

Meet Jesus: As he dials your number

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[0 : 00] So we're in Mark's Gospel again, the beginning of Mark's Gospel, and that's on page 236.

I'll read from verse 16. We pick it up from last week, you remember last week we were looking at the good news of Jesus Christ breaking into this world with a message of salvation.

You remember chapter 1, verse 1, look at that, you could put it on your fridge, couldn't you, that verse, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And we'll be looking at that unfolding today. So we'll read from verse 16. Passing alongside the sea of Galilee, he, that is Jesus, saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net into the sea. And they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, follow me and I will make you become fishes of men. And immediately they left their nets and followed him. It's a frequent word, isn't it, in Mark's Gospel? Immediately, it's sort of racing along. Verse 19. And going on a little farther, he saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, who were in their boat mending their nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the high servants and followed him. And they went into Capernaum. And immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, what have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. But Jesus rebuked him, saying, be silent and come out of him. And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned him among themselves, saying, what is this, a new teaching and with authority? He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee. And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever. And immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. And the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door.

And he healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place. And there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him. And they found him and said to him, everyone is looking for you. And he said to them, let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came.

And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. So we've started this series, haven't we? Meet Jesus. And today's talk is as he dials your number.

[3 : 23] And I'd just like to get us into the feeling that Jesus is communicating to us through his word. It's the way that he meets us. So he bursts into history, doesn't he, Jesus? And he's fulfilling predictions written about himself over 400 years previously. Words which were written on scrolls.

You know, they've probably been hanging around in synagogues waiting. Well, they're all coming to life now, verses 2 and 3. Do you remember? And Mark's saying, this is it. Let's have your attention. And verse 15. Do you remember verse 15, the end of last week? We popped a microphone into the first century and heard words, words that all of God's revelation had been heralding.

Just look there, what Jesus says in verse 15. Do you see that? The time is fulfilled, says Jesus. And the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.

And I mentioned last week that verse 15, when Jesus is commanding people to repent, it's not an invitation into an intellectual discussion. Jesus is saying to his creation, it's a command, he's saying repent and believe. And as we look at our lives, friends, as we live on this same creation that Jesus walked upon, we need to ask who's in the driving seat, you know, of our lives. Someone is.

Is it Jesus? You say, well, hang on a minute, Jesus. Your teaching is commendable. You know, I send the wanes to Sunday school. That's all well and good. But what gives you the right to tell me how to run my life? And this is what our passage today is addressing. And we've got two points. The first one is Capernaum Pursues Miracles. You remember, that's where Jesus is. So it's first port of call, and we join him in the synagogue. And he's been astonishing, those inside, hasn't he, with his teaching. You remember, there was that exorcism. And I guess someone here, they'll say, well, it wasn't actually an exorcism. This guy, he probably had a mental illness. You might be thinking those sorts of things. I had a mature Christian friend down south. He was a retired teacher of classical languages at a boarding school.

[6 : 03] And I used to study the Bible with him. And one evening, we were doing a Bible study. And he told me that he went into a boy's dorm. And there was two boys. And they were both speaking in voices other than their own. And my friend was shocked by it. But at the same time, he didn't actually know what to do. He'd never come across such a thing in his life before. So he said to them, snap out of it. I'll see you downstairs in five minutes in my study. So he met these two lads.

And one thing led to another. And a few weeks later, there was what, in effect, was an exorcism. And my friend said his biggest fear for years was that the press would somehow get hold of this.

But it really happened. I had a friend called Phil Mellor. And I used to race motorcycles with him. And one day in his caravan, he was telling me that he went along to see what a seance was like.

And it was the most petrifying thing that he's ever been involved with. He said plates were being thrown off the wall. There was apparently some plates on the wall. That was Phil Mellor, my friend, Phil Mellor.

And we have to think, don't we? We have to see this passage here and see that there is a spiritual realm. The Bible insists, friends, that there's more out there than what we can see and what we can touch.

[7 : 40] There's more out there than what we can take in through our senses. What does Paul say? Do you remember Paul in Ephesians? He talks about the spiritual realm, doesn't he? Listen to this.

He says, For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

And these Jews in the synagogue, they know, don't they? They know what their eyes are taking in. It was a reversal. Think about this. It was a reversal of Genesis chapter 3.

This Jew, Jesus, had given them a real sense that they were on the winning side. Mark chapter 1, you and me, we know, don't we, verse 1, who Jesus is.

But they don't know yet. What a shock to them. This is spectacular, isn't it? When Jesus is doing this exorcism, this convulsing, he's crying out in a loud voice.

[8 : 43] This is Old Testament promises in multi-sensory fulfilment. Jesus had said, The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand.

And this is it working out. And the unclean spirit convulsing him and crying out, verse 26, with a loud voice, came out of him. And all the flashbulbs go off.

And the message about this in the first century is spreading around like wildfire throughout Galilee. Little photos of this scene, of the exorcism on fridges all around Galilee, with the words of verse 27 printed underneath.

He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. It's an assault, isn't it, friends, on the realm of evil. And everyone's getting to know about Jesus.

Look at verse 28. It's the top news story. And at once, his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee. And then it's Simon Peter's mother-in-law.

[9 : 47] Do you remember the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law? It's not a spirit, is it, this time, but a fever. And it leaves the verse 31 just the same. Look there. It's so matter-of-fact.

And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. And so, just as you'd expect, really, everyone who's affected by Genesis chapter 3 are converging in on Jesus.

It's like he stirred a hornet's nest. You know those scenes on television when there's been a famine in Africa, and people are travelling miles and miles, and they're coming through the dust to a feeding centre.

Well, it's something like that. Perhaps today there'd be helicopters above. There'd be trucks with satellite dishes on the top. Film crews. Catering trailers. This is a major event.

Verse 33. Look at verse 33. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. Well, we, you and me, we know who he is.

[10 : 51] Chapter 1, verse 1. But the crowds don't yet know, do they? And the demons, they also know who's confronting them. But Jesus didn't want the warped message of the demons.

Do you see there in verse 34? And he healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons. And look, he would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him.

And then verse 35. It's such a contrast. Look with me at verse 35. It's the next morning. Do you see verse 35?

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place. And there he prayed. Do you see that silence?

The media village are fast asleep at this time in the morning. The helicopter rotor blades are drooping down. Streets that were full of chaos and dust are now quiet and empty.

[11 : 53] It's still dark as Capernaum sleeps. Still dark as Jesus walks away to a desolate place to pray to his father.

Yes, verse 28. His fame had spread everywhere. Verse 33. The whole city were converging in at his door. Adulation. But this wasn't the future that Jesus knew.

Not what Isaiah had told him. Do you remember Isaiah chapter 53? He was what? What was he in Isaiah chapter 53? What was he?

Was he the new kid on the block? No. He wasn't, was he? He was despised and rejected. Rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not. Says Isaiah, looking forward over 700 years. And so there's a crisis, isn't there?

[12 : 54] Do you see? Will it be fame? Or will it be as it is written? Only the stars look on and see the sun as he speaks to the father.

Think about this. Later on, there was another desolate place, wasn't there? When he was praying to his father. It was Gethsemane. He's given Galilee a partial glimpse of his power.

And they want it, don't they? They want victory. It's only natural. They want victory over Genesis chapter 3. They want victory over illness. They want victory ultimately over death.

Power over evil. We all want that. And they want it now. They want Jesus. Genesis chapter 3. It's the way we are, isn't it, friends?

You and me. We want the immediate. We have a tendency to reach out like Eve for sort of immediate temporal satisfaction. And ignore the consequences.

[13 : 52] Block them out. Am I right? That's what sin is. Eve reached for the fruit. And we reach, don't we? We reach for what we think will satisfy us. But only Jesus can give us what it is to be human, which is a relationship with him.

Everything else is small and tenuous, like chasing after the wind. And like us, the people back then of Galilee, well, they live in a Genesis chapter 3 world.

And Jesus has walked into it and he's sort of displaying victory. He's placarding it in front of their eyes. And they want it, don't they? They want to smash and grab.

They sense that they're onto something. But this is just the tip of the iceberg of the new creation. And listen, it can't, are you following this?

It can't be severed from the hole. And so he went and he prayed, didn't he? Says Mark. Will it be the immediate priorities of this world?

[14 : 59] Or will it be the priorities? Will it be the priorities of the kingdom of God? Who sets the agenda? I wonder, friends, if ever in your life you've had such a dilemma.

You know, someone else's agenda has sort of slowly started to take things over. You know, perhaps it's not a bad thing, but it's against your better judgment.

But it's just sort of developed. And rather than cause offence, rather than becoming unpopular, you've sort of gone with the flow. And if Jesus, think about this, if Jesus were to capitulate here, what would we have?

We'd probably have a ten-year healing ministry, wouldn't we? Do you think? An airport would be built with 20 terminals, converting Boeing 747s, bringing in the sick, a massive industrial hangar with patients lined up, all shuffling along, people pushing beds, and Jesus there at the end of the queue, healing.

And the world, as Jesus, performing to its tune. Listen, listen to this. Patching up this creation, rather than bringing in the new creation.

[16 : 19] And as he prays there, the world's closing in on him again. It won't let him go. Just look there at verses 36 and 37. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him.

Do you see this? They're after him. Verse 37. And they found him and said to him, everyone is looking for you. Do you see? After Jesus, aren't they?

Everyone is looking for you. They're demanding him. Simon's like a frantic tour manager, isn't he? You know, the stadium's full, the crowds are waiting.

Where is he? Where is he? They're starting the slow hand clap, but the star's nowhere to be seen. And Simon brings Jesus. And Simon brings Jesus the news, doesn't he, from the venue.

Everyone's looking for you. Do the democratic thing, Jesus. Ride the wave. That's what they want, isn't it? But verse 38. Look at verse 38.

[17 : 16] Jesus is resolved to proclaim the kingdom of God, rather than follow the demands of the crowd. You see, think about Simon Peter's mother-in-law.

Well, she might have lived, I don't know, she might have lived another 30 or 40 years. She might have lived into her old age, but she'd still die. She still died, didn't she? All the money that goes into the NHS.

We still die at the end of the day. And so this world, think about it, needs God's word, doesn't it? More than it needs is miracles. And you, my friend, need that same word.

So that was our first point. Capernaum pursues miracles. And we move now to our final brief point. Jesus proclaims his kingdom.

Have a look with me there at verse 38. Do you remember verse 38? And he said to them, Let us go to the next towns that I may preach there also, for that is why I came.

[18 : 21] And incidentally, that's the first of three missionary statements in Mark's Gospel. The second is chapter 2, verse 17. And then there's chapter 10, verse 45.

And look at verse 39. And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. So Jesus is preaching again, isn't he? I would have thought the logic of that is quite simple.

Think about this. His word, listen, his word is directed to the root cause of our problem, isn't it? You see? And not its symptoms. So let's go back to this scene and have a look at a couple of reactions to his word in our final point.

Follow me and I will make you fishers of men, he says, doesn't he, to these fishermen. And as quickly as light broke into darkness, they leave their nets, don't they, and follow him.

Leaving is a theme in Mark. We left everything to follow you, chapter 10, verse 28. And friends, we need to leave, don't we, in order to follow. Am I right?

[19 : 23] Think about this. You're not an apostle, but perhaps you've been given a gift. And there's sort of a danger of that gift being buried.

Just listen to this in Sinclair's book. Sinclair says, Many more Christians ought to be looking their saviour in their face and tell him, Here I am, send me. We have too few who are willing to put into practice their profession to leave all for the sake of Christ.

There is a great need in the church and in the world. We cannot afford to turn a blind eye to it. Incidentally, it's only three pounds. I think there's just one on the bookstore. So whether it's a few more hours a week serving Jesus or it's a paid full-time calling, we all leave things to serve.

And think of poor Zebedee in the boat. Do you remember Zebedee in the boat? God smacked, he would be standing there. He's got a lot of explaining to do, hasn't he? When he goes home and he meets Mrs. Zebedee in the evening.

How do you explain that one away? And we finish with the exorcism. And it's an announcement of God's kingdom. It's let my people go in the spiritual, isn't it?

[20 : 35] Look there at verse 27. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.

There's something new. And there's something new supernatural, isn't there, about Jesus' teaching. And did you notice, did you notice the astute observation there in verse 27?

Just look down again, verse 27. Just see it. It's towards the end of verse 27. He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. Not, he prayed to God, and the unclean spirits came out.

Not like Elijah praying on Mount Carmel, 1 Kings chapter 18. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God.

No, listen. Jesus' words carry their own authority. And this is what blows the minds of these Jews here. He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.

[21 : 36] Listen to this. This is a new Bible dictionary. It's talking about God's word. It says, Yahweh's word is an extension of the divine personality, invested with divine authority.

Once uttered, it cannot return unfulfilled. I'll just read you a couple of verses from Isaiah chapter 55.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. And in that Capernaum synagogue, the realm of Satan is being vanquished, isn't it?

And Jesus is giving us a glimpse, friends, of what one day will be universal in the new creation. And in days like our own, well, this is indeed good news, isn't it?

[22 : 45] Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we're just amazed at you sending your Son, Jesus Christ, into this world, and his authority and his power in all that's wrong with this world.

And we pray, Father, that you dwell in us richly through that same word. And our prayer is the hymn that we were singing earlier. May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day, by his love and power controlling all I do and say.

So I lift these things to you, Father. We pray that we glorify you in our lives. We'd be an outpouring of your Spirit and of your Word into this world. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God be with us now and forevermore.

Amen.