

God's Chosen Messiah

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 0 0] All right, thank you, Michael. Please turn your Bibles back to, if it's already closed, to Mark chapter 1, and that should be an outline as well for you following along as we work our way through Mark.

Well, let me begin by asking you the question, how do we discover truth? How do we discover truth? What methods do we use to determine what is right from wrong?

Well, if it's science, we do experiments, don't we, to prove what's right or what's the laws. Because the laws of science are observable, they're repeatable.

So you make some chemicals in a test tube and hopefully you get the same results each time, and hence the proof. Truth in history, however, isn't repeatable.

Singular events happen once and then that's it. Even regular events, each only happen at a particular point in history.

[1 : 1 4] So each year, for example, we have Kickoff Sunday. That's a regular event. But, Kickoff Sunday for 2024, well, that happened last Sunday.

And if you missed it, well, too bad. You can't ever attend Kickoff Sunday 2024 again. You may attend next year's Kickoff Sunday, but there's no way you can attend Kickoff 2024.

Right? And it was a great event. Sorry if you missed it. Now, I happen to have attended all three Kickoff services last week.

The English ones. I missed the Chinese ones, sadly. But I attended all three. I'm not trying to say this to boast. But I'm trying to just tell you I did. Because if you weren't at any of them, how do you prove that I'm right, that I was there?

Well, you could, for a start, check YouTube for the live stream last week. But that's only for 5 p.m. service, right? It doesn't prove that I was there for the 9 a.m. or the 10.30.

[2 : 2 6] And anyway, nowadays, we've deep fakes. That's not foolproof either, is it? Well, you could, I think what you would do is to ask someone who was there, wouldn't you?

At each of the services. An eyewitness who can testify seeing me there. And perhaps you might not even just ask one person. You might ask a few people to corroborate.

And you would try and choose credible witnesses, right? People that are trustworthy, that you recognize, that would recognize me, that wouldn't mistake me, for example, for a doppelganger like Greg Wong.

And that's essentially how our legal system works, doesn't it? That's why in the courtroom we have what we call the witness stand.

Because that's a key part of any trial, isn't it? To weigh up the credibility of the testimonies of the witnesses in order to determine what actually happened. Well, we start our series in the Gospel Mark today.

[3 : 3 4] And leading up to Christmas, we begin to meet the person of Jesus. And that, incidentally, dovetails nicely this year with our involvement in the Meet Jesus campaign.

You see, each of the Gospels that were written, and Mark in particular as well, were done to help readers, particularly in the beginning in the first century, but all the way up to us in our time, it was to help readers to answer the question, who is this man Jesus?

Hence the series title. But what Mark does in the opening chapter of his Gospel is to give us a series of credible witnesses or messengers to testify about Jesus before he then writes about Jesus, his life and his teaching.

And so what we have here in 15 verses is a quick succession of meeting these messengers, which I've grouped, if you see my outline, into five groups of messengers, all of whom claim to have credibility.

The first is the Gospel writer Mark himself. Now I count him as one of the messengers because he's the one that writes the entire Gospel and his message is about Jesus, as we read in verse 1.

[4 : 54] He tells us the beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. So right at the start, we have quite a simple, clear, but direct purpose statement.

This Gospel he's writing is good news about Jesus and a claim to his identity, that Jesus is the Messiah, the chosen one, the one who will rule over Israel as king, but also that this is the Son of God.

Now Son of God is a divine title, but it also is a reference, because kings of Israel used to be called sons of God as well.

It's a reference as well that Jesus is ruling on God's behalf. Mark, however, announces this in a style of a royal proclamation.

So in those days, you know, if the emperor is enthroned or there's an heir born in the Roman Empire, heralds will be sent out across the empire to proclaim this good news, or a more literal word, great news about the event.

[6 : 06] And so what Mark is doing here is to actually be provocative and subversive in using the word good news or great news. What he's saying is that you don't have to worry about these emperors of the world.

This is the great news that we should all be paying attention to. Jesus is the great news. Jesus is the ultimate king, God's Messiah and Son.

He's the one that you should be putting your hope in. So come and worship him. Come and bow down to him rather than, you know, Caesar or whatever other emperor there was at the time.

Now as we look through the gospel, Mark's credibility will come when we see how he carefully records the events of Jesus' life through the accounts of the eyewitnesses.

That is, his message is based on first-hand accounts of people who saw who Jesus was, what he said, what he taught, and what he did.

[7 : 08] Well, Mark will get to these events soon, but before he does, as I said, he gives us the messengers that herald Jesus' coming.

And in verse 2, we get our second group of messengers. For he writes, here is the Messiah, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way.

A voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Now Mark here only mentions the prophet Isaiah, but he's actually quoting from two parts of the Old Testament here.

The words, I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way, are actually the words of the prophecy of Malachi. And Malachi, the word, or the translation of the word, actually means, my messenger.

That's Malachi, that's what it means. So Malachi is God's messenger. And part of this duo of Malachi and Isaiah making up the second group of Old Testament prophets and messengers.

[8 : 17] The other words in the second line are from Isaiah 40. You might have noticed that when Tiff read the passage from chapter 40, verse 1 to 11. And what Isaiah does is that he declares that there will come a time when a voice is calling in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for him.

And both Isaiah and Malachi being prophets of the Old Testament have immediate credibility because all the Jews of the time knew that these were the divine and inspired words of God.

There was scripture that Mark was quoting from. Scripture that was given hundreds of years before. Before Jesus ever even stepped foot on earth.

And so people, as they heard it, were familiar already with these words as they connected it then with the events of John the Baptist. And what the words of these Old Testament messengers do is to introduce the third messenger in the list, that of John the Baptist who now appears in verse 4.

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him confessing their sins.

[9 : 33] They were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey.

And this was his message. After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Here the reason that Mark describes John's appearance, you know, the camel hair, the leather belt and all that, is to draw a comparison with Elijah. Elijah. Because, again, in Malachi there was another prophecy in chapter 4 verse 5 on your screen which said that God would send Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

And so John coming was the coming of this prophet Elijah, the second Elijah as it were. But here John is also shown to do exactly what the Old Testament prophesied or testified that he would.

So we see there firstly that he does as the voice crying out, he prepares the way for the Lord. How? By preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[10 : 48] This is the equivalent of what Isaiah says the voice will cry out, make straight paths for the Lord. Now what does making straight paths entail?

Well, it entails strengthening out your lives. That is, repenting. It's interesting, isn't it, that John doesn't say try harder, be a better person.

No. Straightening your lives first and foremost is to repent, to turn back to God, to acknowledge your rebellion and disobedience against him.

Repent. And then go through the waters of baptism in the Jordan as a sign of that repentance. But secondly, John also announces the coming of the Lord himself, preparing the way and then announcing his coming.

And again, that's the other role that Isaiah and Malachi testifies. He'll be pointing the way to the coming Lord. And in verse 7, John says, After me, this is the Lord, comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals are not worthy to stoop down and untie.

[12 : 00] It's interesting, isn't it, that John, this powerful preacher, this great prophet. Yet he teaches that the Lord who comes after him is so great that he's not even worthy to stoop down and untie the straps of his sandals.

That's meant to be a really stark comparison for us. Because normally the lowliest task of a servant is to go and untie, stoop down and untie the king's shoelaces.

It's a demeaning job. The worst that you would give to all the servants. But even though John is this anointed messenger from God, has this most important message from God, and in one sense he's a really important person among men and prophets, he's the greatest prophet as Jesus would say, yet he's not even worthy to perform the lowliest of tasks for Jesus.

It's another way of saying just how great and powerful Jesus is, which is why it was so important to be prepared for his coming, to repent before he does.

And John even emphasizes the Lord's power by saying that whereas he will baptize with water, the Lord Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. And that is really only something that God can do.

[13 : 23] If you read the Old Testament, we do see people being anointed by the Holy Spirit, or God pouring out his Spirit on kings, priests, and prophets. But only God could do that.

And so if the Messiah can do this, well he must be divine. He must be powerful. So that's the picture that John paints of Jesus and the coming Lord, of this powerful figure, powerful ruler.

And that, when we start looking at verse 9, a very different picture, we have, don't we, of the appearing of Jesus. So at that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, that's in the north, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

And 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. And a voice came from heaven, you are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.

At once, the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals and angels attended him.

[14 : 33] So Mark has really talked up this awesome day of the Lord, you know, get ready Israel, clean up your act, line the highways, get ready for this royal procession. And then when it all happens, it's a bit of a fizzler, isn't it?

No pomp, no ceremony. Instead, you have this lone figure, Jesus, walking into the river, and instead of him baptizing John, well, John is the one that baptized him. And then immediately, he doesn't head into his palace or, you know, his grand castle or whatever.

Instead, he's led into the desert to be tempted, to live for forty days with the wild animals ministered by angels. And so what we have here is a challenge, isn't it?

A direct challenge to our human preconception of what power looks like. Yes, Jesus is powerful, but he's also a lowly and humble messiah.

His power is not what we expect. It's not to be compared with how we see the kings and rulers of this world. Now here too, Mark also introduces for us what I put in my outline as the fourth set of messengers, and that is God himself and his spirit.

[15 : 49] The spirit comes down in the form of a dove, thereby sending a message about who Jesus is, but so does the voice from heaven saying, this is my son in whom I am well pleased.

This is God's beloved son, without sin, pleasing to God. And Jesus now is able to baptize with the Holy Spirit because he himself is being filled with the spirit.

And by being tested in the desert for 40 days and resisting all temptation, he proves, doesn't he, that he is without sin and therefore he has the credentials to baptize others in the spirit.

I wonder whether you've, as we're going through the messengers, been picking up that the messages of these messengers are reinforcing one another, aren't they? Yes, they are independent because they're spread out across time over hundreds of years, but because God is the one ultimately overseeing it all, they work together as God's messengers to corroborate each other's testimony and therefore deliver one single consistent message.

All 15 verses, when we get to it, tell us one single consistent message about Jesus and how we're to respond. So let me come back to my attendance at kick-off Sunday.

[17 : 14] I know I'm a bit obsessed about that today, but I said earlier that I asked the question, how would you know I wasn't there or I was there? Well, I said you asked someone who was there, witnesses.

So let's say, for example, you do speak to someone like Jeff. He's not here today, so you can't ask him, but let's say Jeff mentioned that, oh, you know, I was speaking to Mark last Sunday at kick-off Sunday.

Well, he's a credible witness, yes, but here's one data point, one piece of evidence, isn't it, to show that I was there. And then separately, let's say somebody else comes along, maybe it's Oscar, and he says, yeah, yeah, yeah, I saw Jeff speaking to Mark at kick-off Sunday, you know, as they were scoffing up the sausages or something.

Well, Oscar is a second independent witness, isn't it? It's not like Jeff told Oscar to tell you that, you know, make sure you tell so-and-so that you saw me speaking to Mark, no.

So he's an independent witness, but he's corroborating what Jeff has said. And then maybe later on during the week, another person says to you that, you know, I had to interrupt Jeff while he's scoffing up that sausages and Mark as well, in order to interrupt Jeff from speaking to me in order to ask him a question.

[18 : 33] That becomes a third independent witness, isn't it? But all of them, even though they're independent, they consistently tell you that this single event did happen, that Jeff was talking to Mark, and therefore Mark had to be at kick-off Sunday.

And so this is what's happening in this opening passage in Mark, because the Old Testament prophets, firstly, God through them testified that there would be a forerunner, and this forerunner comes, John, and he testifies, exactly with what the Old Testament prophets say he would say about the Lord's coming, and then he adds to that by saying that Jesus will be baptized by the Spirit, and then the Holy Spirit comes and confirms what John prophesied or said would happen, and then afterwards, Jesus himself comes and finally does all that the others have prophesied of or testified to.

Now, incidentally, I think it was important that the Holy Spirit himself had to testify by coming down in a dove, because otherwise, you know, Jesus could have been just any man, he would have been just like any other man, isn't it, walking into the river.

John wouldn't have recognized him, and it took the Holy Spirit coming on him to point him out that this is Jesus, and of course, the voice from heaven, again, corroborates that this is the case.

But all these messengers are acting like a bit of a chain, aren't they, linking up their messages so that when Jesus finally comes, he himself becomes both the messenger of the good news and the message about the good news as well.

[20 : 17] Now, Mark was number one, but of course, chronologically, he's actually last, isn't it, because he comes at the end and then he puts it all down and writes it for us. And by doing so, he's bringing together all these independent messengers to convey to us the single consistent message about Jesus, God's Messiah, the Son of God.

Well, Jesus finally comes and his preaching itself brings this message, verse 14. It reads, after John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God.

See, he's a proclaimer, he's a messenger. The time has come, he said, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news. And so, as I said, Jesus is both the good news and the proclaimer of the good news.

He's the messenger as well as the message. But in another sense, his message is the same as all the other prophets or messengers before him. The thing that's new, as I've just said, is Jesus is himself the message and he is the fulfillment of all that has been proclaimed to date.

And so, by proclaiming that he's the kingdom of God, he's actually declaring himself to be the Lord, isn't he? He's God's chosen Messiah and in his coming, he's ushered in God's kingdom.

[21 : 41] God's kingdom has come near to them. He has come near to them. And for Israel, this is good news that they have been waiting for. the promised ruler to resume the throne of Israel.

We saw that in the reading from Tiff in Isaiah 40, isn't it? Of someone bringing the good news to Jerusalem, comforting them, telling them that their shepherd, the sovereign Lord, is coming.

Now, for the rest of the world, that's for us, that's also good news because, like Israel, we look at this world and then finally we say there's hope that God will come to fix this world.

Jesus is God's solution to everything wrong in this world. And that's great. That's great and good news, isn't it? So, how do we respond?

Well, Jesus says, firstly, repent, turn from your wicked ways. But that's the same, isn't it, as preparing the way of the Lord, making straight our paths, seeking forgiveness for our sins.

[22 : 42] Jesus isn't saying anything new here, but reinforcing everything that's gone before. And so, here's the question. We may be looking at the world and wanting Jesus to fix all that's wrong about it.

Yes. But God says, let's deal with your life first. Are you angry about the conflict in Gaza?

Well, rightly you should be. But what about your own conflicts in life? Have you made peace with everyone in your own life? God is saying, repent of that first.

Get that fixed up first before you get angry about other conflicts in the world. Are you critical of every wrong thing that the government is doing? Well, what about you?

Have you never done anything wrong to anyone? Been unkind or uncaring? Let's repent of that first before we go around criticizing the government.

[23 : 43] And the good news, of course, is that Jesus didn't just say repent, but he said that there is forgiveness of sins, isn't there? John said that as well. And Jesus can do that because he died for our sins.

He did it so that we can draw near to him and come into his kingdom, so that he can baptize us with the Holy Spirit. And so if you're here today and you've never repented or believed the good news of Jesus, well, let me encourage you to do so.

Think about it, consider it. Being in God's kingdom is not just about coming to church, learning some Bible verses or calling yourself a Christian. Rather, to be in God's kingdom, Jesus says, requires repentance.

That's something that needs to happen in our hearts. We need to admit we have done wrong and seek God's forgiveness, which he will give through Jesus because we believe in him.

So if you've not done that, then please come and talk to me. Talk to one of the leaders afterwards. We'll be more than happy to help you. But for the rest of us who have believed the good news, well, Jesus' words still apply to us, doesn't it?

[24 : 57] Because there's an ongoing need for repentance. Repentance is not just something you did five years ago when you became a Christian and then that's it. That's why when we read the Anglican prayer book, it tells us to come to God with penitent hearts.

It's not something that we just keep, you know, it's not only something that we just keep doing, but actually it's talking about having the right attitude when we come to God. the condition of the heart that is to remain humble and penitent.

Now, I don't know about you, but do you find that your house is always in need of cleaning? Maybe you guys don't have houses to clean, just live in your parents' house, maybe.

Well, let me share with you because I have my own house to clean. It always feels like even though I've been cleaning, the work is never done. You know, I've just cleaned the house, I've just vacuumed, just done the laundry, I've scrubbed the toilet, I've asked my daughters to scrub the toilet, but then all of a sudden, you look back and it's, oh, got to start again.

It never ends. And, you know, I think you all know why. That's because as long as we're living in the house, we will keep creating a mess, isn't it?

[26 : 19] Just living creates mess. We eat, so we need to clean up. We go to the bathroom, therefore we need to clean it. We wear clothes, therefore we need to do laundry.

All of that requires cleaning, isn't it? And so that's the same with repentance. As long as we're living, we will create a bit of a mess spiritually with our lives.

Yes, over time God's spirit helps us not to make such a big mess, but we will still keep falling short of God's standard, whether it's without words or deeds or thoughts.

And so there's always a need to keep confessing, isn't it? To keep a clean slate before God. It's not that the act of confessing is the thing that makes you clean, no, it's the blood of Jesus that is the effective means.

But our ongoing humility and penitence is a reflection of that repentance before God, of wanting to ask for God's forgiveness and the blood of Jesus to keep us clean, isn't it?

[27 : 23] It's a mindset that helps us to continue to be ready, particularly as we know that the kingdom of God has not only come once in the first coming of Jesus, but actually is coming again.

Now, if you're old enough, you may be familiar with the word scurryfunch. It's on the slide. It's in the handout as well. Anyone familiar with this word? No, no one's old enough.

It's the act of hastily cleaning your house when a last minute guest is arriving, particularly your mother-in-law, I think it says on that slide. I have to, I forgot to do this in the morning, but I have to give my wife credit for this.

She was the one that discovered this word. A very useful word because I think there's usually one scurryfungia in every family. But I want to encourage all of us that actually we need to be spiritual scurryfunges, don't we?

Because we know that Jesus is coming again and just like a last-minute visitor, we actually don't know when he will. He could come again at any time.

[28 : 37] The kingdom of God can finally come near for good any time, isn't it? so we need to scurryfunges spiritually, don't we?

If Jesus came tonight, let's say, will we be ready? Will he find us waiting and watching for his coming? Will our lives reflect that we are humble and penitent, waiting for his arrival?

Well, you know, many people, I think, are often preoccupied with the idea of an apocalypse. During the Cold War, that was, you know, the nuclear annihilation, that was the apocalypse between Russia and the US or whatever.

Nowadays, they seem to have forgotten about that risk anyway, but nowadays it's about climate change, isn't it? That's the new apocalypse. Well, actually, the word apocalypse just means revelation, and in particular, the revelation of the coming of the Lord Jesus, his second coming.

That's where the word originally came from. And so, for us as Christians, the apocalypse that we should really be concerned for and preoccupied with is the revelation of the Lord Jesus at his coming.

[29 : 50] You know, for God, that is the thing that he's most concerned with. That is the thing that he's working all of history to bring to pass. That is his end goal for human history.

The coming, he's working towards the coming of his son again to bring the new creation to pass. Now, if you're not ready for that, that will be a great and dreadful day.

Dreadful. But if you are, because you believe in Jesus, because you're having a penitent heart, then that day will be a great day as well.

But it will be a great day of great joy. It will be great news for you of the very best kind, because that is the day that the kingdom of God will finally come near for good in the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

So, friends, let's be ready for that. Let's scurry fudge like Matt spiritually, so that when he comes, we will be ready and rejoicing. Let's pray.

[31 : 01] Now, Father, we long for the day of Jesus' second coming, when all this stuff in the world that we are so grieved by will come to an end, when the perfect kingdom will be ushered in forever, and we can belong to it and live forever in it.

But in the meantime, please give us penitent hearts to repent, to believe, to trust in Jesus, so that we will be ready. and watching when that day arrives.

In his glorious name, the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.