

## **The King Is Coming!**

**September 30, 2018**

This morning, we begin our study in the Gospel of Mark. Last week, we looked at an overview of Mark and I gave you a biography of the author of the book known as John Mark. If you missed that study, I encourage you to listen to it online.

Today, we open the book and study the text. Turn to Mark 1. We will read the first eight verses then study them. While you are turning in your Bibles, let me tell you about Mark's style of writing. In ancient Rome, a popular style of writing was ancient biographies. There were biographies of Caesar Augustus and other popular Roman leaders. This helped people know their history. In addition, everybody likes a story about someone's life because they can relate to it. Mark was writing in the style of an ancient biography. The difference is he was not writing about a short-lived earthly king whose reign was only a few short years. He was writing about a king who is the king of the entire earth and whose reign never ends. His name is King Jesus. Let's begin his story.

### **Mark 1:1-8**

We will organize this morning's study into two parts. The first part will be explaining the text. At the end of our study, we will turn to applying the text. The verses also break into two different parts. The first verses in the introduction are an overview of the book. The rest of the verses we will read introduce us to John the Baptist who is the forerunner that prepares the way for the arrival of the great king this book tells us about.

## The introduction to the book

### The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark 1:1 (ESV)

This is the heading of the book. The title, “The Gospel of Mark,” was not originally over this document. That was added. This was the title and overview. To understand what this means, let’s begin by looking at the word gospel. For us, the word gospel is a church word. It goes with the four stories of Jesus at the beginning of the New Testament.

In the ancient world, the word gospel was not a church word. It was a common word with a specific use. Many of us know that gospel simply means good news in Greek, as if mom was serving pizza for dinner. That is good news. The word gospel had a more narrow use than pizza is served. Historically, in that culture gospel meant the good news that a king had arrived that would save his people, bringing them happiness and peace. Historically, the word gospel had a slightly different meaning to Jews and Gentiles, so let’s explore this word in their historical context.

### What did the word gospel mean to the Jews?

The word Greek word gospel was used to translate some important Old Testament passages in the Septuagint. The Septuagint was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that people used in that day when they were rusty on their Hebrew, much like we use an English Bible today because we don’t know Greek. A good example of the word gospel in the Septuagint is Isaiah 40.

Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. Isaiah 40:9–10 (ESV)

This is an important chapter in Isaiah because it looks forward to the coming Messiah in the distant future. Isaiah says, “Get to the highest point on the mountain.” He wanted people to make sure they got high enough so everyone could hear. “Announce good news. The good news, the gospel message everyone needs to hear, is not just the coming of a mere earthly king. God is coming. God is coming to bring ultimate victory and eternal rescue to his people. The gospel news is that the Lord God comes with might.” When the Jews hear the word gospel, their minds went back to Isaiah 40. They knew gospel meant the good news that an earthly king had come to save his people and bring them happiness and peace, but they also knew that one day God himself would come as the king of his people to save them and bring them happiness and peace. The word gospel connected their minds to this passage, which speaks of God coming as the king to save them. The word gospel is also used in the Septuagint for another passage in Isaiah.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” Isaiah 52:7 (ESV)

Once again we have the word gospel used to describe the arrival and enthronement of a king who would bring happiness and salvation. Who was this king? “Your God reigns.” The king was God himself who would come to reign over his people, save his people, and bring happiness and peace to his people. To the Jews, the word gospel called to mind this reminder that one day God himself would come as the king to save his people.

## What did the word gospel mean to the Romans?

We briefly looked at this a few minutes ago. For the Romans, the word gospel meant the arrival of an earthly king to save them, then bring happiness and peace to them. One of the best ways to illustrate this is to show you an inscription written to Caesar Augustus in 8 B.C. on his birthday. Look how they use the word gospel to describe the news of his kingship and how they credited his rule over Rome as the key to bringing peace and prosperity to Rome.

“The providence which has ordered the whole of our life showing concern and zeal has ordained the most perfect consummation for human life by giving it to Augustus, by filling him with virtue for doing the work of a benefactor among men and by sending in him, as it were, a Savior for us and those who come after us to make war to cease, to create order everywhere, the birthday of the God Augustus is the beginning for the world of the gospel that has come to men through him.” - Inscription to Caesar Augustus on his birthday, 9 BC.

Now if you ask me, this was a little over the top. The guy who wrote this was a major brown-noser, but my point still stands. We can see how the author used the word gospel to describe the good news of a king's reign to bring peace and happiness to his people.

When Romans heard the word gospel, what came to their minds was the good news of a king's arrival to bring peace and happiness to those over whom he ruled. The Jews had a similar idea, but in their minds they thought of the day when God himself would one day arrive to reign over his people.

Incidentally, this is only the beginning of the biography of this king. Other ancient biographies didn't say the word beginning in the introduction. Other kings ruled and died. They had a beginning and an ending. Mark told us the good news

of this king's reign had only begun. It isn't over. This is highly unusual and at the outset catches people's attention that this king is different.

### **The new king is Jesus, who is the Christ.**

Who is this new king? His name is Jesus Christ. Jesus is his first name, but Christ is not his last name. His name is Jesus. Jesus is the Hebrew of Joshua, which means "God saves" in Hebrew. When you realize Jesus means that God saves, it explains some key verses.

You shall call his name Jesus, for He will save his people from their sins. Matt 1:21 (ESV)

I cannot think of a more appropriate name for Jesus than Jesus because saving us is what he came to do.

As I said, Christ is not a last name. It is a title. It is the Greek for the Hebrew word Messiah. Messiah and Christ mean the chosen or anointed one. It was a term originally used to refer to kings of Israel because God is the one who chose them and set them apart to rule.

Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever. 2 Samuel 22:51 (ESV)

The word anointed is the Hebrew word Messiah, which is translated as Christ in the Greek. This says Jesus is the one chosen by God and is the rightful king in the blood line of King David. He is the one chosen by God to be the king and savior of his people spoken about in the Old Testament in the Isaiah passages we read earlier. That is what it means to have Jesus as the Christ.

### **The new king's lineage comes from God.**

The next question is this king's lineage. Every king needs to have a royal lineage. Ancient secular biographies, like the kind Mark was writing, always

began with a lineage to show the king's bloodline. This is why Matthew and Luke also began with a lineage to show Jesus' bloodline and that he is the rightful king of God's people. Matthew showed Jesus's earthly lineage as coming from King David on his earthly adopted father's side. Luke showed Jesus' lineage from Mary his mother's side. Mark simply skipped Jesus' earthly lineage and jumped right to his eternal lineage and said he is the Son of God. That means Jesus is eternal and equal with God the Father.

The Romans were told to think of Caesar as God, but Mark introduced them to the true Son of God, whose name is Jesus. Through the rest of this book, Mark will demonstrate Jesus to be the son of God as he carefully presents overwhelming evidence that Jesus is God. The first half of this Gospel is about Jesus demonstrating himself as equal with God through his words and his works. The second half of this book is Jesus demonstrating himself as God through his death and resurrection.

As we see, the first line of this book is the title of this book, and it is packed with meaning. This book is a gospel story. It is the story of the arrival of a great king who brought peace, happiness and salvation to his people. The king's name is Jesus. His title is the one who is the long awaited Christ of the Old Testament. He is the very Son of God.

That brings us to the rest of our verses.

In the ancient world, kings did not show up unannounced. They always sent an entourage to prepare for their arrival. In some ways it is similar to what

happens when President Trump travels. The Secret Service always goes ahead to prepare the way for his arrival.

In a similar way, every king in the ancient world had someone prepare for his arrival. The name of the one who prepared for King Jesus' arrival is John the Baptist. Let's read about him.

**God promised he would send someone to announce his king's arrival.**

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,' " Mark 1:2–3 (ESV)

Mark wanted people to know this good news of God sending his son to bring salvation and peace was always God's plan. This is not something new. The Old Testament didn't just talk about God sending King Jesus, but it talked about God sending a forerunner to prepare the way for this king's arrival. In a moment, we will meet him by name. He is John the Baptist.

To introduce John and let us know this forerunner's arrival was always part of God's plan, Mark referenced two Old Testament prophecies. Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Each of them talked about John's arrival.

One thing that always puzzled me until I took the time to study these verses in depth this week is Mark said these verses were written by Isaiah but then he quoted Malachi and Isaiah. Why did he only reference one prophetic book when these references to John the Baptist actually come from two different books? This week I learned that was actually common practice in the church at this time to tuck a few words of a minor prophet next to the words of a major prophet but when you referenced them only reference them by the major prophet. The reason is because the topic was the same. They were not trying to

do things with scientific precision but merely to make a casual reference, not a specific detailed reference. So even though Mark said this came from Isaiah, and most of the quote does come from Isaiah, don't be thrown off by a few additional words of this quote also coming from a similar prophecy about John the Baptist in Malachi.

Let's read these prophecies about John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus in their original Old Testament content.

**Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me... Malachi 3:1 (ESV)**

The first part of this quote is directly from Malachi 3:1. In case there is any question, in Matthew 11:10-11, Jesus quoted this verse from Malachi and said it refers to John the Baptist. Since Jesus says this is clearly about John the Baptist, we can trust him.

The next part of the quote comes from Isaiah 40:3 which talks about the mission of John the Baptist.

**A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Isaiah 40:3 (ESV)**

In the ancient world, the herald was to make the road ready for the king's arrival. He did that by clearing away rocks and debris so there was a smooth road for the king. He also told the people the king was coming so they could clean up their town and their lives so they were ready for his arrival.

How did John do that? Rather than clearing literal roads of physical debris, John's mission was to remove the obstacle of stubborn unbelief from people's hearts and lives. He did that by preaching a message of repentance and calling people to confess their sin. John the Baptist was the original hell, fire and



brimstone preacher. When you went to hear John the Baptist preach, you left overwhelmed with conviction. His spiritual gift was helping you see your sin then pleading with you to confess and repent of your sin. In essence, he was a good yelling preacher.

Before we move on, I want to draw our attention to some interesting implications of these prophecies about John the Baptist in Malachi and Isaiah. When you look at these quotes in context, we find John the Baptist wasn't just calling people to repent. He was preparing the way for the arrival of somebody very special, somebody whose true identity is explicitly clear in Scripture.

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming,” says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:1 (ESV)

This prophecy says the forerunner will prepare people to receive God! “The God you seek is coming. The Lord will come to his temple. The God that is worshipped in the temple will literally show up in his temple.” That is exactly what Jesus did at the beginning of his ministry. He showed up in the temple then he overturned the tables of the money-changer in the temple. This prophecy is about more than John the Baptist's arrival. It says John the Baptist would prepare the way for the arrival of God himself. That revealed the true identity of Jesus in case you had any questions.

A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” Isaiah 40:3 (ESV)

Here again we have the Old Testament saying that the forerunner would make straight a highway for God. In Hebrew, the word Lord is the word Yahweh. This is the personal name of God. John the Baptist was preparing a highway for

people to stream to Jesus, who is God. The way he did that was by calling them to repentance. It is only when you can see your sin that you can see your need of a savior.

**John the Baptist prepared people for Jesus by helping them see their sin and repent of their sin.**

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Mark 1:4–5 (ESV)

After Mark showed prophecies about John the Baptist's coming, he introduced people to John and his work. John means the Lord is gracious, which is a pretty good name. Baptist was not his last name. He was not the original baptist. Technically, he was John the baptizer. They gave him that nickname to his name because that is what everybody called him because that is what he was always doing. He called people to confess their sin, repent of their sin and be baptized, calling out to God for forgiveness of their sin.

Why did John call for baptism after confession and repentance of sin? To be clear, this is not Christian baptism, where we baptize in the name of Christ. Christ hadn't come at this point. Acts 19 shows us disciples of John the Baptist later being rebaptized into the name of Christ. What kind of baptism was John the Baptist administering?

The closest parallel was the one-time washing of Gentile converts, which symbolized their rejection of paganism and their acceptance of faith in the God of Israel as they appealed to God to be washed clean. It was a ceremony that marked outsiders becoming part of God's people. A gentile convert being baptized into Judaism was nothing extraordinary. For a Jew to be baptized was

unheard of. This required them to see themselves as outsiders who are not fit for God's kingdom. It required admitting they were no better than a dirty, rotten, filthy Gentile. John's baptism required a Jew to humble himself or herself and realize his or her sin and depravity. It required he or she admitting that as descendants of Abraham he or she was no better off than a Gentile. This admitting of sin and asking to be put in a position of needing to turn to God for help with sin put him or her in the perfect position to hear the good news of Jesus.

Let me take a moment to give some practical application we all need to hear today. The only way we can hear the good news of the gospel is to come to the end of ourselves and admit the hopelessness and depravity of our sinfulness. The Bible tells this to us.

...correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth... 2 Timothy 2:25 (ESV)

Notice that repentance comes before knowledge of the truth. The only way to see the truth of Jesus is to own our sin and repent of our sin.

This true repentance with confession of sin will be seen in our behavior. This is what John the Baptist preached.

Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Luke 3:8 (ESV)

What did the evidence of a repentance of sin look like? In John's day it involved the Jews admitting they were no better than a Gentile. They needed to call out to God and be baptized like a Gentile. It was an outward expression of inward repentance. This act of baptism did not produce forgiveness. It was a sign of calling out to God for forgiveness.

There is another practical lesson for us. Today, when we want to share Jesus with our friends, we cannot begin with Jesus. We need to begin with sin. We need to help our friends see their sinfulness and their hopeless addiction to sin. When we try to change our sinful behavior we promise ourselves we will stop sinning but we go right back to sinning. We are hopelessly addicted to sin. We fool ourselves into thinking we have power over sin. It is only when we realize that we are desperate we are open to hear about Jesus and will turn to Jesus and be born again.

So as we tell our friends about Jesus, we need to start John the Baptist-style and help people see their sin. Only after that will they be open to see the goodness of Jesus our savior.

**John the Baptist looked and acted like an Old Testament prophet.**

Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. Mark 1:6 (ESV)

Mark described what John looked like. Other New Testament books describe exciting parts of John's life. They describe his supernatural conception. They describe his father's muteness until his birth. They describe him being filled with the Holy Spirit even from the womb. Mark skipped all of that and simply described his clothing and his diet.

John wore a hairy garment. What does that mean? This doesn't mean camel hide. In that day they literally took camel hair and wove it into a piece of cloth. It was hairy cloth. It was rugged. It was natural but it was itchy. That is what John wore, an itchy hairy garment. He was not much of a fashion statement but it

was practical. He also wore a leather belt around his waist. Why is it important for us to understand his dress?

John's clothing choice was remind people of someone from their past. His name was Elijah.

They answered him, "He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite." 2 Kings 1:8 (ESV)

Elijah set the clothing fashion of ancient prophets. John the Baptist looked like Elijah from the past. People would have recognized that with his choice of clothing. Incidentally, this is exactly what the angel who prophesied about John the Baptist's birth said he would be like in his life.

...and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared. Luke 1:17 (ESV)

Jesus even recognized John the Baptist as the one who was to come in the spirit and power of Elijah.

For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. Matthew 11:13–14 (ESV)

Elisha, the famous Old Testament prophet, wore a garment of hair and a leather belt. John the Baptist dressed the same way and people instantly recognized the association.

Incidentally, when false prophets tried to look like legitimate prophets, one of the ways they did this was by walking around in hairy clothing trying to look like Elijah of old. Many of us have read this verse before but we can now understand it in a better way.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. Matthew 7:15 (ESV)

That was not a sheep hide. That was clothing made of sheep hair to look like Elijah. To look like Elijah, the false prophets dressed in wool.

Let's look at John's diet. He ate locusts and wild honey. He was one of those back-to-nature people. Locusts were the only kind of insects you were permitted to eat according the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 11:22. You removed the wings and legs, then you roasted, boiled, or baked them. If you wanted to make a high protein bread you ground them up and baked them into your bread. I personally think the reason he also ate wild honey is because locusts taste terrible but if you put enough sugar on anything you can make it edible. We learned that while raising our children. Douse their vegetables in sugar and they will eat them.

### **John preached about the greatness of the coming king.**

And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Mark 1:7–8 (ESV)

John preached about sin and repentance but he also preached about the greatness of the coming king.

John said he was preparing the way for one who would come after him who is so great that he was not even worthy to untie his sandals. In that day, the roads were different. They were mud roads. They were dirty roads. In addition, people didn't use cars. They used animals. Does anybody know what it is like to step in a steaming pile of dog poop? Isn't that disgusting? Imagine stepping in a steaming pile of dog poop in sandals. That was a daily occurrence in the ancient world except the piles were much bigger than what a dog could make. There were piles of poop all over the roads from horses and mules and oxen and

camels. When you arrived where you were going, your feet were a disgusting biology project that smelled so bad you couldn't get your nose far enough away from your feet. The job of the lowest slave in the house was to take off your sandals and scrape the poop off your feet before you came into the home.

John the Baptist said the guy who was coming "that I am preparing you for is so great, I am not good enough to scrape the poop off his feet."

Remember who John the Baptist was at this time. The Bible says multitudes of people, thousands upon thousands of people are taking a 20- to 30-mile trip into the desert to hear John preach. He was Mr. Popularity. He was baptizing so many people his arms are getting too tired to even pull them out of the water. He was incredibly popular, but he said, "I am nothing compared to the greatness of the one I am preparing you for."

John then explained why Jesus the coming king was so much better. "I baptize with water but he will baptize with the Holy Spirit." In other words, "All I can do is get you wet on the outside. The king who is coming can clean you up on the inside. When he comes he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and he will make you clean from the inside out. He will change your heart and your life."

John the Baptist was talking about the renewal of the Holy Spirit that happens at the moment of salvation when we come to Christ.

...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior... Titus 3:5-6 (ESV)

John could only call people to repent of their sin. Only Jesus, would be able to forgive their sin and give them a new heart that loves God more than sin.

John's message summarized the heart of the gospel. There is a new king. His name is Jesus. He brings a new kingdom. He is the long-awaited Messiah who is God. He brings forgiveness and the Holy Spirit who will make you a new person from the inside out.

### Applications:

Let me give you a few quick applications:

1. **Before we can embrace the truth of Jesus, we need to see the truth of our sin.** John the Baptist's preaching of repentance of sin and conviction of sin was essential for people to hear the good news of Jesus. Nothing has changed. If we don't see ourselves as great sinners, we won't see our need for our great savior. When we tell people about Jesus, we always begin with what the Bible says about sin before we begin with what the Bible says about the good new of Jesus. In Matthew 5, the Bible says that if we have lusted in our hearts, we have committed adultery in our hearts. The Bible tells us if we have hated people in our hearts, we have murdered in our hearts. We are murderers. It is when we see ourselves as God sees us, as murdering adulterers, that we can finally see our need for Jesus.
2. **Jesus is the only one that can change a life.** I love how John openly admits that all he can do for people is get them wet, give them a bath. Jesus is the only one who can change your life. When we confess our sin to Jesus and ask him to be our savior we are not just legally forgiven by God but the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and makes us into different people. We become new people with different desires. The character of Christ starts to come out of us. We are not perfect people but we are forgiven people and



changed people from the inside out. Today, I don't know your sin management strategy. You can try all you want to manage sin on your own but you will lose every time. The only way to change is to come to Jesus and let him change you from the inside out when you trust in him and his Holy Spirit comes into your life.

3. **Life isn't about me. It about pointing people to Jesus.** I love that John didn't say it once but he said it all the time as people streamed into the wilderness to hear him, that his job was to simply prepare people for Jesus and point people to Jesus. Nothing has changed That is our job as well. We are not even worthy to untie Jesus' sandals. We are nothing. He is everything. The job of our lives is to point people to him. All we can do is get people wet. Jesus changes their hearts and lives. Only Jesus can change people from the inside out.



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