

Great News!

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, give us faith to receive your word, understanding to know what it means and the will to put it into practice through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Well, I remember it as though it were yesterday.

It was lunchtime. I was playing in the school playground at Coronation Primary School in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea. Suddenly, the loudspeaker blared out and disturbing it disturbed our play.

But anyway, we listened. The announcement was short, sharp and to the point. John F. Kennedy, the President of the United States of America, had been assassinated. Millions of people from my generation remember that day.

In fact, I was surveying with the 745 congregation where people were. And people, as they shook hands at the door, said, I remember where I was. You see, the assassination of JFK was one of those crucial events in modern world history.

It is one of the events that capture an age in some ways. For my generation, I think there are probably three or four such events. Let me go through the ones that I think, for me at least.

[1 : 05] I remember where I was when I watched the landing on the moon. It was in Scotch College when I was, I think, in first year of secondary school. For us in Australia, I think maybe the dismissal of Gough Whitlam might have been another one.

The shooting of John Lennon was another one. And the terrorist attacks on the United States. Many of us can remember where we were when those announcements came, when we first heard that news.

For many of us, those events, in one sense, are markers in our history. Markers about who we are, where we've come from, where we're going, and all those sorts of things. Well, the ancient Israelites were no different.

They, too, had crucial events in their history. And those events marked out who they were and who their God was and what was happening. They formed their self-concept. They told them who they were, who their God was.

Now, within the Bible, there are, I think, a number of such events like this. And today I want to concentrate on just a few of them. But I think they are very significant markers in the history of God's people, God's Old Testament people.

[2 : 08] The very first great event of Israelite memory is the one recorded on the first page of the Bible. For in Genesis 1, God creates the universe.

And the pinnacle of his creation is what happens on day 6 when he creates human beings. We human beings are presented there as being the creation of God. And when we turn to Genesis 1, we find that a little bit more about Genesis, about human beings, we find that we were created for relationship with God.

We also find that our nature in relationship with God is captured in one person. So we can look back on our history and say, yes, if I were to capture who I am, I would find it in my progenitor.

That is, in Adam and Eve. And when I look at them, what do I find? I find that I am a human being who lives independently from my creator rather than dependently. Adam is like me.

He's a man who wants to rule himself rather than be ruled by God. And that's a marker in the land, in the sand, as it were. There's a marker on my way. This is who I am. In Genesis 3, we meet God again.

[3 : 16] And we find that he's a righteous God who judges human rebellion. And what we find, but we don't like God to be ruler over us.

We find God to be a God who, though generous, can punish sin. And then let's turn to the next great event in the history of God's people.

And it is the Exodus. Do you remember that? Israel are descended from Abraham. They find themselves in the promised land under a foreign overlord.

They are suffering terribly under the persecution of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. And so they call out to God for deliverance. And God hears. He acts. And through a series of dramatic incidents, he delivers his people.

He provides an exodus. That is a way out of Egypt. And he shows himself to be a God who will, for his people, intervene in history. He will save them.

[4 : 16] For he is a God full of compassion, mercy and love. And in his compassion, he eventually brings his people into the promised land. But on the way, what do they show themselves to be?

Well, they show themselves to be like Adam. That is, they refuse to trust. They decline to obey. They rebel against God time after time after time. And God judges them as he did judge Adam.

But again, just as with Adam and Eve, his mercy triumphs over judgment. And he brings his people into the land of promise. So there's the second marker. First creation, second exodus. Third occurs in the promised land.

They finally make it into the land. And the books of 1 and 2 Samuel record for us that God gave them kings. Now, the first king was something of a disaster, Saul. But eventually, we find that there's another king, David.

And but even David abuses his authority. Even David is not perfect. Even David, as those who come after him, acts in his own interests rather than the interests of God.

[5 : 23] And so as the Old Testament story goes on, we find kings do exactly what humans do. The kings fail. And the book of Kings and Chronicles records their failure for us.

However, through the prophets, God indicates that eventually he will provide a different sort of a king. A king that's sort of like David and Josiah, but better. A king who truly shepherd the people of God.

A king who will constantly have their best interests in mind. A king who will rule like God with justice and righteousness and mercy. But because the kings failed. The story of Israel is exile.

Is one of failure. Adam failed. Adam failed. Israel failed. The kings failed. Israel fails. And God acts in judgment. But even then, he acts in mercy. For he forgives and forgives and forgives.

He warns and he warns and he warns. And he says, if you continue to rebel like this, eventually I will have to punish. And he does. He sends a foreign nation into the land.

[6 : 28] And his people are cast out of the land of promise and into Babylon. And in there in Babylon, God promises again that he'll forgive. In Isaiah 40, he says these words.

Comfort, comfort my people. Says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed. That her sin has been paid for.

That she has received from the Lord's hand. Double for all her sins. A voice of one calling. In the wilderness, prepare for the Lord. Prepare the way for the Lord.

Make straight in the desert. A pathway for our God. A highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up. Every mountain and hill brought low. Rough ground shall become level. Rugged places are plain.

And the glory of the Lord will be revealed. And all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Can you see what I'm saying? I want to say that the history of Israel is marked by certain crucial events.

[7 : 25] And they show a pattern. What is that pattern? On the side of humanity and God's people in particular. The pattern is sin and failure. On God's side, what is the pattern?

The pattern is long-suffering. But finally, judgment. But a desire to want to bring forgiveness. That's the situation at the end of the Old Testament.

Humans have acted independently, sinfully and rebelliously. And God is a just God who must judge rebellion. Because he's righteous and just.

However, at the same time, his nature is to have mercy. And he wants mercy to dominate over judgment. Now, with that in mind, I want you to turn in your Bibles to Mark 1. We've taken a long time to get there.

But now we're there. I want you to have your Bibles open. In chapter 1 of Mark, verses 1 to 15. Now, I need to forewarn you that I'm just going to skim over the surface of this text today.

[8 : 24] But I want to show you what's happening. I want you to look at the first 15 verses with me. And as you do, I want you to remember what has immediately preceded this. Let me tell you a little bit about Elijah.

He's one figure we didn't look at. Elijah is one of the earliest recorded Old Testament prophets. And he exercised a ministry during some of the worst kings of Israel. One of the most notorious kings of Israel, King Ahab.

And he was a prophet revered and honored in Israel. So, in the very last words of the Old Testament, we hear about him. And you can flip back to it or just listen to me as I read it.

In Malachi chapter 4, we read this. See, there's the last words of the prophets. See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

And he will turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents. Or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction. Now look at Mark chapter 1, verses 2 and 3.

[9 : 26] It continues his prophecy about Elijah. And it combines it with Isaiah 40. And it points to a prophet, another prophet like Elijah who will come.

And this new Elijah will be John the Baptist. And as this new Elijah, his task is straightforward. To prepare the way of the Lord promised in Isaiah 40. To prepare for God's great time of salvation.

To herald God's great time of comfort. And so in Mark 1, verse 4, we see him pursuing that task. He looks the part of a prophet. You know, he's dressed in sackcloth and ashes and so on.

He's clothed with the garb of a prophet. He says the words of a prophet. And like the prophets of old, he proclaims judgment and demands repentance. And as he does so, he announces that he's introducing someone greater than himself.

And this coming one, he says, is greater and more powerful than I. And he will baptize with the Holy Spirit rather than water. And then we reach verse 9.

[10 : 27] We are told that Jesus comes from Nazareth. And he is baptized by John in the Jordan. And as he's baptized, what happens is the heavens are torn apart. The spirit descends on him like a dove.

And a voice comes from heaven and says, this is my son whom I love. With you, I am well pleased. Now, those words are crucial words. They come from two important places in the Old Testament to Samuel 7 and Psalm 2.

Both talk about God's anointed king, the Messiah. Remember that marker? Kings in Israel. Well, now God is saying there is a king coming. Both of them say that the Messiah is God's son.

These words from God are a striking acclamation. They are an affirmation that God has fulfilled another Old Testament promise. He has sent a new David, a new king, a Messiah, a king who will rule over God's people and God's world with justice and righteousness and truth.

Now, look at verse 12. We're told that immediately the spirit comes, the spirit sends Jesus into the wilderness. Do you remember the wilderness from the Old Testament? Do you remember what happens in the wilderness?

[11 : 40] Think about it for a moment. Remember back to Genesis 1. Remember when God created and he said in the beginning. Do you remember how the spirit of God hovered over the created world?

Sorry, over the world before it was created. And then as God spoke, a new world came into existence. Do you remember in Genesis 2 where Adam lives among the animals and he's tempted and he fails?

Do you remember where Israel lives in the wilderness and they are tempted and they fail? Can you hear all those illusions here? You see, when Jesus goes out into the wilderness, does he fail?

No. He survives and he returns. And after Jesus put in prison, he goes into Galilee and he announces that God's time and the imminence of God's kingdom. Adam is about to take place.

God is welcoming rather than banishing. Where Adam had chosen to be his own king. Jesus proclaims and practices and epitomizes the kingship of God. He reverses what Adam did. He reverses what Israel did in the wilderness.

[12 : 46] He reverses what Israel's kings did. Everything is about to turn around. But the illusions don't stop there. Look at the references to the desert or the wilderness again in verses 3, 4, 12 and 13.

And look at verse 3 in particular. It quotes Isaiah 40 and it talks about a way in the wilderness. A way of the Lord. And then about Jesus going into the wilderness.

Where Adam failed and Israel failed. Not Jesus. Jesus. He comes out of the wilderness. Spectacularly successful. And there will be a new exodus.

A new way out. A new deliverance. A new return. And the association of Jesus with the promises of Isaiah finds further support in the second half of verse 11. Have a look at it. There God talks about Jesus as one with whom God is well pleased.

You see, there haven't been many humans in the history of the world that he has been well pleased with. But here, he is well pleased with this one. This king. The language that is used is the language of the servant in Isaiah 42 verse 1.

[13 : 51] The servant of Isaiah is one who will act as a prophet speaking God's word. He will be a good king who will deal with the problem of sin by tying it upon himself. And so we get a good king again.

And finally there's a new age. The story of the Old Testament is the story of a longing for a return to Eden. For a king who will rule like David but better.

Who will rule the way God wanted David to rule. And wanted his sons to rule. Where God's good purposes will be brought to a climax. And look at verse 14. Can you see what Jesus says?

He proclaims the great news of God. He says the time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. Can you hear what he's saying? He's saying all those markers in history point toward me.

And those markers in your history point toward me who is coming. And I am here and with me the kingdom of God is at hand. So repent and believe the good news.

[14 : 52] You see friends with the coming of Jesus into the world. With the coming of Jesus to his public ministry. With him and his news. The new age is bursting in upon the world.

And with him and his news. God is reigning as king. And if that is so. The only appropriate action is to turn from sin. To repent. So that you're ready to face this king.

Now I think the cumulative force of Mark 1 1 to 15. Is overwhelming. It is a text that is replete with Old Testament quotations. And allusions.

And he's painted this magnificent. Mark has painted this magnificent picture. Of where God is and what God is about in the ministry of Jesus. And he's telling us this is the great climactic event in God's purposes.

It is about to take place. It has already started. For in Jesus the fulfillment of all the promises and purposes of God. Is a have there yes and there are men.

[15 : 49] It has arrived. And God is beginning to do it. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. Now before I wrap up today.

I want you to think about this word gospel. Do you notice it's there. In verse 1. And in verse 15. That's this one word.

Now. Friends do you know what that word gospel means. Mostly. We know it to mean good news. Don't we. Let me tell you. I think that's an inadequate translation.

Let me tell you why. In the Greek speaking world. A gospel was a sort of proclamation of something. So when an heir to was born to an emperor.

The word would be used to announce the birth. Of this. This descendant. This inheritor of the throne. When you proclaimed the coming of age of that descendant.

[16 : 49] You use this word as well. Great news. When he ascended the throne. The proclamation would be referred to again using this term. But the word was also used in the Greek Old Testament.

It was used. To mean great news. Sometimes good news. But most often. Great news. And one famous passage it is used.

Is the one we read in Isaiah 52. Verse 7. Let me read it to you. It goes like this. How beautiful on the mountains. Are the feet of those who bring. Good news. Great news.

Who proclaim peace. Who bring good tidings. Who proclaim salvation. Who say to Zion. Your God reigns. That.

Behind those terms. Bring good news. Good tidings. Is that same Hebrew word. And it's used elsewhere in the Old Testament. I want to show you one place where it is used. In your Bibles.

[17 : 44] I wonder if someone can find a page number for me. I want you to turn to 2 Samuel chapter 18. A very unusual passage in some ways. But explains what. Good news is all about.

Someone find a page number. 2 Samuel. Chapter 18. 318. 318. 318. 318. Can you have a look at it with me? I want you to notice what it's about.

It's a story about David. And I want to tell you what has happened to David. David. You might remember had a son who was incredibly handsome. His name was Absalom.

Absalom. Okay. And Absalom set out to take the throne off his father. His father ran out of Jerusalem.

Got Joab his general to wage war for him. And eventually Absalom is killed. And we look at the reporting of this event in 2 Samuel chapter 18.

[18 : 42] And what has happened is, as I said, Absalom has been killed. Now I want you to just skim through the chapter. And you'll see there's a reference to Ahimahaz. Can you see that?

If you're reading through it. Verse 19. Then Ahimahaz the son of Zadok said, let me run and carry news to the king that the Lord has delivered him from the hand of his enemies.

Can you see what Ahimahaz is saying? He's saying, we've got some great news here. I'd like to be the bearer of the great news. Can I do it? Now, Joab knows. That's not very.

If you're bringing David news, if it's not good, he often doesn't react well. It's just something common that happens in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel.

And so Joab thinks, no, I better find someone else. So have a look at what he says. He says, you're not the one to carry the news today. You may carry the news another day. But today you shall carry the news because the king's son is dead.

[19 : 40] Sorry, you shall. Sorry. You shall carry no news because the king's son is dead. Then Joab said to the Cushite, go tell the king what you've seen. And the Cushite bowed before Joab and ran.

Then Ahimahaz, the son of Zadok, and again said again to Joab, come what may. Let me also run after the Cushite. And Joab said, why will you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for the news?

In other words, can you hear what he's saying? You're bringing great news, but there won't be any reward in it for you. Then he says, and so he said, run. And Ahimahaz takes off.

Okay. And he runs. Now, David was sitting between the two gates and the watchman went up to the roof of the gate by the wall. And when he lifted up his eyes, he saw a man running alone.

And the watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, if he is alone, there is news in his mouth. And he drew nearer and nearer. And the watchman saw another man running.

[20 : 39] And the watchman called to the gate and said, see another man running alone. And the king said, he also brings news. And the watchman said, I think the returning, the running of the first is like the running of Ahimahaz.

Must have been very distinctive. Okay. Or fast or something. I don't know. And the king said, oh, he's a good man. And with him comes what? Good news.

Okay. With him comes good news. And then Ahimahaz. And that's that word that is used that travels through into the New Testament. And then Ahimahaz cried out to the king. All is well.

And he bowed down before the king with his face to the earth and said, blessed be the Lord, your God, who has delivered up the men who trusted, who raised their hand against my Lord, the king.

And the king said, it is well with the young man. Is it well with the young man? Absalom. Can you hear what he really wants to know? Doesn't want to know whether there's been victory in battle. He wants to know how his son is because his son was loved by him.

[21 : 36] And Ahimahaz answered. And when Job sent the king's servant, your servant, I saw a great commotion. But I don't know what it was.

And the king said, turn aside and stand here. So he turned aside and stood. And behind the Cushite came. And the Cushite said, good news for my Lord, the king. For the Lord has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you.

The king said to the Cushite. But is it well with the young man? Absalom. Can you hear what he wants to hear? One item. Is it OK with my son? Doesn't care about the battle.

Doesn't care about the victory. What he wants to know is, what's the news about my son? And the Cushite said, may the enemies of my Lord, the king and all who rise up against you for evil, be like that young man.

And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And he went. And as he went, he said, my son, Absalom, my son, Absalom, Absalom, my son, would that you had died instead of me.

[22 : 42] Oh, Absalom, my son, my son. Friends, there's good news. That's that same word. It carries through to the New Testament. Now, let me ask you something.

Is it good news for David? Is it good news for David? No. Is it good news for Israel? Yes.

So it actually depends on your reception of the news as to whether it's good or bad. Does that make sense? OK, it's exactly the same for the gospel. The gospel is the great news of what God has done in his world.

It is the culmination of all of God's purposes in his world. It is the dramatic event where God says, I am saving the world. Now, when that news comes to you, you can react to it in one of two ways.

You can receive it. If you receive it, it will be the best news you have ever had. If you reject it, it will be the worst news you ever had.

[23 : 51] Do you see why the translation good news is not good? Actually, I'm not sure it's best. I think great news is better. Because great news says, I can receive it, in which case it will be good news.

And I can rejoice in it and say, that's good news. But if I reject it, what's going to happen? It will be the sign that I've got nowhere to go.

No place to retreat to. No salvation left. It will be the very worst news for you. So friends, Mark's hope and my hope is that you do not listen to these events, view these events as distant historical events.

These events proclaimed here in Mark chapter one. My hope, Mark's hope, God's hope and the hope of Jesus is that the events you hear about here, outlined in chapter one of Mark's gospel, you will take on board personally.

And they'll become events around which you will order your whole personal life. Those events are God's great news. They are God's great news about his son. God's great news about the salvation of the world through his son.

[25 : 00] He has been planning this through all history and finally it is done. So the question that we need to answer is this. Is that great news?

Good news for us. It will be good news for you if you take it on and believe it. And then every time you read that word from then on, you will say. Good news.

Good news. Good news. Good news. Good news. Good news. Good news for you. If you reject it. If you cast it aside.

If you don't say this is for me. It will be the very worst news for you. If you don't take it on and believe of the one of whom it speaks. It will be tragic news for you.

For it too will tell you about your eternal destiny. The friend is very important. It's only a little thing. But these events here are God's great news.

[26 : 00] What will you do with it? And according to what you do with it, it will either be good or bad news for you. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your spectacular news put out into the world about your son.

Thank you that he is the fulfillment of all those promises in the Old Testament. Thank you that he is your savior of the world. Father, please help us to take this news on board to receive it.

That it might indeed be the best news we have ever heard. Father, please help us not to reject it. For then it will be the worst news. For it will signal that we have nowhere to go.

But Father, we want to take it on as good news. To take it on as the greatest news we've ever heard. And Father, please help us to shape our lives by it.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.