

The Kingdom Comes

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Date: 09 December 2012

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[0 : 0 0] I'm going to be speaking from this lectern this morning rather than the sky deck just because I'm a little bit taller than the Andrews. So it's just easier for me.

Well, let's pray. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for your word. And as we look at it now, please speak to us. Please help us to understand it. Please change our lives by it. We pray for the glory of your name.

Amen. Amen. Well, just in case you hadn't heard this week, Prince William and Kate Middleton, sorry, I should say the Duchess of Cambridge, made an announcement.

They are expecting a baby. The news, of course, spread all around the world. The media just lapped it up. And now, you know, everyone's emailing them, name suggestions. I emailed them saying, you know, Matthew's a good name for a boy.

But I haven't heard back from him yet. But I'll, you know, I'll check it later. Of course, there was that story as well of the tragic death of the nurse as well that was involved with it.

[1 : 0 3] But really, the big news this week has been the announcement of the royal expectations, so to speak. And if we were living in the ancient world, the time of Mark's gospel, then that announcement would be called a gospel or good news, news of great importance for everyone to hear.

And in Mark chapter 1, we're introduced to another big announcement. In fact, the biggest news in history ever. Mark chapter 1, verse 1.

Please turn to it. It says the beginning of the good news or gospel about Jesus, the Messiah. So Mark has an announcement. It's good news or gospel.

And it has to do with royalty. But no, not the British royal family. A king. Which is what the word Messiah there in verse 1. Messiah or Christ.

They both mean the same thing. In fact, Son of God there as well means king. So really, Mark's gospel begins with the news about King Jesus, the king. But before we meet Jesus properly, Mark quotes some voices from the past.

[2 : 1 3] In verse 2. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, I'll 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. Mark wants us to know, in fact, God wants us to know, that the great news about Jesus hasn't come out of the blue. It's not an accident or a mistake or afterthought.

No, no. The good news about Jesus was promised long, long ago. In fact, even those opening words, the beginning, echo the words of Genesis 1, the first page of the Bible.

That begins with the same words, in the beginning. Genesis 1 tells us about the very beginning of everything that God created the heavens and the earth. He created everything out of nothing simply by speaking his powerful word.

Well, by using the same language here in verse 1, Mark is saying, God is starting again. God is doing something new and big, just like in Genesis 1.

[3 : 17] God is going to bring life out of nothing again. He's bringing a new era of history into existence. But in verses 2 and 3, it's not just that the great news about Jesus was promised long ago, although it was.

Rather, the way that these quotes are put together actually tells us there's a particular way this new era of history is coming, a particular order, so that we know when it's about to happen.

So verses 2 and 3 promise two people. First, a messenger, it's there in verse 2. And second, the Lord himself, or God, will come in verse 3.

So before this new era of history begins, Mark reminds us from the Old Testament, first there'll be a messenger, and then the Lord. And then, who do we meet?

Well, in verses 4 to 8, we meet first a man called John. John is the promised messenger, the forerunner. Well, how do we know he's the messenger?

[4 : 22] Not just because he comes straight after the quote, but look at what he does, look at what he wears, and what he says. 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. They were baptized by him in the Jordan River. See, John baptizes people.

He immerses them in the River Jordan, calling them to repent, to turn their lives back to God, to seek his mercy. John is preparing people. So he's doing the job that a messenger or a forerunner is supposed to do.

And in verse 6, he has strange clothes and diet. John wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. I don't know what you ate for breakfast this morning, but I'm guessing it's not that.

But the question is, why does Mark tell us about what John is wearing? I mean, that just seems like such a random piece of information, doesn't it? Well, it's to ring bells in the minds and ears of his audience.

[5 : 32] You see, John is dressed like the prophet Elijah. Let me give you an example of what's going on. See, if I said to you, I saw a woman walking down Bourke Street in Melbourne with purple hair, big floral glasses, carrying gladioli, you would say, oh, Dame Edna's in town.

If I said that I saw at Doncaster Shopping Town four blokes wearing bright-coloured skivvies, you'd say it was the Wiggles. You see, we know that clothing identifies people.

Well, in the same way, in the first century world, if you said to a Jew that there was this preacher in the wilderness wearing a camel hair suit with a leather belt around his waist, they would have said, oh, it's the prophet Elijah, the great prophet who's meant to come before the coming of the Lord.

The messenger Elijah has come. And that's probably why so many people from everywhere are coming to see and hear John in verse 5. They come from the big city and they come from the country. Everyone is coming to see what the fuss is about.

But even more important than what John is wearing is what John says. In verse 7, this was his message. After me comes one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I'm not worthy to stoop down and untie.

[6 : 49] I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit. So John's message is, someone great and powerful is coming. Someone so great and powerful, I'm not even worthy to untie the strap of his sandal, which in the ancient world was such a lowly, scummy job, so disgusting that even some slaves didn't do it.

But John says, to me that would be a privilege I don't even deserve. Compared to the one who's coming, I am nothing. I simply immerse you in these muddy waters, in this river, but the one who's coming, he will immerse you in the Holy Spirit.

And so that's his message. So because of what he does and wears and says, John is clearly the promised messenger, mentioned in verse 2, the forerunner who was prophesied long ago.

So really this is it. The stage is set. The messenger has come and so who are we expecting to see next? Well in light of verse 3, we're expecting the Lord.

And who does Mark introduce us to straight after John in verse 9? It's Jesus. Jesus is the Lord. At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

[8 : 08] 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. So Jesus appears and what happens? He's baptized in the water. He comes out of the water and he's given the spirit.

The spirit descends on him. The heavens open, literally torn apart. And God speaks from heaven to Jesus saying, you are my son. And that is a direct quote from Psalm 2.

We heard it read this morning. Psalm 2 was read out at the coronation of Israel's king. King David and other kings after him had Psalm 2 read out.

And so here God is saying, this man Jesus, he's the king. He's the man I've appointed and set apart to rule the world. And so if the voice from heaven wasn't enough to convince you that Jesus is the king, then look on in verses 12 and 13.

[9 : 15] Jesus confronts God's adversary, Satan, and he confronts him and overcomes. At once the spirit sent him out into the wilderness and he was in the wilderness 40 days, being tempted by Satan.

He was with the wild animals and angels attended him. See, back in verse 1, Mark called Jesus the Messiah or king. And in verse 11, God has just spoken from heaven and declared Jesus to be the king.

Well, the question we want to know is, if Bob the Builder wrote Mark's gospel, it is, can he do it? Well, the answer is, yes, he can.

Jesus is in the wilderness, verse 12, he comes face to face with God's enemy, Satan, and he doesn't give in. You know that saying, we have absolute power corrupts absolutely?

Jesus has absolute power, but he's not corrupt. So, and it's not just here in verses 12 and 13, but actually, if we kept reading through Mark's gospel, we would see page after page of Jesus demonstrating his authority and his power as God's king.

[10 : 25] For example, he speaks a word and a typhoon stops dead in its tracks. He releases people who are controlled by evil spirits. He speaks a word and sickness goes away from those who are sick.

He commands people who are dead to stop being dead and they come back to life. And most remarkably, he forgives people's sins so that they have a clean slate with God.

So, beyond a shadow of a doubt, Jesus is God's promised king. And because he's the king, he needs to be responded to rightly. There's a famous story.

You may have already heard this story before. You may know it. But if you don't, it's a story about the world champion boxer, Joe Lewis. On one occasion, three young men hopped on a bus in Detroit in the 1930s and tried to pick a fight with this lone man sitting in the back row of the bus.

They taunted him, they mocked him, and he didn't respond. So, they kept it going and sort of, you know, really started to stick it into him and insulted him and still, he didn't respond.

[11 : 34] And after a while, he stood up and at that point, I think the three youths realized this man is actually a lot bigger than what he looked like sitting down. He pulled the cord to get off the bus.

He turned to the three young men and handed them a business card from his pocket and he got off the bus. And as the bus was driving away, they read the card and it said, Joe Lewis, boxer. Now, these ignorant young men tried to pick a fight with a man who had become heavyweight champion of the world from 1937 to 1949.

One boxing association called Joe Lewis the greatest boxer ever and Muhammad Ali was second to Joe Lewis.

That's the kind of guy that he was. You see, these young men didn't respond rightly to Joe Lewis because they didn't recognize who he was. Well, in the same way, Mark, the author, has told us Jesus is the king and God has said Jesus is the king so that Mark's audience and even us today will respond rightly to Jesus.

How should we respond? We'll look at Jesus' message in verses 14 and 15. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God.

[12 : 53] The time has come, he said, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. What's Jesus' message? Repent and believe the good news.

The way to respond is to repent. That is to do a U-turn. Turn your life around to God and believe. That word believe means trust.

Trust in the gospel. But before we finish, let's consider the word gospel or good news in this translation. The word we heard about in verse 1.

The word gospel doesn't just appear in the New Testament. In fact, it's not even a religious word. As I said at the start, it's just a word that means great news, momentous news.

It's a word that comes from the world of the media like newflash or headline. The word also appears in the Old Testament. We heard it in that first reading, Isaiah chapter 40, where messengers carry literally glad tidings or good news or gospel to God's people who are in exile under a foreign oppressor.

[14 : 00] And the message that they bring, the gospel, is God is king. God reigns. Now the news that God is king can either mean good news or bad news depending how you respond to it.

You see, God is holy, he is just and he opposes rebellion against him. So if the news comes to you that God is the rightful king of the whole world and therefore has the authority to tell you how to live and demands that you submit to him and you don't, well then the news that God is king is actually bad news for you.

It means you've rebelled against him and he stands rightfully as judge over you and he'll hold you account for your neglect to treat him as he deserves. So the gospel is in that sense not necessarily good news.

However, the God of the Bible is full of mercy and compassion, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He loves to forgive and show mercy. So on another level the news that God is king actually means God is able to save you.

So even though Israel were in exile in Isaiah 40 the news God is king means God will rescue you. He'll overthrow the enemies. And so if you recognise God as king and submit to him as your king well the message is you'll be restored.

[15 : 26] You'll be forgiven. That is wonderful news. So you see the good news or the gospel really can be good news or bad news depending how you respond to it.

Now the New Testament authors also use the word gospel. It's there in Mark chapter 1 verse 1 but their use has a different focus to Isaiah 40. It's the same message but a different focus.

So in Isaiah 40 the Old Testament gospel message is God is king. Well the New Testament gospel message is Jesus is king.

We've seen that today throughout Mark chapter 1. You see it's the same message but with a different focus. You see God has always been and always will be the king.

But now with the coming of Jesus God chooses to rule his world through a particular person. This man his son the Lord Jesus. God speaks through him God acts through him God rules through him God saves sinners through him God's plans and purposes for the world is to one day bring all things under Christ as king.

[16 : 42] So to repent and believe the gospel means to repent and believe in Jesus. And so like the news that God is king the news that Jesus is king can either be good news or bad news for you depending on how you respond.

If you reject or oppose Jesus as king you'll be crushed under God's judgment. That's the penalty for sin that's what we all deserve. But if you submit to Jesus as king and rely on his mercy and his saving death then you'll be rescued from judgment because Jesus took it for you.

You'll be blessed as Psalm 2 says you'll be forgiven. Therefore Jesus' message really is urgent. He says repent. You know we react to we react differently to different messages don't we?

I was at a church not long ago where the minister got up the front to read the church notices but the mic wasn't on and he actually said this mic's not working but the congregation all said it once and also with you.

Which had that effect. I mean it just showed that they had totally switched off they were just flying on autopilot they weren't listening at all.

[18 : 04] You know now if the minister was to announce everybody we need to get out the building's on fire well I'm sure the congregation would have reacted very differently I can imagine that we all would have run for the door so you know we respond differently to different announcements church notices well we kind of pay mild attention to those but the announcement of a fire well that's life threatening there are life or death consequences for that and so it's an urgent message.

well this morning I want to say Mark and the rest of the Bible want to tell us that the gospel about Jesus is urgent and serious news it's like the news of the fire there are life or death consequences for how you respond so if you're not a Christian this morning Jesus' message is repent turn your life over to Jesus believe in Jesus as the king who died for you and whom God raised from the dead as your king if you are a Christian this morning and you're already trusting in Jesus and submitting to him as king well then remember to keep on trusting and submitting to Jesus he's your king now I love Christmas it's my favourite time of the year but one of the dangers as Doug mentioned earlier one of the dangers of Christmas time as great and as fun as it is you know the school nativity plays carols by candlelight all those things we love and enjoy one of the real dangers at this time of year is that we can domesticate Jesus you know we like the baby Jesus in a manger because a baby doesn't threaten us doesn't demand anything of us doesn't expect anything from us he's just a helpless little baby meek and mild but as important as the birth of Jesus is and the first Christmas and we do need to remember it we do need to remember that the Jesus we celebrate at Christmas grew up he became an adult man and he came to die on a cross to pay for our sin and as a resurrected and ascended Lord he commands all people everywhere to repent and bow the knee to him before he returns as judge so by all means let's enjoy Christmas and all the good opportunities to celebrate Jesus and the gifts that God has given us friends and family and food and so on but we do need to remember that Jesus is the king the king who came to die and be raised to life and he calls each one of us to bow the knee to him so can I urge you this morning with Jesus words the time has come the kingdom of God has come near repent and believe the good news let's pray thank you heavenly father that you sent your son the Lord Jesus to live as one of us to die the death we should have died and thank you for raising him in power thank you that he is the king of the world please help us to trust him to rely on him to give thanks to him and to submit to him as our king father we pray this in Jesus name amen thank you