and he's worth going out to see. And if this is just a support act, then what's Jesus going to be like?

When this guy, John, is speaking with authority and power. And then John says, you know, I'm not worthy to tie his laces when he comes. I'm baptising with water.

I've got a message. I'm baptising with water. When he comes, he'll baptise in the power of the Holy Spirit. And so Mark again is building up this sense of anticipation about Jesus coming.

[8 : 21] And then, boom, there's disappointment. When Jesus comes, how understated is Jesus coming?

This Messiah who's coming on a centre stage of whom John is the support act, just mingles in with the crowd.

He comes from Nazareth. Where's Nazareth? It's like a lachybui. I mean, it's not in the books, you know. It's not the place that the Messiah you would think would come from.

Who knows anything about Nazareth? And he's coming from Nazareth. And he comes in among the people and it's absolutely kind of understated.

And he gets baptised with the people, along with the people. And immediately he's taken himself into the desert. He doesn't stay centre stage.

[9 : 22] God whisks him away into the desert. Unremarkable. John is then imprisoned. Jesus then calls fishermen to follow him.

It's not what we expect from the great Messiah. It's not the anticipation that's been built up, particularly through the history and the knowledge and the lives of the Jewish people, who were expecting a Messiah to come, a king, like David, but better than David to come.

But Mark is wanting to get that across. This is not any ordinary king. This is not a Jewish king. This is not a king who's going to usurp the Roman authority and give Jews their freedom and build a theocracy of people who will serve God as a nation.

This is a spiritual king who is going to transform the whole world very different. So what do we learn then briefly about Jesus from these introductory verses?

And this is really just an introduction for us. First we remember he's radically different, isn't he? He's not maybe the kind of saviour that we look for or would expect. This is God who has spoken about at Christmas time the Son of God coming.

[10 : 40] And he comes, this God, God comes and takes on human flesh. But it's different from what we expect. He spends 30 years in complete almost anonymity, himself preparing for this three years of public ministry, preparing to understand what he's come to do, developing his relationship with the Father, recognising that he must be ready for this great work and getting ready to do what?

What's he getting ready to do? The author of Life, what's he getting ready to do? To die. That's the king.

He's coming to die. That's his message. That's his training. That's his calling. That's his direction. Jesus Christ, the only one who came specifically with this work.

Would he be coming to die? The police of his people is radically different. And he sets his own marker down, even at the Salle Cedric. Mark does it for us as well.

I mentioned it briefly, by him being baptized. Have you thought about that? Why did Jesus get baptized? Because John says, you know, repent and be baptized.

[12 : 04] Be washed away from your sins. Have this symbolic washing which reminds you and reminds us all of our need for cleansing. Well, why did Jesus get baptized?

He wasn't a sinner. He hadn't done anything wrong. But he will go on briefly to note that God said he was well pleased with him.

So God was pleased with him. Why did he need to repent and be baptized? No, he didn't. He didn't repent. But he was baptized because he says, why? He says, I'm with you here. I'm part of the crowd.

I'm here for a specific reason. I'm associating with you. I'm coming to be the Savior who will die in your place. And I'll be baptized along with you because there's going to be a day when I will bear your sin.

I'll be a sin better. And so I'm coming alongside you by being baptized and by associating with you. And you know, he's still saying that today.

[13 : 04] Who do you, what advocate do you need in your life? Maybe you're not in trouble with the law. But we're in trouble with God because we've broken all his laws. Who's our advocate? Who's the one who comes and dies in our place?

Jesus. Jesus is our Savior. Who do you need in your life? You can't need anyone more important than Jesus. Whoever you are, Jesus sets down this marker and says, look, I associate with you. I know that you need to be forgiven. I know that you need repentance. And I'm the one who makes it valid and who can make it worthwhile and who can forgive you.

So he sets down this marker. And then we have this interesting little verse in verse 9 and 10 where he is baptized by John and the Jordan as he's coming out of the water.

So heaven been torn open in the spirit of descending on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, you're my son, my love with you, I'm well pleased. So what do we know? It's about Jesus here. Through Jesus, all heaven breaks loose.

[14 : 11] We're all used to all hell breaking loose, but this is all heaven breaking loose. When Jesus comes, we have this amazing reality that he sees and that we see.

It seems from the passage that nobody else saw it. There's an occasion later on where people do hear God speaking about Jesus, but not here. Jesus was a spirit of descending.

He saw heaven being torn open. And a voice came to him saying, you are individual, you are my son, whom I love with you, I'm well pleased. So we have this ripping open of heaven that Jesus sees and that we see when we have the Bible.

That's for his encouragement and for our understanding. See as we look at the Bible and as we remember the place of the timing of all these events, basically no one had spoken to the people of God.

There had been no message from God or from heaven. For 400 years there had been silence. And then John comes and then heaven is ripped open. And God the Father makes this basically a declaration of the kingship of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 23] He says, you are my son, I'm well pleased with you and I love you. And he's reminding Jesus who remember has been learning all about the Father through his childhood.

Because he emptied himself. He's learning that he is the Redeemer and he is the King. And he is coming to usher in his kingdom. He goes on to speak about his kingdom.

The Holy Spirit comes and empowers him for this great work. God is well pleased with Jesus. And it's really a reminder to us that only through Jesus is heaven ripped open.

And it's an interesting use of the word for heaven being opened. It's not like heaven gently opened with a door. It's not like someone opened a door of heaven that you can close again.

It's this idea of being ripped open and it will never be closed again. You know, something really rips badly, it's hard to fix it. But the picture is it's been ripped open by Jesus and by what he's come to do.

[16 : 26] And the way to heaven is open to us. It's a bit like, it's similar, it's the same word that's used of the curtain being ripped open in the Holy of Holies when Jesus dies on the cross.

Because heaven is opened because of what Jesus has done. Do you want to get to heaven? You know, that's the question people say, I want to get to heaven. Heaven, what's the way to heaven? How do we know to get to heaven?

I am the way, the truth in the life, Jesus says. Heaven's ripped open because of what Jesus has done. And for me, the way to eternal life and the way to hope is through Jesus Christ.

That's our way to heaven. And that's hugely significant. And it's greatly important that at this point God encourages Jesus with these words.

Jesus needed encouragement to prepare him and to empower him for the work that he had to do. And throughout the Bible we're reminded again and again of the importance of encouragement.

[17 : 30] Jesus, the Son of God, needed encouragement from God the Father. How much more do we need encouragement in our lives? And so I just asked you this morning, just as I throw a wee comment, how many Christians have you encouraged over this last week?

What kind words? What text have you written? What phone have you picked up? What kind act have you done by way of encouraging Christians in their Christian walks?

Or how have you been encouraged? It's a great thing, isn't it? We're so in need of encouragement and we're so good at discouragement. We're so good at the negative.

We're so good at punching people in the stomach, metaphorically, I hope. So we learn that through Jesus all heaven breaks loose.

We also learn that He is sent with a purpose that's indicated just even very early here. Once the Spirit sent Him into the desert, He was in the desert for 40 days being tempted by Satan.

[18 : 34] He was with the wild animals and the angels attended Him. So it's the inauguration of the King. We've been singing about the King and Jesus is coming to inaugurate His kingdom. The kingdom of God, He's coming to do that work.

But He's no ordinary King, is He? We're the kings because they've been in palaces and they have wealth and they have servants around them. But here is Jesus Christ, He's not a pampered King. The Spirit comes upon Him and immediately sends Him where? To the desert. Now why does He do that? Why does He send Him to the desert? Because He has a crucial work to do there right at the beginning of His public ministry.

There's flashbacks to Genesis here, isn't there? Where He's tempted by Satan, the way that Adam was tempted by Satan. And we know the New Testament calls Jesus the second Adam, where He too is tempted by Satan.

But where Adam the first failed, Adam the second overcomes. We're not told much about it here but the other gospels do tell us about it. He sent into that place of abandonment.

[19 : 37] He sent the place where the wild animals are. And He sent to have the whole power of darkness in Satan and hell. Tempt Him to not be the King and not do this work. Nah, you don't need to do this work, Jesus.

I'll give you what you want, says Satan. You don't need to go to the cross. I'll do it for you. I can give you what you want. He does exactly the same, Satan, as He did with Adam. He challenges Him to question God's word, God's veracity, God's love, God's goodness.

But Jesus isn't going to give up. And Jesus isn't going to give in to temptation because He has to overcome where Adam the first failed, if he's to be our Savior, if he's to have the power to defeat sin in our lives and temptation in our lives.

So He overcomes and He defeats. And this purpose is hugely significant even at the beginning of His ministry. We can't give in. We do give in to the power of temptation.

We don't have the power to overcome sin and death. We need Jesus. That's why we need to pray, isn't it? You can't do it on your own. You can't have a self-governed or self-service way to heaven.

[20 : 57] You can't just ignore what Jesus is offering. And Mark wants us to recognize that in our lives. So we recognize that He's sent with a purpose. And lastly, we also see that He has authority in His life and in His ministry already.

At the last section there, He comes and He speaks. He says, the time has come. The kingdom of God is near repent and believe the good news. So He is backing up what's happened with heaven ripping open and John the Baptist declaring Him as the Lord.

He says, yeah, the time has come. The King is here. The message will affect every single human being. God comes into a broken and defeated and a dying humanity, of which we still remain part in the 21st century.

Because He's the Saviour. God is on the move. The time has come. The kingdom is coming. Are we a part of that kingdom? That's His message. And it's a message where He says, we also need to repent and believe.

This is the King. The King, when He speaks, demands a response. He's saying sin matters. We need to turn away from our lifestyle, but more importantly from our very being which is turned against God.

[22 : 25] And we need to turn towards God because we are under His wrath and under His judgment. And He says we can only do that through Jesus Christ. Sin is serious, you know.

He says, He says, sit in your own heart. He says, sit around you in the world. But most of all, sit in Him having to go to the cross. If we shud shake off, it's not really important.

We're saying that the cross wasn't important. It wasn't a significant thing. We can't say that. It's an interesting rewriting of the prayer of general confession from the Old Book of Common Prayer, which can highlight sometimes has been satirized for our lack of understanding of the seriousness of sin.

Benevolent and easygoing Father, we have occasionally been guilty of errors of judgment. We've lived under the deprivations of heredity and the disadvantages of environment. We have sometimes failed to act in accordance with common sense.

We've done the best we could in the circumstances and have been careful not to ignore the common standards of decency. And we are glad to think that we are fairly normal. Do thou, O Lord, deal lightly with our infrequent lapses.

[23 : 34] Be thy own sweet self with those who admit they are not perfect. According to the unlimited tolerances which we have a right to expect from thee, and grant us as indulgent parent that we may hereafter continue to live a harmless and happy life and keep our self-respect.

Sin is really matter. It's insignificant and it's unimportant. And God's just the big sugar daddy that will take us home on that last great day. But he says, repent and turn from that and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That repent, that turning round is linked with a belief, but not a head belief, or not just a head belief, not a belief just in the facts, but belief biblically is always linked with faith and with trust.

So he's saying, repent and entrust your life to me. Make me the Lord of your life. Follow me and serve me. And that has all changed, isn't it? That's what repent means. It means turning, you know, well, turning one way and turning to face God.

And trusting in Him, even when it's difficult to do so, easy to trust Him when things are going well. But it's about trusting Him and living for Him. Again, it's not just a wordy thing.

[24 : 49] It's not even just something that we would do in church. All come down the front and put your faith in Jesus Christ. I'll lay my hands on you and you'll be redeemed and you'll be saved. And you go back to your seat and you've said some great things and you've confessed some amazing things.

And you're the Lord's, but it's not like that. It's much more than a confession or a word or a head belief. Remember Huckleberry Finn's alcoholic pappy?

The old drunk cried and cried when Judge Thatcher talked to him about temperance and such things. Said he'd been a fool and he was aching to turn over a new leaf.

And everyone hugged him and cried and said it was the holiest time on record. That night he got drunker than he ever had done before. You know, it's not just about our words.

It's not just about our confession. It's about entrusting our life to him and allowing him to take our life and turn it round. Powerful authority, I don't have any authority whatsoever, but Jesus has the authority and he says, the time has come, the kingdom of God is near.

[25 : 58] Repent and believe the good news. Is there anything we can do to make someone turn and then trust our life to Jesus? Well, ultimately not.

We can't. That's why I want us to eat and pray. We can recognize our need for God and for our role in cooperating simply by living it and sharing it and telling it.

But recognizing God is the one who will bring life. God who's the one who will change hearts. So he's powerful in word, but he's also powerful indeed in it. We didn't even read that second section which speaks all about his healings.

The early healings that he engaged in to back up what he was saying, to show that he has come with authority and with power and to come with a specific reason to heal.

I'm going to say more about that in another sermon in a few weeks about healing. But I want you to remind ourselves that it's far more than just physical healing you're speaking about.

[26 : 57] There's actually the church that have become obsessed with physical healing, along with what Martin was saying about the health, wealth and prosperity of the gospel. But it's far more than that. There's a far bigger, deeper, stronger healing of character, body and mind and soul, and of relationship with God primarily.

That will be perfected in heaven. Do you need healed in your relationship with God and in your bitterness, in the anger, in the lack of forgiveness, in the greed, the selfishness, in the lust, in the pride, and all of these things, the unseen things.

No one really knows if they've been healed or not, until we live and act with one another. It may be that we begin to see and understand and know the beauty, the uniqueness, the way Jesus comes alongside us, that he is the way to heaven, that he's sent with a purpose and he's sent with authority into your life and into mine.

Let's bow our heads briefly and pray. Lord God, we ask and pray that we would understand a little bit more about you today, that we would allow the Spirit of God to challenge us and to work in our lives and to make us think about who you are and who mark under the power of the Spirit, wants to declare you as.

And may we recognize our need to come before you as Lord. And may that be something that transforms our lives as we invite you into our hearts and entrust our lives to you. Lord, we thank you for Martin and for what he has told us about the Gospel and the opportunities in Latin America.

[28 : 33] And we pray that you would indeed bring many people from here and elsewhere to be able to serve in whatever might seem a small way, but will have a huge impact on that continent.

And we do pray for the Gospel there, we pray for the Gospel here, we pray for the glory of God in the coming of your kingdom for Jesus' sake. Amen.