

## MARK 1:1-20    CBC 11.4.2021

Over the next year, we're going to be looking in detail at Jesus. We'll be working through Mark's gospel, which is a book about who Jesus is (the King of the Universe) and what He came to do (rescue His people by dying for us on the cross and paying the penalty for our sins, so as to bring us home to God who loves us).

This is an adventure we're going to have together. For some, it may lead you to know Jesus for the first time. For others, it may lead to a deeper attachment. For all of us, I hope it will make us say, "I'm glad I belong to Jesus." Please pray for this series – and pray for the preachers.

The earliest records of the church tell us that Mark recorded Peter's reminiscences. The best bits of documentaries are always the eyewitness testimony, and that's what we've got here. Peter was there! So let's jump right in and get the story from someone who really knows it.

**v.1:** *The beginning of the good news about Jesus (Christ) the Messiah, the Son of God*: "Beginning" - not just saying, "Let's get going." Mark's first word repeats the very first word of the whole Bible (Ge 1:1). Mark wants us to know that the coming of Jesus is as significant as the creation of the world. It's going to mean what we've been longing for: the remaking of a broken world.

And it's good news – gospel! Right there you see the difference between Christianity and all other religions. Other religions say, *"This is how you have to live in order to earn your way to God."* That's not good news. You don't feel relieved of a burden – you feel you've been given one.

But Christianity is completely different. It's joyful news about what God has done to bring you home to Himself. All this year we'll be hearing good news. If the gospel isn't to you the best news you've ever heard, you can be certain you haven't understood it. **What is this Good News? It's the Person introduced in v.1: Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

- **JESUS** is a name meaning "He saves!"
- **CHRIST** isn't a name but a job. Jesus' job is to be the 'Christ' - the anointed King that God sent.
- **SON OF GOD** is another term denoting kingship (in the Old Testament the king of Israel was "the son of God").

Mark wants us to know that Jesus is God's Anointed King. The King has come! And Mark's book is going to unpack what that means.

### 1. THIS KING IS INCOMPARABLY GREAT

That's vv.2-8. We're introduced to John the Baptist who functions as a spotlight on Jesus, focusing our attention on how great Jesus is. He fulfils what God promised long ago: **2** *as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way' – 3 'a voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."*

Who is this Lord who comes? Read Isa 40 and you'll find that He's the Lord who creates and upholds the world, calls the stars by Name, is God over all. And John the Baptist says THIS Lord is coming – and then Jesus walks in. Jesus is the Lord of the universe. And He does everything you'd expect God to do: He teaches with authority, controls nature, gives life. He is incomparably great.

That's why John tells people to get serious about God without delay: **4** *And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness*

of sins. **5** The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. **6** John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. **7** 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. **8** I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

Like an Old Testament prophet, John summons people back to the Lord. The time for playing religious games has gone. The One who is coming is the King who ultimately rules all things. Only one response is adequate: repentance, expressed in baptism.

As for John himself: "I'm not worthy to be His lowest servant" (v.7). John isn't pointing to his own humility, but to how great Jesus is. v.8: "I can offer you only a symbol of cleansing; Jesus will give you LIFE." The King who is coming is incomparably great.

## **2. BUT THIS KING IS ALSO INCOMPARABLY GOOD vv.9-13**

**9** At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. **10** 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. **11** And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' **12** At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, **13** and he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

This great King didn't come to crush us but to rescue us. The first thing that Jesus did was to be baptised by John. And it makes us think. If baptism was for repentance, why would Jesus be baptised? It's odd, because as we read Mark's gospel Jesus never does anything to repent of. But His baptism shows two things:

- First, His commitment to do God's will. He's not turning His back on sins He has committed, but on sin as a lifestyle. We say we're done with sin, and then we fall back into it. But Jesus uniquely turns His back on sin completely. He is totally committed to obeying God.
- Secondly, His commitment to rescuing us. He came to take the sinner's place, to take our guilt and shame upon Him and to die our death on the cross. And He signals His identification with us at the beginning of His ministry by standing with sinners. Mark wants us to know from the outset that Jesus, God's anointed King, came to save us from our sins. That's good news! There's nobody more committed to you than Jesus.

So Jesus' baptism expresses His total commitment to God in obedience, and His total commitment to us in our need of rescue. That's what qualifies Him to be our Saviour.

And to seal this fact, (v.10) "as Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn open ..." (*compare Mk 15:38*) ... And the Spirit of God descends on Jesus, and God speaks. So the Trinity that was at work at the Creation is now at work for our Salvation.

And God tells us what we really need to know about Jesus: "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased" (v.11). Those words have incredible weight: they bring together all three sections of the Jewish Bible – the Writings, the Law, and the Prophets:

- From the Writings: "You are my Son" (Ps 2) – the King who'll rule the nations!
- From the Law: "Whom I love" (Ge 22) – the greatly loved son offered in sacrifice.
- From the Prophets: "With you I'm well pleased" (Isa 42) – the Servant of the Lord who will suffer for the sins of His people.

All of the Bible finds its fulfilment in Jesus. In Him God gives us everything. Greatness and goodness combined – absolute sovereignty, and perfect love.

And then the Spirit sends Jesus into the wilderness as our Champion to do battle with Satan (vv.12-13). Wild animals are there too. It's a hostile, threatening environment – and Jesus is there to face our enemy, Satan, on our behalf. Everything Christ did in His life was done for us. From day one, it was all substitution; it all was Christ in our place, Christ facing what we would not be able to face, Christ winning a victory that we could not win. The first Adam was our representative and was defeated: as Adam died, all died (1Co 15:22). And Christ is the Last Adam – there'll never be another – because He is the God-appointed champion of His people. And He's victorious!

The whole of Mark's gospel will relate to this spiritual battle one way or another. And it begins with Jesus standing in our place for forty days receiving the full force of what it means to live in this fallen world. That's what it means when we read in Heb 4:15 that Jesus "has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet He did not sin." He stood in our place and defeated the enemy on our behalf.

ARE YOU GRASPING THE MESSAGE? Jesus is the King of the universe come to rescue His people. To do for us what we can't do for ourselves. To save us from our sins, and to defeat Satan. That's His GREATNESS and His GOODNESS – two things that are uniquely combined in Him. He's the King ... BUT He's different from all other kings: He's the Servant King. His greatness and His humility can't be separated. We'll see these themes right through Mark's gospel.

And because this incomparable King has come, everybody in the world is pushed to a decision about Him:

### **3. JESUS CLAIMS OUR ALLEGIANCE vv.14-20**

**14** After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. **15** 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

That's not said angrily – it's a joyful announcement. "Repent" means turn from everything that's keeping you from Jesus who loves you. Get rid of everything that's damaging you. Fundamentally, stop trying to be your own king – otherwise you'll always be a prisoner, trapped in your own self-centredness. Jesus calls us out of that prison – to move from death to life by believing the good news that He's the real King, and He loves us so much more and so much better than we could ever love ourselves.

This is God inviting you to come home. Jesus didn't have a scowl on his face when He called people to 'repent' – it was a loving smile: 'I am come, now is your moment, come to me.' There's great joy in turning from the tyranny of ourselves to the freedom of the children of God.

And no part of life is unaffected when we Jesus is our King. As if to show us what an all-embracing thing this is, Jesus goes not to church (as though we could confine God's rule to an hour's religion on a Sunday), but to the workplace:

**16** As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **17** 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' **18** At once they left their nets and followed him. **19** When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. **20** Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Leave your nets and follow me! Why? Because I'm going to make you fishers of men. **Not a taking away but a making room.** Jesus doesn't rob us of our treasures. He puts second things in second place to make room for the true riches of His Kingdom in our lives.

Laying down nets doesn't mean they abandoned their homes, families, boats, and simply wandered about in the hills. There's plenty of evidence that wasn't the case. But from now on, every part of life was under new management. All that they were and had was for the service of Christ.

That's what it looks like to repent and believe the gospel. Jesus may not want us to change our job; He WILL want to change our heart so that God is our priority. And it's His grace that will do this: *"I will make you"* new people. The message isn't our adequacy but the sufficiency of the grace of Christ. Ordinary people whose lives were changed by Jesus – and then they were used to change the world. How beautiful is that?

## CONCLUSION

That's Mark's message: the King has come! So what are you going to do about it? Have you received the Good News and acted on it? Have you let go of everything that keeps you from God? Are you taking hold of Jesus as your King? You can't be neutral about Jesus. You're either living under His authority or you're setting yourself up as your own authority. What has your heart? What brings you joy? Is it Jesus? Are you growing in these things?

Mark shows us that Jesus is very GREAT because He's the King of the Universe. And He's very GOOD because He humbles Himself to save us. And because He's so great, I'd be a fool not to follow Him. And because He's so good, following Him isn't threatening – it's liberating! I WANT to follow Him.

And when Jesus is your King, you can go into Monday knowing there's someone who has complete power and perfect love who is in charge of your life. What more can you ask?

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, thank you for the powerful beginning of this amazing gospel. Thank you that Jesus is Your appointed King; that He is incomparably great and good. May we let go of anything that's keeping us from Him; may we to come to Him again in repentance and faith; may we live as His disciples, as those who submit to His authority and are committed to His mission. Help us, by Your Spirit. For Your glory's sake. Amen.

## FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION:

- How does knowing that Jesus is incomparably great and good give you reason for hope today?
- Where in your life does the call to repent and believe the good news challenge you at the moment? How are you going to respond?