

# The Kingdom of God has already started

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I don't know how many of you have been with us in our series so far in Mark. I hope most of you have. When we read a book like this, it's always good to pick up the themes as they go and as they develop in the book.

And one of the themes you would have noticed in the book of Mark is the idea of seeing and not seeing, right? We've seen that come up in a number of ways. The idea of whether we can see what is true or not, and also the idea that what we see often and reality are two different things.

And we know that in our own world, don't we? What things appear to be at first glance and what they actually are are often very different, aren't they?

And one of the main reasons for that is often because we only ever have a small part of the picture of what's going on. We only ever have a small part. I came across this picture online the other day. Okay? Now, can you make out what that is? If you were at the first service, you're not allowed to give it away. Okay? I mean, what does it look like? It doesn't look like much of an artwork, does it?

[ 1 : 12 ] It looks a little bit dismal, almost like a mistake. It looks dark and dreary. What could it possibly be? Well, if you realize that actually it's part of a bigger picture.

Next picture. See, it's the bottom left of that beautiful photograph of a sunset. And that, that little picture is what our lives are.

That little picture that doesn't look like it makes much sense, that's what our lives are. The bigger picture is what God is doing. And our lives are only a small part, and we can only ever see a small part of the big picture.

And that is a lesson that the disciples needed to learn here in our story. The disciples needed to learn that as they looked at Jesus, as they followed Him, they could only see a small part of the picture.

And as they went up on this very important event, this is a very important event in the Gospel of Mark, the transfiguration, as they went out with Jesus on this mountain, they saw two things.

[ 2 : 16 ] They saw Jesus like they'd never seen Him before, but they also saw the bigger picture that they were only a small part of. And that's a vision they needed a glimpse of, and it's a vision we need to see this morning as well.

We as Christians, we as followers of Christ, coming to learn about Him, coming to listen to Him, we need a glimpse of the bigger picture. And that's what I hope we'll get this morning.

So let's now dive in and look at what happens in this event in Mark chapter 9. So what makes it so profound and so outstanding is that these disciples, three of them by name, James, John, and Peter, were invited for the first time really to sit in on a very high level heavenly meeting.

Look at verse 2 to 3. After six days, Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up on a high mountain by themselves to be alone.

He was transfigured in front of them, and his clothes became dazzling, extremely white, as no launderer on earth could whiten them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.

[ 3 : 34 ] Well, I don't know if you work in corporate. Maybe you are a manager, or you do something in a big company. I used to work for the Fashini group, and I was in the Fashini data department.

But every now and again, they would call junior people to come and sit in on a meeting of people who are much more important than them. And they would kind of sit in the corner with their notebook, and they would keep quiet.

But it was quite a big thing to be called in to a high level meeting. And that's essentially what's going on here with the disciples. There's a meeting that has to happen.

There's interaction between heaven and earth, and between Moses and Elijah who appear, and Jesus. And the disciples are deliberately called to come and sit in and observe on this high level meeting.

But it's not the first. It's not the first time something like this has happened in the Bible. In fact, if you were listening carefully, you would have picked up a lot of similarities between Exodus 24, when Moses took the leaders of Israel up to Sinai, and this passage.

[ 4 : 41 ] I'm just going to read some excerpts from that again, from Exodus 24. You can just listen. But I want you, as I'm reading, to try to spot the similarities between what's going on here, the details, and what's going on in Exodus when Moses and the leaders of Israel go to receive the law from God, the law of Israel.

So Exodus 24 starts, Then he said to Moses, that's God, Go up, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of Israel's elders, and bow and worship at a distance.

Then on verse 9, Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of Israel's elders, and they saw the God of Israel. Verse 12, The Lord said to Moses, Come up to me on the mountain and stay there so that I may give you some stone tablets with the law and the commandments I have written for their instruction.

Verse 15, When Moses went up the mountain, the cloud covered it. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day, he called Moses from the cloud.

Okay, so, Mark, what he does is he puts in a whole lot of details in the story that you could miss at first reading that connect this with people who would have known the Old Testaments, would have seen the similarity here.

[ 5 : 58 ] There's deliberate connections between the two stories. The mention of six days in both of them. They're on a mountain in both of them. They see God in a cloud. Three leaders are named, right?

Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, Peter, James, and John. Three of Israel's leaders, essentially, the new Israel in Mark's case. And they receive God's instruction in both cases.

And so what we're reading here, when we look at Mark 9, in context of what's happening in the bigger picture, what we're reading is this is like another interdepartmental meeting.

Interdepartmental meeting, do you know what I mean? In companies, often companies are split into a whole lot of different sections, a whole lot of different departments, like it was when I was working in a company.

And when there's a big project on the go, like it's a big thing, when it's like a big company-changing project, and they're heading in a new direction, they will have an interdepartmental meeting, where they get representatives from all the different departments, all the different sections of the company, to come together in the same meeting, and to get on the same page, so that they're all ready to go for this new project.

[ 7 : 15 ] Well, that's what was happening in the first phase of God's project for this world, in Exodus 24, when the leaders of Israel first met God on a mountain.

But it's happening here again in Mark 9 for the last phase, the final phase, of God's restoration and salvation plan for the world.

And there is another meeting between heaven and earth, because up on a mountain, in the ancient mind, that was the place where heaven and earth symbolized, the place where heaven and earth met.

And it's where there was interaction between heaven and earth, between the two realms that we live in, the spiritual and the physical realm, and the heavenly and the earthly.

And here, this is a meeting where the two are coming together. And the disciples are sitting in on this meeting. The disciples are sitting in on this amazing meeting, and they're sitting in on it to learn two things that I think we need to learn just as much as they did.

[ 8 : 17 ] And that's what I'm going to cover now. The first thing they needed to learn is that Jesus is the only one who will make God's project happen for this world.

No other religious figure. No other person can. No other heavenly being. Jesus alone. We'll see that. So last week, remember what we learned. If you were here last week, that was another key passage in Mark.

Mark chapter 8, where the disciples, with their spokesman Peter, come finally to the conclusion after eight chapters that this Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Messiah of Israel.

And it's a big revelation. It's a key point in Mark. Now, if you weren't here last week, Dylan helped us to understand just how profound that was and what the Messiah actually is.

I want to remind you by reading again, same as last week, from Psalm 72, which just gives us some of the job description of what the Messiah will do. It goes like this.

[ 9 : 14 ] Psalm 72, 8 to 12. May he rule from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth. May desert tribes kneel before him and his enemies lick the dust.

May the kings of Tarshish and the coasts and the islands bring tribute. The kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. Let all kings bow in homage to him and all nations serve him, for he will rescue the poor who cry out and the afflicted who have no helper.

The Old Testament is full of prophecies about this coming one who God will send finally to fix society, which we all desperately need and this world desperately needs.

We all know it. And God has a plan to fix things. Just that, I think, is something we need reminding of. As we look in despair at the broken world, God has a plan and it is in process to fix everything and us as well.

And this Messiah is the one he will send to do that. But there's a sequence that needs to happen.

And that's another thing we learn as we read our Old Testaments. There's a sequence of things that need to be set up before the Messiah comes.

[ 10 : 23 ] One of them is that Elijah, the great prophet of the Old Testament, will return in some way to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. And you know that's how our Old Testaments end.

That's the last thing that the Old Testament says. I actually turn there. Turn to the end of your Old Testament. The very, very last paragraph of your Old Testament. You can find it just before the New Testament.

Okay? So there should be like a page about two-thirds of the way through your Bible, which is the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New. So right at the end of the Old Testament, there's this prophet, Malachi.

And he says the last things that need to happen before God's project, final phase, kicks off and the Messiah comes.

Look what it says. Malachi 4 from verse 4 to 6. The last words in the Old Testament. Remember the instruction of Moses, my servant, the statutes and ordinances I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

[ 11 : 31 ] Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with the curse. Okay, so there's serious things that are happening and God promises to send Elijah to prepare people before the coming of the Messiah.

But notice there are two figures that are involved. Two figures that are instrumental in the arrival of the kingdom in Malachi, right at the end of the Old Testament. They are Moses and Elijah.

It's no mistake that those are the same two people that Jesus meets up on this mountain. Moses and Elijah. The people who are instrumental in the kingdom project kicking off in its final phase.

So what's happening here is that this is all departments reporting in. This is all the different pieces and parts of the puzzle over history coming together so that the final phase can kick off.

[ 12 : 36 ] God's plan for this world can be put into effect. God's plan for this world. God's plan for this world.

But the central figure, do you notice, in it all happening is Jesus. He's right in the middle of it. And the disciples needed to realize that. The disciples were still confused. Like, who is this guy? Okay, he must be the Messiah.

But what's going on with, why is he here? Why are Israel leaders rejecting him? What's the deal?

Well, they needed a glimpse that he is right in the middle of what God is doing. He is right in the center of God's plans for this world coming to fruition.

But they don't only see that, but they also see something they'd never seen before. They see that he is so much more than they ever thought he was on this mountaintop. Look at verse 3 of Mark 9.

Go back to Mark 9 now. Verse 3. And his clothes became dazzling, extremely white, as no launderer on earth could whiten them.

[13:41] That's an interesting detail Mark puts in there. Like, no launderer could, no bleach could not even skip or, you know, aerial.

No laundry could make it this wide. Why did he put in that detail? What's the point? Remember, this is from Peter's eyewitness. Peter was there. Peter reported this to Mark to write down.

And Peter wants us to know that what he saw was not from this world. It didn't have its origin on earth.

So they had up until then seen Jesus from earth, born as a baby, being a human being, looking like any other human being. But for a moment here, they see him in his heavenly form.

Because white, dazzling white clothing is the clothing of heavenly beings. You see it when angels come and give a message to Mary and to other people throughout Scripture. Very often, they're described as being dressed in white.

[14:46] And so this is where this glimpse of Jesus in this heavenly white tells them that Jesus is not just the human they thought he was. He is also from heaven.

He is from a heavenly realm. He is from the other realm. As well as from this realm, this earthly physical realm that we're in. He is the connection, the unique connection between the two realms. He is the unique God-man who is able to connect heaven to earth like no other figure ever can and ever has claimed to. No other religion has offered this.

A person, a unique heavenly earthly God-man who can connect heaven to earth so that what we pray can come true and God's kingdom can come and his will can be done on earth as it is in heaven.

You know, we pray that. We want the heavenly order and glory to be on earth. And that's why we pray. That's what Jesus taught us to pray. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[15:52] Well, how is that going to happen? Only through the unique God-man, Jesus Christ, who is both from heaven and from earth.

He has come here not only to initiate God's plans for this world, but to connect heaven and earth. That's who he is. That's who the disciples needed to see him to be.

That's who we need to see him to be. And that then makes sense of what God says when he gives new Israel and new law in Mark 9.

Look at this. Look at this. Look at this. So Mark 9, they go to this mountain. This is the new Israel being formed. Remember in Mark, one of the themes has been Jesus is calling a new Israel to himself.

Just as the old Israel had 12 tribes, he's calling 12 disciples to himself. And they received the law on a mountain, the old Israel. Well, so the new Israel come to receive God's law.

[16:53] And just as they received God's law in the first phase of the plan, they now receive God's law for the new Israel. God's new law in kicking off the final phase.

But it's a much simpler law than the laws of Moses, which were there for a time so that Israel could be separate from the nations to receive the Messiah. But those laws are now obsolete.

But the new law given to the new Israel, of which we are part of, is a very simple one. Verse 7. This is my beloved son.

Listen to him. That's all. You want to know what God wants you to do? You want to know his law? His instructions? See, what must I do if I want to do what God wants?

Listen to his son. That's it. That is it. It's the only thing God wants of you now. To recognize, truly see, recognize the one that he has sent to make his plans happen, to unite heaven and earth, and listen to him.

[17:58] Because when you do that properly, when you actually see Jesus who he is and actually listen to him, because you realize who he is, everything else follows. All the other things you should be doing.

All the other ways you should be living. You know, we wonder, how am I living right? Am I doing the right thing? If you want to know if you're living right, are you listening to Jesus? Because if you are, you're living right.

If you're not, you're not living right. That's what God says here. That's the one law. The one thing he wants of human beings is to recognize the one who is the center of his plans for all things.

And he wants us to focus our attention on Jesus. And when we do, when we focus our daily attention, front and center on Jesus more than any other things, because we realize who he is, then we start living the way God wants.

Then we do all the other things as well. We start coming to church. We start being nice to our neighbors. We start resisting sin in our lives. We start serving the kingdom. All because we see who Jesus is and we're listening to him.

[19:00] And that's all God wants you to do. And then everything else will follow when you're doing that properly. That is the first thing that the disciples needed a glimpse of, that we need to see properly who Jesus really is, that he is the only one who will make God's project happen.

But there was a second, equally important thing the disciples needed to realize that we need to realize this morning. And that is that God's project has already begun. It's already started.

Look from verse 8. Suddenly looking around, they no longer saw anyone with him except Jesus. So just as quickly as it had come, it had ended.

And Jesus was ordinary again, the other gospel writers tell us. He was just a man. It's almost like it never happened. But they knew it happened. It was now burned into their minds that this had happened.

But it's back to normal now. The vision is gone. And so the disciples, as they're now going down the mountain and they're processing all this, they start to wonder, you know, when's all this going to happen?

[20:03] What is the sequence of events that needs to happen? They think, okay, what did the prophets say? And when Elijah and this. And then they were probably silent for a lot of it just as the cogs were turning as they were processing.

But eventually they speak up. Verse 11, look what they say. Then they asked Jesus, why did the scribes say Elijah must come first? So they're thinking, okay, so we know that Elijah has to come first.

Now why? Because this is the Messiah, supposedly. And they're trying to work it out. Where's the Elijah? And Jesus gives them a shocking answer. He said, he's already come.

It's already started, guys. Look at verse 12 and 13. Elijah does come first and restores all things, he replied. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be treated with contempt?

But I tell you that Elijah has come and they did whatever they pleased to him, just as it is written about him. You see what he's saying? He's saying the project of God, the final phase, the kingdom has already begun.

[21:08] Elijah has already come. It was John the Baptist. He was fulfilling the Elijah role, Jesus tells us here. He was fulfilling that prophecy of the Elijah figure returning. But the thing is, to the disciples, they were so confused because this didn't look like what they expected.

They didn't expect the kingdom to come in this way. Right? They didn't expect the Elijah, the epic Elijah figure to be executed by Herod. They didn't expect the glorious Messiah to be a carpenter. All of this just isn't what they expected. What they could see and what reality was were two different things. And that is what Jesus is trying to tell them, though.

He's trying to tell them, or one of the major things he's trying to tell them in this passage is, it's already begun and you need to get on board. You need to realize it started. In fact, it's exactly what he's trying to tell them in the first verse of chapter 9.

Look back there. We haven't looked at that yet, but it's such an important point that Jesus tells his disciples. And I want us just to spend a few minutes trying to understand Mark 9 verse 1.

[22:16] Look at what it says. He said to them, Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come in power.

What does that mean? They will not taste death. He's just been talking in the previous chapter about how they're going to die. They've got to be prepared to die if they want to follow him. But he says, Don't worry, you're not going to taste death until you see the kingdom of God coming with power.

There's been a lot of different explanations of what he could mean. A lot of liberal critics of the Bible have said, Ah, you see, Jesus was wrong, wasn't he? He said the kingdom of God would come with power within the lifetime of the disciples.

And, well, where is it? So, obviously he was wrong. And others say, Oh, no, no, no, no, what he meant by he will not taste death was not taste spiritual death.

And they do all these kind of athletics to try to explain away this verse. But the plain meaning is the right one. Jesus is saying the kingdom of God will come with power before some of the disciples die.

[ 23 : 21 ] So, within the first century. That's what he's saying. So, was he wrong? No. Because it did.

It did come. And it's here. In power. It's just not what we expected. And it's not what his disciples expected. But it came. When Jesus rose from the dead, three days after his crucifixion, and then he ascended to heaven, he sent the powerful Holy Spirit.

You can read about it in Acts chapter 2. And that Spirit came down in power. And the church was established. This, yeah, was established on earth. And thousands of people who didn't know each other before and had all these differences came together in a common belief around the Messiah. They started following the Messiah. A powerful work was done. And that church, despite government's attempts to suppress it and destroy it, then and today, it has been spreading ever since, growing to cover the world.

Just like Jesus said in his parable about the growing tree that starts so small and then it grows and it extends over all the world. That's the powerful coming of the kingdom.

[ 24 : 33 ] And wherever that church went, the prophecies about the Messiah started to come true. Like in Psalm 72, that the afflicted who have no helper will find help.

Wherever the church, God's people spread around the world, that's what happened. Not in totality and completion yet, but in a very real way, the afflicted who have no helper are finding help.

Even here in Plumstead with St. Mark's. And wherever the church went, lives have been powerfully transformed for 2,000 years. New creation power has already come to earth.

We need to realize that. It's already entered into our world because of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Kingdom power is already here.

It's already here even though it doesn't look that way. Just like it didn't for these disciples. It didn't look like the kingdom was arriving in their lifetimes and yet that's exactly what Jesus says.

[ 25 : 29 ] It didn't look like things were kicking off and yet that's exactly what Jesus said was happening. And just like it didn't look like the kingdom was coming for His disciples, it doesn't look to many Christians, many of us, it just doesn't look like the kingdom's here in power.

We struggle along. We battle with sin. Our churches have limited budgets. We never have enough money to buy the equipment we need.

It doesn't seem like this is a powerful institution of God doing His work. But what we see and what reality is are two different things.

The disciples didn't expect the Messiah to come like this, to be a dusty man from Bethlehem.

They didn't expect John the Baptist, I mean Elijah, the epic Elijah figure, to be this John the Baptist who got executed. But what they could see and what reality was is very different. That is a concept we need to remember.

[ 26 : 30 ] What we see when we look at the church, when we look at the world, and what reality is are very different things. And just as they needed the reminder that the kingdom is already starting, so do we.

We need the reminder that the kingdom has already started and it's already come in power, just like Jesus said it would. I remember growing up in the 80s and the family tradition would be to sit around and watch MacGyver.

Remember MacGyver? I mean, how many years later? I still got the jingle in my head. But the thing is, for those of you who were born after 2000, back in the day when we watched TV, it was at a scheduled time.

And it started at that moment, and you can't stop it, you can't pause it, you can't choose when to watch it. I know, it sounds archaic, doesn't it? But that's what happened. It was a scheduled time, you had to be there when it started, otherwise you were going to miss it.

And sometimes, I remember growing up, sometimes I would be getting a snack in the kitchen ready for MacGyver to start. I'd be getting like a piece of cheese or something to snack on while we watched.

[ 27 : 43 ] And I'd be in the kitchen and I'd hear the voice of my brother go, it's started! It's started! Come! And I had to run to the lounge to make sure I didn't miss it, because those opening scenes in the series were very important to set the whole plot, right?

Well, you see, Christians, I think, here today, in 2021, I think a lot of us are still waiting for the show to start. I think we're still waiting for the kingdom to come in power.

When Jesus comes back. And then we'll experience, you know, the power of transformation and the power of the kingdom in all its glory, and that's what we're looking for, and that's what we're waiting for.

But we've got to realize, it's already here. It's already started. That's what Jesus is trying to tell His disciples. It's already started in the church. This is where the power of God's kingdom is active and available, even though it doesn't look like it.

Kingdom power doesn't seem to be here, does it? With, you know, limited budgets and scratchy sound and failing equipment and, you know, peeling paint.

[ 28 : 58 ] It doesn't look like this is the epic kingdom of God. It seems too ordinary, doesn't it? But also, we look at the church, we look at ourselves, and we, you know, our struggles with sin and the brokenness of the world affecting us, and we think, oh, I can't wait for Jesus to come back to fix me.

And until then, we generally use the excuse, well, this is just who I am. You know, what can be done? I can't wait for the power of the kingdom to come. We need to realize it's already here. It's already here and available to us.

The power to overcome sin, the power to become the people that God made us for is already here in the church. The power to change lives and to change communities is already here.

Gatherings like this, ordinary as they seem, are heavenly meetings. They are meetings between earth and heaven. When we gather and we worship God, we're joining with the angels in heaven. When we say these prayers, we're connecting with God.

We're speaking to Him and through Christ, He hears our prayers. Christ is the intermediary between heaven and earth. And when we gather in His name, we are at one of those heavenly meetings even though it doesn't seem like it.

[ 30 : 08 ] And when we gather here, it might seem ordinary like this, but this, the gathering of God's people around God's Word, is the greatest threat to the forces of evil in this world.

And they are doing everything they can to shut it down and they can't. They'll never succeed. And this is how God is doing His kingdom work today and how He is preparing the world for the return of Jesus Christ.

And so, in closing conclusion, as we look at this event in Mark 9, it reminds us that what we see and what is reality are often very different.

and so, I want to ask you two questions I think everybody needs to ask themselves. Firstly, do you see Jesus as He really is? As the heavenly Son of God who is the only one who can bring about God's plans for this world and for your life?

Do you see Jesus as the central, essential figure to your life being what it should be and to this world being what it should be? Because when you do that, when you see Him like that, then you will listen to Him.

[ 31 : 22 ] Unless you see Him like that, then you won't. You won't make Him front and center. You might give Him a hearing from time to time maybe to get some advice on how to live better. You might listen to when you come to church what the preacher says.

But unless you see Him as the glorious God-man who is from earth and from heaven, who has come to combine heaven and earth, who has come to fulfill God's restoration plans for this planet unless you see Him as that glorious figure, you won't give Him your full attention.

But that's exactly what God wants you to do. Listen to Him. So do you really listen to Jesus as God wants you to? Is He front and center daily in your life?

The second thing is, the second question is, do you see this church? Do you see church? Do you see the church in the world as it truly is? not just as a human institution, but as a divinely equipped conduit of kingdom power, the means by which God is taking heavenly power and exercising it on earth through His church.

Do you see St. Mark's like that? Hey? Despite its ordinariness, seemingly. Remember, what we see and what reality are two different things. Do you see St. Mark's as a conduit of God's heavenly power in Plumstead?

[ 32 : 47 ] Don't let rosters and sound issues and peeling paint cause you to lose sight of the power that is here to change your life and to change the world.

And don't lose sight of how epic it is to be involved in that, to be part of the church. Do you have that vision of Jesus and of His church that the disciples received on the mountain?

Do you have that glimpse of Jesus this morning? The disciples needed that vision if they were to be effective in the kingdom and so do we. We need that vision.

Do you have that vision? Good news is you don't have to go up on a mountain in Israel to get that vision. You know how we get that vision today?

You know how we see those things today? Through this. the seemingly ordinary and mundane gathering around God's Word with the power of God's Spirit.

[ 33 : 51 ] Reading Scripture in the eyes of faith. These words that were written by these disciples and then infused with God's powerful Spirit when He sent it in power down to earth to make these words come alive for us.

This is our mountaintop experience. This, even though it looks so ordinary, this is our mountaintop experience. This is where we will see Jesus truly glorified.

This is where we will see Him as He truly is. And it's from reading and believing this that we will go back out there and be on fire to do powerful work for the kingdom.

Let's pray that that would be the case. Lord, we do thank You for this vision, this glimpse of reality that You have given Your disciples and You have given us this morning.

We praise You, Jesus, for being the Lord of heaven and earth, the one who will bring God's kingdom and make God's will happen here as it is in heaven.

[ 34 : 59 ] Lord, we pray that You would help us to see You as that every day and to listen to You. Help us to listen to You properly. In Jesus' name.

Amen.