

The Beginning of the Good News

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 August 2021

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] Well, hi everyone from quarantine. It's a privilege to be able to bring God's Word to you today, and I look forward to seeing you all, hopefully, God willing, next week. But for now, we're forced to do it this way, but we know that God will draw near to us by His Spirit as we open His Word together. So let's do that now. Have your Bibles open with you, and we're going to start this new series in Mark. I'm very excited about it because there's so much depth and treasure in this book of Mark to discover. And so let's pray to God and ask for His help as we embark on that journey together.

Let's pray. Lord, we do thank You for Your Word and how You bring real transformation power as we open Your Word and as You speak truth to us by Your Spirit and as You penetrate our hearts. And we pray that You will do that now. We pray that as we start this journey in the book of Mark, You will be with us all along the way, and You will help us to understand what is, not what we want to hear from it, but what You want us to hear, and what You want us to take on board into our hearts and into our lives, and how You want us to respond to these epic truths that we will uncover with Your help. And so we pray that You'd be with us in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, over the past week, I'm sure many of you are familiar with what's been going on in Afghanistan. In the news, terrifying things. The Taliban takeover, Taliban coming into Kabul, the capital city, and taking over the country. And of course, with their policies, and the way they terrorize people, and their iron fisted kind of dictatorship, people, ordinary citizens in

Afghanistan have been fleeing for their lives, literally running for their lives, getting to Kabul airport, and sadly, many of them killed, trying to cling onto planes as they're taking off from the airport just to get out of the country. And the USA, who has been trying to help them over the years, establish a working country, has pretty much called time, and very quickly and suddenly fled the country themselves, leaving the country and the civilians with very little hope. And it's a very sad situation. I mean, I saw videos of women throwing their toddlers and babies over barbed wire fences just so that someone could get them out of the country. And just the things that the Taliban are doing, what people expect them to be doing when they take over this country. It's a very sad situation. And it's a reminder of just what a mess this world is in. Just another reminder of what a mess this world is in. And you know, we think after centuries of civilization and politics and government systems and technology and advancement that you would think we would have got over things like this. But it hasn't changed. Over centuries, the same violence and issues and problems plague the human race. And Afghanistan is just another reminder of it. And we long, we long, each of us deep down inside, as we watch the news like this, and we watch the news in our own country, we long for a world that is fixed. You know, and it's not just us, everyone, everyone deep down inside somewhere, no matter what their religion or political views, deep down they long for a solution to this problem, this mess that we find ourselves in. We all long for peace among the nations, for justice, for the wrongs to be righted, and to live in a society that functions well. And that works. That is a deep longing. And that longing is nothing new. It's been around throughout history. Societies in every age have always hoped for and longed for a fixed world. And they've, in every phase of history, have pinned their hopes onto different things to fix it, different people, new leaders arising, charismatic leaders who promised to bring solutions. And they pin their hopes on those leaders. And generally those leaders end up as corrupt as the people that they're trying to stop when they get power for themselves. Or new political systems like Marxism or communism. People pin their hopes on those political systems to fix the problems and to bring peace and prosperity. And they failed. They never did. Or new technologies, especially in our age, we think new technology is the way that's going to fix the world. And yet time and time again throughout history, these things fail to fix it. But there's always the hope in every age. There's always the hope that we can fix the world. Well, in the first century BC, these hopes in the ancient world of a world that works were at fever pitch. They were at their very top when the Roman Empire was in charge. Because now we look back in the Roman Empire and we see it negatively. But in the day, the civilians of the Roman Empire, the citizens of the Roman Empire, they looked to the empire and the Caesars as the ones who would bring restoration and order and peace to society, especially during the reign of the Caesars.

Julius Caesar and his heir, Augustus. People looked to those men and considered them as gifts from the gods who are going to bring restoration and order and justice to the world. And they even named months of the Roman calendar after the Caesars. July, Julius, and this month Augustus, August, were named because the months were named after them because the people saw those men as gods and the saviors of the world.

[6 : 18] In fact, there's something called the Prien inscription, which I want to read to you, an excerpt from. A Prien inscription is something that archaeologists uncovered that came from the area of Rome around the time of Augustus. And it said these words, talking about the Caesar Augustus.

Providence has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, the son of a god, sending him as a savior that he might end war and arrange all things. The birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good news for the world.

Well, you may notice how similar the opening of the gospel of Mark is. In Mark 1 verse 1, listen to the words that Mark chooses to open his gospel. He says, the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God, as it is written. And so here, that's no mistake. People reading that would have totally understood that Mark was referring to the well-known views of the Caesars of Rome.

Mark here is boldly claiming in his opening verse that what the Roman world hoped for and what every civilization since has longed for, the real solution to the problems of this world has actually now come in Jesus Christ. The world just hasn't realized it yet. Mark wrote his gospel to make sure you do.

And the way he starts, the first verse in fact, is vital to understanding where he goes in the gospel and what the gospel means. And so, let's look at that. Let's look at how he talks about Jesus and the titles he uses. And the reason, it's very clear, the beginning of this gospel, the reason Mark can make such a bold claim about Jesus is that he's the one who is the son of God, better than any Roman Caesar can ever be, who will come and bring peace and order and fix the the world. The reason he can make such a bold claim is because Mark shows that Jesus is the Messiah, the Jewish Messiah of the Old Testament. Now, it's interesting, Mark's original audience were most likely predominantly Romans or Greeks, not Jews. There would have been a lot of Jews amongst his first audience, but he writes his gospel, the scholars reckon, mostly to speak to non-Jews. And that's clear from the fact that he doesn't use many Old Testament quotations like Matthew does, for example. But the most Old Testament he uses is actually here in the very first chapter of his book. And the reason why he does that, even though he's talking predominantly to non-Jews who wouldn't really have read or known the Old Testament, is because to make this claim about Jesus, he has to first show them that he is the Christ, the Messiah of the Old Testament. And so this idea of the

[9 : 39] Christ is important for everyone, non-Jews as well, to understand. And that's why he says, the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. Now that is not Jesus' surname, that is a title, it means anointed one, it's from the Hebrew Messiah, it's the same word, just in two different languages. And to fully understand that claim that Mark is making about Jesus, that he is the Messiah, that everyone needs to know about, even if you're not a Jew, to fully understand that we need to actually go back into the Old Testament. Because that's where this idea of the Messiah starts and is developed over history and over God's dealings with humanity. And it starts right back in Genesis, chapter 3, in fact, right at the beginning of our Bibles. This idea of someone God is going to send. But it only starts there as a very vague hint. And then it's developed as you continue to read the Old Testament. And it's probably the main theme that runs through and unites the whole Old Testament, the coming of this one in future. And we learn more about this mysterious figure as time goes by.

But in Genesis, remember the fall of humanity after humans rejected God's rule and wanted to rule themselves, and how evil was embodied in the serpent, Satan, who brought humanity to that point.

But even after the fall, God, in His grace, promises Eve, the mother of humanity, that one day, one of her descendants would come and crush the head of the serpent, would defeat the power of evil over humanity. And it's just left at that. Until later, as we continue to read, God takes Abraham and makes promises to him that through his family, the nations are one day going to be blessed. And He leaves it at that. But then later, in Genesis, chapter 49, we learn something more.

We learn that it's through the tribe of Judah, who are descendants of Abraham, that there would be one who, we're told, to whom the obedience of the nations belongs, who the nations would obey, and happily so, and who the rule of the nations would belong to him. The nations, not just Israel, but the nations of the world would belong to a person that comes from the tribe of Judah and the family of Abraham. And then later on, centuries later, David, King David of Israel, has promised that one of his descendants, an anointed one, would bring the kingdom and his kingdom would extend, not just to the borders of Israel, but over all the earth. And then in the Psalms, there's a lot of Psalms that talk about this anointed one, this Messiah figure. And Psalm 2 is a classic one.

Psalm 2, and it's a Psalm that looks forward to the anointing of the Messiah one day. And it says this, this is God speaking. Psalm 2 from verse 7. At his anointing, God says, you are my son. Today I have become your father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with an iron scepter, and you will shatter them like pottery.

[12 : 56] And so, you know, there's a whole lot more. The Old Testament says about the Messiah, especially in the prophets, they develop it more. But I just wanted to give you that very brief outline of this idea of the Messiah in the Old Testament, because what we see is that way before the Romans, the Jews were told by God of a coming one who would fix the world, who would bring justice to societies, and would drive evil from the world. This planet's only true solution for the problem of evil and suffering and power and conflict among nations. And here, in Mark, in his first verse, he claims that is who has arrived on earth.

But he makes that claim in the first verse, and then for the rest of his gospel, he doesn't tell you what he thinks anymore. This is the only time he really tells you what he thinks. The rest of the gospel, he lays out the evidence, the facts, and he lets the reader decide for themselves.

And the reason he does that is because the way Jesus goes about fulfilling the prophecies of the Messiah and establishing the foundations of the restoration of this world, like the prophet said, like God has promised. The way he does that is in ways that nobody expected. Very strange.

I mean, how would you expect the arrival of the one who's going to fix everything? I mean, what would that look like? I imagine crowds of people, people wanting to talk to him, leaders of countries wanting to have seminars with him, him being involved in the center of the political heart of countries and the world. If it was today, you would have coverage in CNN, you would have him lined up for interviews. If this was the one who's come, who's going to actually fix the world, people will want to know how they'll want him to come to universities and start preaching to politics students. And yet, when Jesus came, there was none of that.

He almost came secretly under the radar without anyone noticing. This Messiah that's been the hopes of the Jewish nation for centuries and centuries comes in a way that no one expects.

[15 : 33] But it's as we read this first bit of Mark that we realize just why this passage hints at why he came in such an unexpected way. And the reason is, in summary, and it's developed more in Mark, the reason is that before this Messiah can fix the world that he's come to do, he first needs to fix people who live in it.

And that's why John the Baptist, when he comes and prepares people for the arrival of the Messiah, says these words in verse 8. It'll start from verse 7.

He proclaimed, One who is more powerful than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the straps of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

You see, that's hinting at the fact that before Jesus, before the Messiah can fix the nations, he needs to fix us. We need him to fix us.

And the prophets of the Old Testament also spoke about this. They spoke about the coming of the kingdom and the rule that the Messiah will establish over nations, but they also speak about the inner transformation that is needed in humans who live in those nations before that can happen.

[17 : 00] Now listen to Isaiah chapter 42. You can turn there in your Bibles. Isaiah 42, 1-4. This is God talking about the coming one. Through the prophet Isaiah, he says this, This is my servant. I strengthen him. This is my chosen one. I delight in him. I have put my spirit on him.

He will bring justice to the nations. He will not cry out or shout or make his voice heard in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed and he will not put out a smoldering wick. He will faithfully bring justice.

He will not grow weak or be discouraged until he has established justice on earth. The coasts and the islands will wait for his instruction. It's a beautiful prophecy about the coming one.

And it's fulfilled here in Mark. Did you see that? God in Isaiah talks about, this is like 800 years before the events of Mark, talks about my chosen one who I delight in and I've put my spirit on him.

That's a prophecy of something that's going to happen. How you will know that the Messiah has come. And in Mark 1, 9 to 11, we read, In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John.

[18 : 24] As soon as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased.

Just as the Old Testament prophets would anoint the king of Israel with oil, here the last of the era of Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, anoints Jesus as the king who's going to begin the project of fixing the world.

And God affirms that that's the one by anointing him with the spirit as he said he would in Isaiah. But the way that Jesus is going to start fixing the world is by first fixing us, fixing you and me.

By baptizing us with the Holy Spirit. Isaiah goes on a few pages later in Isaiah 44, 1 to 5. And God says this, And now listen, Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen.

This is the word of the Lord your maker, the one who formed you from the womb. He will help you. Do not fear, Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on dry ground.

[19 : 50] I will pour out my spirit on your descendants and my blessing on your offspring. They will sprout among the grass like poplars by flowering streams.

This one will say, I am the Lord's. Another will use the name of Jacob, still another will write on his hand, The Lord's, and take on the name of Israel. I don't know if you've ever, you probably have if you've got a garden, seen what happens when there's no rain for a while.

Everything gets brown, you know, maybe in summer, your grass will get brown. And then when the first rains come of autumn or winter, depending of course on where you live, you see just after the first rains, these little bits of green sprout up, new life sprouting, as an indicator of the lush greenery that's going to come when the rains come down more.

And that's the illustration we see here in Isaiah 44. God says that when he sends his spirit down, little sprouts of restoration will appear around the world, pointing to what the Messiah is going to achieve.

And that's why before the Messiah achieves that, he needs to pour out his Holy Spirit. But who are these people? Who are these little sprouts of restoration life that will appear even before the restoration comes in the world?

[21 : 20] Who are the people who take on the name of Israel? Well, Mark tells us, they are those who do what Jesus says in Mark 1 verse 15, right at the end of our passage.

Listen to the words of Jesus. The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. Repent and believe the good news.

The good news that we are called to believe in is this news that we've just been seeing that Mark has just outlined, which is the news that the Messiah has come.

That is the primary good news that we are called to believe in. Even before Jesus goes on to do a whole lot of things that we read about in Mark, in his miracles and his teaching and his death and his resurrection, all of those things are part of the good news.

But the foundational good news that we are called to believe in first and foremost is the good news people cause Jesus to believe in here in Mark 1 verse 15, which is that this Messiah has come.

[22 : 33] And his project to fix the world and to fix us has begun. We need to know that. We need to see the world in that light. That is the gospel we are called to believe and to proclaim to the world who is desperate for a solution to the problems of nations and the problems of our broken hearts.

They are not interested in some personal spiritual savior. The world wants to know how humanity and how this world is going to be fixed and we can tell them because of what Mark reveals here in his gospel.

We have got to believe that. But we have also got to repent. We have got to repent. Believe and repent. Now the word repent is a very interesting one.

The literal meaning is turn around but the way it is used by Jesus in the Bible is, as one scholar puts it, not just to stop doing bad stuff and change your life and turn your life around.

True repentance, biblical repentance actually means changing one's heart and mind about what is ultimately important and then changing one's life accordingly.

[23 : 46] True repentance starts in our mind and our heart and how we think about things and how we think about what's important and how we think about the world and specifically how we think about Jesus and it's changing one's mind about what's important and then changing one's life to match that.

And if Jesus is who Mark says he is, the only solution for a broken world and broken lives, then nobody can ignore him no matter what your religious background, no matter what your beliefs, no matter what your political views, if Mark's claim about Jesus is true, you can't ignore Jesus.

Either you've got to find a way to write Mark off and refute what he says and find a reason to believe that Jesus is not the Messiah or you've got to repent as well and turn to him and change your mind about him.

Either way, what you need to do is stay here and study Mark with us. No matter who you are, whether you're watching online, whether you're at church, you need to stick it out and you need to walk through this book of Mark with us so that you can make your mind up about who Jesus is.

But if you already have, if you're a Christian, you believe in Christ, you believe that Jesus is the Christ, then something you need to know, and with this I'll end, you need to know that the command here by Jesus in Mark 1 verse 15 to believe and repent, those verbs are actually what are called present imperatives, which means Greek has different tenses of verbs which don't come out in the English.

[25 : 26] But the way these words have been said by Jesus is a command that is ongoing. It's not one thing you do at the beginning of your Christian journey and then it's done. You repent and you continue repenting.

You believe and you continue believing. In other words, Christians are those who haven't believed and repented as a thing back in their lives. They believe and repent more and more every day.

More and more every day they are changing their minds about what's important and they're learning to live accordingly. And so if Jesus is who Mark says he is, Christians, if Jesus is who Mark says he is here, if he is the hope of the nations and the fulfillment of God's plan to restore all things around the world, I want to ask you two questions this morning.

Firstly, do you speak about him to others as if that's true? Or do you just treat him as your private Lord and keep him to yourself? Because if you do that, if you just treat him as your private spiritual Savior and keep him to yourself, this is not the gospel that you believe.

The gospel of the Messiah having come into this world. And the second question I want to ask you, what in your life is more important than doing his work if he is who Mark says he is.

[26 : 48] Is there anything in your life that can be more important than doing his work? Think about what the most important thing you could do with your life is. Especially, I'm asking, maybe especially those who are in that phase of life where the young adults in your early 20s where you're thinking, late teens, you're thinking about what you're going to do with your life.

And hopefully you're thinking not just what's going to make the most money, but what's going to be important. How can you add value to the world? How can you do something important? What is the most important thing you could do with your life?

Work for the UN? Work in government? Research a cure for cancer? No. The most important thing you can do is work for the Messiah if he is who Mark says he is here.

And you do that through involvement in his church that he's put here as his embassies, as his outposts, to start the foundation of his restoring of the world and restoring of people and fixing of people before he comes finally to fix the world.

The work of the church is more important than the work of the UN. It's more important than the work of the World Health Organization. It's more important than anything if Jesus is who Mark says he is here.

[28 : 06] And parents, if you want your children to be involved in something that is important, if you want your children to grow up and do things that are important, before you think about what universities they study and what jobs they get, you should think about how involved they are in the work of the Messiah because they can be involved in that work right now and they will learn how to be involved in that work by watching you and how involved you are in it.

Your duties at church may not seem like much. The ways you're involved in your local church might not seem like much and there might be a bother to you. Do I?

Oh, I'm on the roster again. Really? Do I have to? Oh, well. I guess I got it. But I want you to realize that your involvement in your church, in whatever capacity it is, that is your involvement in what the Messiah is doing to prepare this world for restoration.

And because He is the only hope for this world to be fixed and for people to be fixed, that work is the only work that ultimately matters.

The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near. Now repent and believe the good news.

[29 : 30] Let's pray. Oh, Lord, we thank You for this revelation that Mark, the inspired gospel writer, gives us about Jesus, that He is the Christ.

He is the Messiah. Messiah, come to bring justice and restoration to Your world. He is the fulfillment of the plan You have always had right from the beginning. The plan You worked through Abraham and the family of Israel.

The plan You call us to be involved. And Lord, help us to realize, therefore, that working for the Messiah, being involved in His work and His church is the most important thing we can be doing.

Lord, I pray for those who are not sure yet of what they make of Jesus, who are listening to this. I pray that You would help them to realize who Jesus really is and to change their mind about Him and then to change their lives accordingly that they too may be involved in the work of the Messiah to restore this world and they will be members of that coming kingdom.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.