

The King is Here

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening, everyone. It's glad to see you here. Please keep your Bibles open as we look at the first chapter of Mark tonight. As Martin has said, we're moving through the four Gospels over four weeks, chapter one. And so today we're looking at Mark being the second week in Advent. We've got some outlines as well in your news sheet, so take them out and hopefully that will help you to follow along. Well, more than 20 years ago, there was a big push to change the world during Christmas. Pop stars in the UK were confronted by the poverty in the world. And on Christmas 1984, they recorded a popular single to draw attention to it.

As I wonder if anyone remember what that song was called. Pop quiz, anyone? Who said that? Thank you, Jenny. Yes, do they know it's Christmas time at all? It was 1984 after all, and some of us may not have been born. This was followed very closely in the US by another song, which is We Are the World. Yes? Memory coming back. And then Michael Jackson did something similar a few years later with the song Heal the World. The chorus of the song, I've put it up here.

I'm just wondering whether there are any volunteers to sing it for us tonight. I was going to, but maybe not. Well, the chorus goes, as you can read, something like this. Heal the world, make it a better place for you and for me and the entire human race. There are people dying.

If you care enough for the living, make a better place for you and for me. It's a very catchy song, isn't it? I'm just fearful that some of you will probably have that ringing in your years for the rest of the sermon. Well, people all over the world long for a better world, don't they? No famine, no oppression, a place for freedom and peace. And things weren't that different during the time of the Jews, during the time of Jesus, particularly since they were under the rule of the Romans, which was harsh and oppressive at times. Besides, for the Jewish people, they had their own scriptures, which promised a very different world, one where they would have a king of their own and where they would live under his rule at peace with one another. And so when we read Mark, Mark opens very tantalizingly with a vision of this world. But it was also a provocative one. For it begins like this, the beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. Mark styles his opening line like that of the Roman emperors. The word gospel or good news in Greek is actually not a Christian word at all. But in the Roman world, it was used to announce good news or great news, perhaps a victory or conquest, calling forth celebration and adoration by the people.

And so Mark, in announcing Jesus like this, flags the possibility that this Jesus might be a king, a rival and a threat to the Roman Empire. The entire gospel, therefore, is the great news of this coming king, Israel's long-awaited king, conquering and victorious, one who would bring an end to their oppression and usher in God's kingdom. There is therefore the beginning of the great news of Jesus, the Messiah, God's anointed, the Son of God. Now Mark then proceeds to establish the truth of this announcement, but by demonstrating three things, that this Jesus was firstly announced by prophecy long ago in scriptures. Then secondly, that he was anointed by God in the presence of the Jews. And thirdly, that he was attested by trial in the wilderness. So those are the three points that we have under the long-awaited king. So first, announcement by prophecy, which is from verses 2 to 8.

[4 : 32] Now scriptures are full of prophecy about Jesus, but Mark highlights this one from Isaiah, and Vicki read it from Isaiah 40. Verse 2 and 3 says, 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.

So just like a herald announcing a king's victory procession, God's own king will be preceded by a messenger. And his job will be to clear the way for the Messiah and prepare the people for him. Just like a road sweeper on the morning of a royal procession, getting rid of all the rubbish before the queen arrives. And this is exactly what John the Baptist does when he arrives. Except that John is more than a herald. He's actually God's prophet.

Just like the prophets of old. Just like Elijah. He's the voice calling out from the wilderness, dressed like Elijah, with camel's hair and a leather belt, and with a diet of locusts and wild honey.

But notice, however, a few more details about the prophecy. The person that John is preparing for is none other than the Lord himself. That is, God's Messiah, Israel's king, is the Lord himself.

This is the same Lord who brought Israel out of Egypt during their exile. This is the same one who brought them out of exile during the time of Isaiah. Each time, they were brought out and into the land of promise.

[6 : 22] And if you read both in Exodus and in Isaiah, God describes this land of promise like the Garden of Eden, a land of peace, a land of plenty, a land of prosperity.

Well, this is the expectation which Marx creates when he announces Jesus. Jesus, Israel's coming king, will reinstate this kingdom of peace, of plenty, and of prosperity.

No more tears, no more oppression, no more conflict. So that's point one. Jesus is announced by prophecy. Well, point two.

Jesus, the king, is anointed by God. And this we find in verses 9 and 11. And that's exactly what we see when Jesus arrives on the scene. For at his baptism, heaven opens or is torn open, and the Spirit of God descends on him like a dove.

And then immediately the Father's voice is heard from heaven, saying, You are my son, the one I love, with whom I am well pleased. So God speaks through his prophets from the past, and now he speaks publicly and directly right there and then, confirming his prophecy in Isaiah.

[7 : 45] But actually, even the very words he now uses from heaven are words that he has already spoken before. For the words, the one I love, with whom I am well pleased, are also words from Isaiah.

This time it's from chapter 42, about God's servant. And so if you read Isaiah, you will know and you will see what this servant's mission is.

Let me just read you two passages from that prophecy. The first from Isaiah 42 and 6 and 7, which I've got on the screen there. And it says, I, the Lord, have called you, that is the servant, in righteousness.

I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for his people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

And the second passage is from Isaiah 49 and verse 5 and 6. And there it says, And now the Lord says, He who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has been my strength.

[9 : 05] He says, It is too small a thing for you to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob, and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

And so if you add these two passages to the prophecy we've read earlier in Mark, can you begin to hear what the Jews would have heard then?

How big a deal this was. What great expectations there would have been for this coming Messiah. Not just a king for Israel, but a saviour for the entire world.

And so the question is, is this king up to the task? And that brings us to the third point, that Jesus was attested by trial. Verses 12 and 13.

And here's where Jesus confirms his credentials by his own actions. And so the Father speaks from heaven, the Spirit descends from heaven, and now the Son will confirm his own kingship through testing in the wilderness.

[10 : 20] And so let's look at verse 12 and 13. At once the Spirit sent him out in the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness 40 days being tempted by Satan.

He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. Note that Jesus is sent by the Spirit and not lured by Satan into the wilderness.

And also note that 40 days, which is one day for each year, that Israel was in the wilderness. And so what Mark is saying is that where Israel failed over its 40 years, Jesus, unlike Israel, triumphs.

Mark does not give us the details, but if you look at Matthew and Luke, you would see that Jesus passed the test, and that when he was tempted by Satan, he did not succumb to it.

So here then is a king who would not let his people down. Here is a king who lives up to what God expects of him. And for all of Israel's previous kings who failed, this is now one king that will not.

[11 : 30] Where David and Solomon, the great kings of Israel, failed to live up even to God's expectations, Jesus will not. And so it's only taken about 13 verses, but Mark has succeeded in announcing his gospel, the good news that it's Jesus Christ, Messiah, Son of God.

And he has shown us the credentials of this king, announced by prophecy, firstly, secondly, anointed by God, and then thirdly, attested by trial. And so when Jesus finally arrives on the scene and announces in verse 15 that the time has come, the kingdom of God is near, there is a great anticipation that at last, everything that has been spoken of in the Old Testament is about to come to pass.

Now is the time, the kingdom is near. Now is the time, something amazing is about to happen. Now is the time that God is finally going to make this world a better place.

God is going to make our world a better place. For you, for me, and for the entire human race. And yet, in and amongst all that expectation, we find a few surprises.

Yes, Jesus is the king that everyone has been waiting for, but he's not the king that everyone expects. In particular, how he will achieve his victory will surprise everyone.

[13 : 07] And the reason for this is because Israel's problem is bigger than they think. Now most Jews would have thought that Rome was their problem.

Get rid of the Romans and life would be fine. Re-establish the kingdom of Israel, make it rich and powerful, and all our problems will go away.

But John's message was that the enemy, the real enemy, wasn't physical. But you see, prepare the way of the Lord was not a reference to a physical way, a physical highway, where God's army would then come down in battle.

Instead, the paths which the people were to make straight were spiritual ones, their own lives, the way that they were living was not what God wanted of them.

And so if we go back to Isaiah 40, where these verses come from, we'll be able to see in verses 1 and 2 that God's message to his people was comfort, comfort, speak tenderly to Jerusalem, her hard service has been completed, and then what?

[14 : 19] that her sin has been paid for. She has received from the Lord's hand double for all their sin. And so the message which John brings is not one of conquest, but of repentance.

And so in verse 4, he preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. His was a call to turn back from their waywardness and to prepare for God's rule in their lives.

And it is the same message that Jesus gives in verse 15, repent and believe the good news. And so if you look at the rest of Mark, you see that actually Jesus had very little conflict with the Romans.

In fact, the person who correctly pronounces Jesus on the cross as the Son of God was actually a Roman centurion. Instead, time and time again, his enemies were among his own people.

The Jews, the Pharisees, those who knew the prophecies and yet refused to repent because they kept trusting in themselves. Friends, many of us have the same tendencies, don't we?

[15 : 35] To think that the problems that we have are actually external to us. It's always somebody else, you know, our husband or wife, our parents, the government, the school, our colleagues, the church.

If only we could fix them, we say. If only God would do something about them, then the world for us would be a much better place. Then I'll be a happier person.

But if we're honest with ourselves, we have to admit, don't we, that often we are the problem. We are the cause of a lot of conflict in our own lives.

We are the source of our own unhappiness, our own anxieties, our own insecurities. And so let me quote another Michael Jackson song since we're sort of on the roll tonight.

And this time it's from The Man in the Mirror where he says, and some of you might be able to repeat after me, if you want to make the world a better place, just look at yourself and make a change.

[16 : 44] See, at the heart of every problem in this world is the sinfulness of humanity. And that sinfulness resides in the heart of all of us, each and every one of us.

And so friends, it's only when we begin to realize that this is the real cause of our problems, of the world's problems, that we understand the kind of king we need in Jesus.

The problem was bigger than what the Jews thought, and so the solution needed to be better. And Jesus did come with a better solution, or more accurately, a better salvation.

And we begin to see that Jesus did not come to overthrow a political system, but to do something more radical, to overcome the sinfulness that is in the heart of every person, in my heart and in your heart.

And the way he did it was through his death on the cross. Mark says in verse 1 that this is the beginning of the good news, and the good news actually does not stop until we get to the cross.

[17 : 58] For it is there that Jesus achieves his ultimate victory over Satan and sin and death. And it is there that Jesus achieves his role as the servant as he was portrayed in Isaiah 53, where he was pierced for our transgressions, and by his stripes we were healed.

And so this is not a victory in the physical realm, but in the spiritual realm. That was why he was not tested militarily in the wilderness, but morally.

And because Jesus has come to establish a spiritual kingdom and not a physical one, the only way to be part of it is through spiritual means.

That is, through faith and repentance. To repent and believe the good news. Jesus has to be the king in your life, and the kingdom's rule has to extend into your very heart and mind and will.

That's what it actually means to be baptized by the Holy Spirit in verse 8. And so Michael Jackson was only half right. Yes, take a look at yourself, take a very good look, but it is only God that can make the change, not you.

[19 : 19] Some 2,000 years ago Jesus came into this world, and as he did, the time was fulfilled. The kingdom came near, the king came, and his spiritual kingdom was established.

But the question I want to ask all of us this evening is, has the kingdom of God come near to you? It has come into this world, but has it come into your life?

That is, who is your king? Is it Jesus, or is it you? Now, you may have only started coming to church, or you may have been coming a long time, but I think that's still the question that remains.

Who is your king? You see, at Christmas, we see the image of the baby Jesus, and it's a very popular one. But the baby Jesus makes no demands on us.

Instead, the Gospel of Mark goes straight to the man to show us that Jesus grew up to be the long-awaited king, the king whose rule we need to submit to, the king who solves the problem at the heart of every problem in this world, human sin.

[20 : 30] One day, we will see the full effect of this kingdom physically with our eyes, but for now, it is a spiritual kingdom, hidden, but still very real.

Are you part of that kingdom? Is Jesus your king? If he isn't, then let me urge you, repent and believe the good news.

Make Jesus your king and let him change your world for the better this Christmas. Let's pray. God and Heavenly Father, we thank you that you sent your son Jesus.

We thank you that you have thought from the beginning of this wonderful and perfect plan for salvation, which not only deals with the physical problems of this world, but the spiritual ones as well.

Tonight again, Lord, we want to reaffirm that you are, that your son Jesus is the king of our lives. and I'll pause right now so that you might in your heart make whatever prayer you need to to God in response to that claim that Jesus is king.

[21 : 57] Dear God, we pray that this Christmas you will help us to see you and your son as king and to help us to help others to see the same.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.