

The Power and Priority of the Messiah

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. Good to see you. Very good to see you in live and in person. What a great story to be part of. The book of Mark, the Gospel of Mark, which is really the Gospel of Jesus.

And today we're looking at, we've been introduced to Jesus last week, and today we need to dig deep into who is Jesus. Mark is going to show us what this Messiah, what Jesus of Nazareth, what kind of Messiah he's going to be.

Now it's interesting to see what the world thinks of power, isn't it? Power. Take, for example, what's been happening in Afghanistan. You've all seen the news.

The West thought that power lies in capitalism, in money. They thought money and military could change what they consider a seemingly backward and essentially bad country into a modern and good one.

I don't know if you know this, but America and its allies have been involved in Afghanistan for 20 years. They invaded in 2001, 9-11, and they've been there ever since.

[1 : 1 2] They've spent hundreds of billions of dollars, literally hundreds of billions of dollars in equipment and everything, trying to get them from what they were to something else.

And it all went up in smoke over the last two weeks. Clearly the power to change people doesn't exist in money alone. Wouldn't it be such an interesting experiment to take the money, those hundreds of billions of dollars that they spent on tanks and guns and military and some sort of social experiment, you know, they introduced all the gender and LGBTQ studies.

You know, they flew the gender flag, the LGBT flag, over their compound, over the American embassy in Kabul. I can imagine how that went down.

Okay, now take all that money and give it to the church and say, hey, why don't you guys try to fix Afghanistan? What do you think would happen? Just think about that for a second. Imagine you get all that money and give it to churches and say, okay, you have a go.

Do you think it would make a difference or do you think it would fall flat? Think about that. Don't be like, yeah, it'll make a difference. Maybe it would, maybe it wouldn't. Well, okay, I think it would, but let's say you had three different types of churches pitch up and you had to decide, you know, you've got the hundreds of billions of dollars at your disposal and you've got to choose which one is going to go in and make a difference.

[2 : 3 3] You've got one that believes in the power of miracles. They're going to do, they're going to speak in tongues. They're going to have healings. They're going to have crusades. They're going to see all kinds of wonderful things.

Okay, that's what that church is going to do. Okay, then you've got another church that is going to do good. They're going to set up NGOs. They're going to do education. They believe in preaching the gospel.

If necessary, use words. Have you heard that kind of thing before? It's more about doing good, loving your neighbor, being incarnational. And then you've got a church that says, well, we're just going to do what we do every Sunday.

We're just going to take this thing here and it's going to tell people about it. Which one would you give your billions of dollars to? Well, today we're going to look at the power and the priority of the Messiah.

The power and the priority of the Messiah. And you see straight away in Mark chapter 1 that Jesus has a lot of power. You see miracles going off. The big question that Mark wants to answer in this section is what kind of Messiah is Jesus going to be?

[3 : 46] We know he's here to bring the kingdom of God into reality. But is he here to bring the blessings of that kingdom primarily? Healing? Blessings? Or is he here to teach people what it means to be part of that kingdom?

This section is about Jesus' actions and words. And how both have power and authority, but there seems to be a little bit of a tension between the two. And we want to look at which one has priority. So today is about the power and the priority of the Messiah.

So first of all, the power of the Messiah. I mean, and the story just bristles with power and energy. Without a doubt, Jesus is someone who's full of power and authority.

And you see that as we go through this text, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing. He's just doing things left, right and center. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. That's Mark's way, by the way. And immediately, and then, and suddenly, and on the spot.

Just things happening. In fact, this whole section stretches over a 24-hour period. You'll see that in the text as you read it. And the first thing you see is that Jesus calls his disciples.

[4 : 49] And you've got the irresistible call of the king. Verse 14 and 15. So Jesus comes into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God.

A major message from God. The time has come. He's proclaiming. The kingdom of God is near. It would have been like, you know, that kind of thing.

Repent and believe the good news. The gospel. And then what happens? Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee. He saw some fishermen and said, hey, come follow me. Shore of a lake, talking to rough and tumble hillbilly fishermen.

If Jesus was doing this in Cape Town, he would have been hanging out in Cork Bay. Can you just imagine? Picture the scene. You're a fisherman. You've got stuff to do.

Money to make. And this random guy walks past and says, stop what you're doing and follow me. Can you just? Now imagine how much authority you need to have the kind of effect on someone that Jesus had here.

[5 : 54] Immediately they stop and follow him. You need some serious power at your disposal. In fact, the only other person who makes this kind of call in the Old Testament is Yahweh.

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Remember how he calls Abraham? Same way. Hey, Abraham, come follow me. Boom! He gets up and he follows him. God calls and people simply do not not obey.

Here's Jesus doing the same thing. And just a plain, straight up word of power from the King of God's kingdom. And it's not an invite. Verse 17, come and follow me.

It's more of a military command. It's, come here, now. Ya, corpora. Ya, bas. And this rough and tumble salt of the earth, these rough and tumble salt of the earth fishermen drop what they're doing and they follow him.

Incredible power. Then you've got the commanding voice of the king driving out demons. Next we see Jesus in action in Capernaum in a synagogue. Later on he's going to heal Simon's mother-in-law in the house.

[7 : 03] By the way, you can still see those ruins today. Capernaum is on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. It's a ruin. But the synagogue that Jesus preached in, this is the synagogue.

You can see it. It stands still. It's still standing. And then Simon's house is still there as well. It's got a big church over it. Kind of, and they've built this structure that looks like the Millennium Falcon, which is quite cool.

But they reckon it's there. He goes to the synagogue. He's giving a sermon. And out of the blue this demon manifests. Jesus must have said something to get him riled up.

And sadly, the demon-possessed person could have spent months and years in that synagogue without hearing a single thing that bothered him. To think about that. What is a child of God?

What is a Jew spending years in a synagogue with being demon-possessed? And how come they couldn't do anything about it? One sermon from Jesus is enough to wake it up and want it to take action.

[8 : 08] The demon realizes immediately there's a power struggle going on. It's in a fight for its life. What have you got to do with us? That means go away, leave us alone. Have you come to destroy us? So he knows he's in trouble.

Now demons are strong and scary things. I'm pretty sure I saw one as a kid. And I just shouted, Mommy! And I wasn't a young kid either. But Jesus doesn't show a hint of fear, but goes on the attack.

And all it takes for Jesus to win this encounter? A word of command. Silence! Leave! And it's gone. It's so impressive. Because exorcisms happened in those days, but there were whole rituals that you had to go through in order to do it.

Burning incense, various incantations, amulets. And with Jesus, it's just a straight-up command. And the demon is gone. And one of the things that this teaches us about who Jesus is, is that he is the Messiah.

Don't let that slip from your grasp. And this comes from our Zechariah 13 reading, where the coming age of the Messiah talked about as the house of David in Zechariah 13. But meaning, the house of David meaning someone will come from his line, i.e. a king.

[9 : 22] And this coming Messiah, this coming person from the line of David, will bring forth streams of living water that will bring renewal, and that will clear the land of unclean spirits.

If you saw that in Zechariah 13, those first few verses. So part of the Messiah's expectation of the Old Testament is that the Messiah would do these two things. Cleanse from impurity and get rid of the plague of demons.

Here in Mark, Jesus is fulfilling what you see written back in Zechariah 13. In fact, it's interesting if you just read Zechariah 12, as well, there's fantastic prophecies about the Christ.

Important prophecies that have a lot to do with what happens with Jesus in Mark. You should read Zechariah 12 to look up on that. And then we see the healing touch of the king. This is all Jesus' power.

It's all over the place, and you've got to deal with it. You've got to say, yes, this man is full of power. Jesus does two healing miracles in short succession. He heals Simon's mother-in-law of a fever and then a leper, simply by touching them.

[10 : 32] Now, to understand how powerful these miracles are, you need to understand a bit of the Old Testament background. Both fever and leprosy are signs of covenant cursing. They're a sign that God's people are not living in right relationship with him.

Now, there's laws in Leviticus that help with, not with healing, but with restoring a person with leprosy. But the important thing, you can read about that in Leviticus 12 and 13.

But the important thing there is that the priest could only examine a person and then send them away for seven days to isolate and then see if they were any better.

They couldn't actually heal them. They could proclaim them clean. They could proclaim them healed. But they couldn't do the healing themselves. And under no circumstances were they allowed to touch the person with the fever or leprosy.

It's the same as touching a dead person. So leprosy isolates and puts barriers between God and his people. And Jesus doesn't seem to care about any of that.

[11 : 36] And just goes ahead and heals the person. And he does it by touching them. Okay. Now, what this tells us about Jesus here is that he is superior to the Old Testament priesthood who couldn't really make a difference to people in this condition.

Mark is telling us that in Jesus, the kingdom of God has taken a new turn. There's a king who's going to do new things in a new way and a different way.

In Jesus, you have a king filled with power and authority. And not just that, but filled with compassion. Do you notice why he healed the person with leprosy?

Jesus is busy preaching. He's going around in the synagogues preaching. The man comes up to him, verse 40, and begs him on his knees, If you are willing, you can make me clean.

Filled with compassion. Jesus reaches out his hand, touches him, and says, I'm willing. Be clean. So you've got a king whose words can heal and clean and restore.

[12 : 41] A king whose words have power. Now, who wouldn't want a king like that? The crowds are loving it. Notice the reaction that all these exhibitions of power get.

People are amazed. They've never seen anything like this. Never heard about it. Crowds are coming out. The whole area has heard about this. Everyone is looking for Jesus. Of course, you can imagine.

If you imagine you were there in Galilee, and you heard about this guy that could do these things. You would be the first one. You'd line up. Take your granny. Take your mom. Take yourself. Line up.

Want to be healed. Yes. Yes. But in all this frenetic activity, there seems to be something missing.

Remember the programmatic text for the advance of the kingdom. This is how God is going to make his kingdom advance. Have a look at verse 14 and 15 again. Jesus comes into Galilee, preaching the good news of God.

[13 : 45] The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel, the good news. What is needed for people to enter the kingdom and be part of the king's agenda? What must they do to be part of this program of change?

Well, they need to repent and believe. There needs to be a change of heart and mind, as we saw last week, about who Jesus is. And then believe him. And put your trust and your faith in him.

So they're loving the miracles that Jesus is performing, but there doesn't seem to be a lot of repentance and faith. Do you notice that? A lot of amazement, but a lot of misunderstanding of what's going on.

People are trying to get Jesus to follow their agenda. Hey, we want some healing here. Not too sure about the preaching stuff. That just seems to have flown out the window at the moment some fantastic miracle went along.

Now, the problem with miracles is while they look spectacular and do have an effect, they don't seem to have the effect that Jesus or God is looking for.

[14 : 48] The thing is, you see, Jesus knew his people's history. He knows that miracles don't always cut it. Psalm 106 says this.

It's reflecting on God's work amongst his people and how they responded to him. It's talking about the salvation coming out of the Exodus, basically. So Psalm 106, verse 9.

It should be on the screen. He, God, rebuked the Red Sea and dried it up. He led them through the depths as through a desert. He saved them from the hand of the foe, from the hand of the enemy.

He redeemed them. The waters covered their adversaries. Not one of them survived. Then they believed his promises and sang his praise. You don't get bigger miracles than the Exodus.

On a national scale. Not these private little things that we often hear about and see about. Even here in Jesus' time. Much bigger than that in the Exodus. Verse 13. Verse 13.

[15 : 45] But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his plan to unfold. In the desert, they gave into their craving.

In the wilderness, they put God to the test. So he gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease amongst them. So, Jesus doesn't want people to follow him based on the miracles alone.

Because miracles alone don't get to the heart of the matter. There's no repentance. There's no faith. Having God do miracles, there's no guarantee that he will get a people that are faithful to him.

You see that text in Psalm 106 shows it us. Remember what happened at Sinai? God meeting with his people in person. And then they're messing around with idolatry and sex.

Unfaithful to God spiritually as well as sexually. Clearly what is needed, if God is going to do a new thing with his people who are going to be with him, we've got to do a deeper work of the spirit so that there's something happening on the inside.

[16 : 54] The body and soul, at the soul level. Inside level. We need an internal creative work by the spirit. Or rather, a recreative work. What we would maybe call regeneration.

That's why Jesus gets the spirit in chapter 1. So that he can pass it on to people so that they can be changed. Faith based on what we can see alone, even if it's in something as incredible as a miracle, is in the long run not based on something that can sustain it.

Faith based on what we can see alone in the long run is not going to sustain the people of God that Jesus wants. At best, it can remain a sort of a baby faith.

At worst, it gets dropped. At the moment, life gets difficult. Or something more eye-catching comes along. So if miracles are not Jesus' top priority, what is?

What is Jesus' priority then? He's got all this power, and he's showing it off. But is that the main thing he wants people to get about him? About his program? What is Jesus' priority?

[18 : 00] I'm not sure if you noticed. But Jesus doesn't go looking for miracles. Doesn't go looking for the people to do miracles with. How did he heal the person with a demon?

What was he doing? Have a look at verse 21. They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.

Kind of doing what we do here Sunday by Sunday. Obviously better. I should think. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the Lord.

Just in a man in the synagogue, there the Spirit goes. Jesus wasn't looking for that. The healing of Simon, Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus didn't go there to heal her. He just went to the house.

Simon then tells Jesus, Listen, my mom's sick. And Jesus says, Okay, let me go and see if I can heal her. Oh, let me go and heal her. The man with leprosy.

[19 : 08] Jesus is preaching in the synagogues. Verse 39. He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in the synagogues, driving out demons, and a man with leprosy came to him. Okay, so this is important. This tells us what Jesus' priority really is.

Jesus' priority is to teach and to preach about the kingdom of God. And this takes precedence over the healings and the miracles, as amazing and important as they are for establishing his Masonic credentials.

There's something even more important that Jesus is not going to be sidetracked from. That's why the key story in this section is where Jesus withdraws from the crowds, goes off to pray.

He goes off to a lonely place to pray by himself. What he's doing is he's refocusing on God and getting committed to his mission, to the kingdom of God.

And then he goes off to preach again. Let's have a look at from verse 35. Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place where he prayed.

[20 : 17] Simon and his companions went to look for him. When they found him, they exclaimed, Hey, everyone is looking for you. These are all the crowds that had been in Capernaum the night before, begging for miracles.

A bit of a temptation there. Jesus could have said, Yeah, you know what? Where's my phone? Yeah. Let's go.

Hi, everyone. I'm back. We're going to just heal this guy over here. Oh, look at that. 14 million followers. Okay. No.

Jesus replied, Let us go somewhere else. I'm not into that. I'm not into the crowds. Let's go to the nearby villages, so I can preach there also.

That is why I have come. So he travels throughout Galilee, preaching in the synagogues, and driving out demons. We've got someone whose teaching has authority.

[21 : 18] Jesus' words are as life-changing as his miracles. Now just think about the priority of Jesus is to teach and to preach. Does that mean you've got two choices?

One to see the power of the miracles, and one not-so-powerful side of Jesus, just ordinary, everyday talking? Well, no. I don't know about you, but if you give me two choices between seeing a demon being thrown out or someone getting healed of leprosy versus listening to a talk about the kingdom of God, which one, I don't know which one I'd prefer to watch and be more exciting, miracles just sound more exciting and full of power, whereas words are just, you know, kind of words.

But here is why listening to Jesus' words is so helpful and life-changing. Jesus' power is experienced as much in his teaching and preaching as his miracles.

First of all, Jesus' teaching has weight and authority. Just his teaching, just talking, has this massive impact. You saw that in the synagogue at Capernaum, verse 21.

They went to Capernaum, Sabbath camp, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching. They couldn't believe it because he taught as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

[22 : 48] So Jesus' teaching has authority. It has weight. It's noticeably different to what they've had before. Something new has started. The old way of being the people of God is about to be changed. There's a new, more powerful way to be part of God's people and it revolves around it doesn't revolve around keeping the law or keeping the traditions of the scribes.

That's what the teachers of the law are. They had the they controlled what people understood the law. They explained the law. But it revolves around Jesus and listening to his words about God, about the kingdom, about himself and about how we are to live.

Jesus is the new king and he's going to be the new lawmaker. Just notice how powerful Jesus' words are in this whole section. He speaks a word of command and the four fishermen follow him.

Their lives are never the same. Instead of fishing for fish, they are called living souls to be part of the kingdom of God. They get to change people's destinies. Jesus' miracles that heal and restore are also done by his word.

Yes, he touches them, but he also heals them with his word. Likewise, when we listen to his preaching and teaching about the kingdom, when we respond in faith, that will have the same effect, if not more, than if we have experienced a miracle.

[24 : 14] And in fact, you can experience a miracle and all that happens, take the person who gets healed of leprosy. Maybe, we don't know what's happened to him. Maybe he goes on his merry way.

He doesn't really obey Jesus. He just does his own thing. So he's not going to die of leprosy. He's going to die of something else. But if you hear Jesus teach about who he is and you respond to that, then you've got a different eternal destiny.

So that's actually more powerful, in a sense, to believe in Jesus' words than to have a miracle in your life. So Jesus didn't want to be distracted from his core mission and his followers, and as his followers, neither should we.

Jesus came to preach the kingdom and to be the Messiah. But the way of the kingdom, in Mark, is going to be the way of the cross. It's going to be full of suffering, it's going to be full of sacrifice, and it's going to end in death.

That's going to take focus and determination. Being a famous first century miracle worker isn't going to cut it. Jesus is not here to entertain, or to fascinate, or to draw crowds.

[25 : 23] He's not going to be made to dance the tyrannical whims of the crowds. Least of all his disciples, he goes off to pray, to stay on track, to stay focused on his mission. Now this has implications for what we should be focused on in our own Christian lives as we are followers of Christ.

Are we focused on sacrificial living? Are we focused on sacrificial living? Or is it like, yeah, you know, when we have to, we have to. But I'd rather have the good stuff.

Are we focused on preparing for the long haul? For difficulty? Or are we focused on the stuff that we can get out of being a Christian? For our own comfort?

Maybe we want to build our own name or our own security. Jesus didn't call the disciples to have deep, personal, intimate relationship with him. He called them to join his mission.

He doesn't call them for themselves. He calls them for his mission to get a job done, to build the kingdom of God. So just as we're followers of Christ, are we sure that we are following Christ not for ourselves primarily or only, but to make sure that what Jesus wants to happen happens?

[26 : 37] Does that make sense? And we all say that because it's the right spiritual thing to say. And boy, it can be hard sometimes.

And because we're so quick to fool ourselves into thinking, yeah, we're really doing it, but we're kind of doing a half job. Parents, are you teaching your kids that being a Christian is jolly hard work and will take discipline and faithfulness and endurance?

Or are you just going, hey man, this is going to be the most amazing thing you've ever had in your life? Imagine Jesus had walked up to Simon and Peter and those fishermen. Hi, I just want to say that I love you and I've got a wonderful plan for your life.

And I just want to invite you to join me and it's going to be amazing. And just so by the way, I'm going to die and you're probably all going to die as well. We're in it for the long haul no matter what comes our way.

Back to the parents teaching the kids. We're in it for the long haul no matter what comes our way or rather especially when hardship comes our way because it will. Life is hard and life is long and it's more so as a Christian.

[27 : 48] If your Christianity is based on bubble and fluff and everything you can see and everything that's exciting all the time, you're going to get, you're going to fold when the going gets tough.

Be careful of selling Christianity as something that is all peaches and cream all the time. I'm not saying scare them out of it but just be realistic. What about you?

What are you looking for? Where are you looking to find power in your own life? In miracles, in blessings, in changed circumstances, in things you can get. Maybe, you know, so many Christians follow the teachers that promise us a miracle.

You can get your miracle today. If we had put a sign outside, get your miracle today, we would get people. But we are experiencing a miracle.

It's the miracle of Christ's words and as we read them and understand them, it does this thing that it changes us. What Mark teaches us is that Jesus does have the power and is willing to cleanse and heal and remove all the things that, all evil things in our life.

[28 : 56] But just as equally, even more so, is the power of Christ's words. For us, he does it primarily through his words. That's so counterintuitive for us because words sound so boring.

You know, you want to see action. But Jesus' words have power. Jesus' words compel people to follow him. They stop demons from doing evil. They banish them from hurting others.

His words get rid of diseases no one else can. But his words are also words of teaching, of truth, about God, about the world, about people, about you, about me.

Jesus' own words tell us what the focus of his mission is. I'm preaching the good news about the kingdom of God. Let's do an inventory. How well are you listening to Jesus' words?

Are you listening to them really well, not so well, average or below average? Well, here's a remedy for wanting more of Jesus' words in your life. If I told you that you, if you had to do a certain thing to see Jesus acting in power, would you do it?

[30 : 03] Imagine. You've heard what Jesus can do in power, in the powerful stuff Jesus can do. I say, come and you can get the same thing. Come get your miracle. You want to see Jesus acting power in your life?

Well then, listen to his words. Because his words have power. You'll be changed if you spend time listening to the words of Christ.

You'll be changed like the disciples were if you spent time with him. It means time in prayer and time in his word and time with other Christians that can help you dig in his word and pray with you.

And the word that Jesus speaks here results in healing and cleaning and restoring. And which of us don't need more of that in our lives? Well, let's pray.

Dear Lord Jesus, you are the captain of our salvation. You are the king of God's kingdom. you've been given all power and authority and you came to teach us about yourself and to preach the gospel.

[31 : 09] Help us, Lord, to have faith in you and to hang on to your words and to know you better through your word so that we can be changed and made fit for your kingdom and to be good disciples and followers of you all the days of our life.

Amen. Amen.