

Announcing the King - Part 1

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[0 : 00] Well folks, good afternoon and welcome to the Lunchtime Bible Talk. A particular welcome if you're joining us for the first time today. Please don't rush away, there's a sandwich lunch that's served at the Black there for three pounds.

Tea, coffee, a biscuit, packet of crisps, please do make use of that. And the time at the end for a bit of fellowship together. We're immediately going to turn on the scriptures today.

And our scripture reading comes from Mark chapter 1, which you will find in page 836 of the Church Bible.

Mark chapter 1, and we shall read the first 15 verses together. Let us hear then the word of God. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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 path straight.

[1 : 14] 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.

Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, After me comes one who is mightier than I, the straps 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. In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening 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.

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

[2 : 30] Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe in the gospel. Amen. And may God add his blessing to this, the reading of his word. Well, I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me again to Mark chapter 1, which you'll find on page 836.

And as you do so, a word of prayer. Make the book live to us, O Lord. Show us yourself within thy word. Show us ourselves, and show us our Savior.

And make the book live to us, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, friends, announcements.

Announcements are made every day in the world, on the national stage, and on the international stage.

We may find these announcements informative and interesting, but most of the announcements that are made don't have any real direct bearing on our lives personally, nor as we live our lives day to day in Glasgow.

[3 : 38] Some announcements from the past year that I think fall into this category. Apple computers announced their new operating system, OX10.11, otherwise known as Irene.

Ah, come on. El Capitan. I thought all you technoboths would know that. Leonardo DiCaprio, finally after six nominations, wins an Oscar for Best Actor.

Rangers win the Scottish Championship, and are now back in the Premier League. Now, we may have some emotional response to these things, but there are other announcements that are deeply personal, that have a tremendous effect on us emotionally.

She said, Yes. It's a boy. Your grandfather is dead. Now, I'm sure there have been announcements like these in each of our lives that are deeply personal, deeply emotional, and have affected and changed our lives forever.

Over these next two weeks, we will be considering these opening verses of the Gospel of Mark. These verses are all about an announcement. The King has come.

[4 : 51] And I'm absolutely convinced that there has never been an announcement made that has as far-reaching implications for every human being on the planet as the announcement that we have here in these opening verses of Mark.

This announcement demands a response from every human being. And the response that we have will have implications on our lives, not just our lives while we're here on planet Earth, but will have implications for all eternity.

We will look at these first 15 verses of Mark over the next two weeks. But under our consideration today are the first eight verses. So firstly, we have in verse 1, Mark announces the King.

Mark announces the King. In this verse, Mark gives us a summing up of what his book is all about. The beginning of the Gospel, or the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Usually when you read a book or watch a film, it usually takes a bit of time to work out what the plot is and who the main characters are. But no, not here with Mark. Mark wastes no time in getting to the main character and the main message of his book.

[6 : 00] And this wasting no time is a key feature of Mark. His Gospel is the shortest of the four Gospels. It's action-packed. It's fast-moving. And the word immediately, or the phrase, or at once, is used over 40 times.

Well, what does Mark tell us in verse 1? Well, he tells us it's the beginning of the Gospel. And what that word Gospel means is good news. And friends, we need to be reminded of that, don't we?

Whether you've been Christians for years, or whether you're not yet a Christian and you're investigating the Christian message, we need to be reminded that Christianity is good news. It's not good advice, like you would maybe get from self-help books that you could buy.

It's not good rules. Thank goodness it's not good rules, because I can't keep all the rules as it is. It's not good advice. It's not good rules. It's good news. And what is this good news?

Well, it's good news about a person, Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. Wow. It's a staggering claim. It's a staggering opening to his book.

[7 : 08] For what Mark is saying here, there's none other than God himself has visited our planet in the person of his Son, Jesus, who is the Christ, the Messiah, the promised King. And that, Mark says, is good news.

And it is good news. Religion, friends, religion is all about man seeking to reach God, to find God, to please God, all by his own efforts. Religion is all about man reaching up to God.

Whereas the gospel, the gospel is about God reaching down and coming to this earth, coming into the human situation in the person of his Son. The good news is all about Jesus.

For in him, God has taken the initiative. God has broken into the human situation in the person of his Son. And friends, we need to be absolutely clear about that.

When Mark writes the gospel of Jesus Christ, he does not mean the gospel that Jesus preached. No, it's Jesus Christ himself who is the good news.

[8 : 11] It's not something that Jesus taught, but something that Jesus did. Someone famously said this, Jesus came not to preach the good news, but in order that there might be good news to preach.

Jesus is the good news. And friends, Mark was absolutely convinced of what he wrote in verse 1. These words can be so familiar to us that we hardly even engage with them.

But for Mark, for Mark to write these words down and distribute them publicly was for him to risk the very real possibility of having his head chopped off.

The context into which Mark was writing was into a world that was ruled by Rome and the Roman Emperor. The Roman Emperor was regarded as king and God. So for Mark to write verse 1 was him saying, no, Jesus is the king.

And in so doing, putting his own life at risk. And that's still the same today, friends. You can be into all the religion and spirituality that you want and no one will ever bat an eyelid.

[9 : 18] But as soon as you name and proclaim Jesus is king and start living your life like it, then you will face opposition. And you will begin to make enemies.

The world doesn't like to play second fiddle to anyone. And especially not to Jesus. And friends, that opposition will rise in some of the most unexpected places.

Even from within the so-called Christian church. Mark was totally sold out in the truth of verse 1 that the good news of Jesus Christ was so good and so important that people needed to know about it. And he was prepared to risk his own life so that they could know about it. But Mark goes on to say, don't think this appearing of Jesus Christ was unexpected. That it just came out of the blue. No, because it hasn't. It was promised in the Old Testament and prepared for down the generations in history. So after Mark announcing the king, we have in verses 2 and 3, the Old Testament announces God's king.

[10:22] The Old Testament announces God's king. I suppose after reading verse 1, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we would maybe expect Mark to take us to Bethlehem and to the place of Jesus' birth.

But no, Mark takes us back. Back to the pages and the prophecies of the Old Testament. We could put verse 1 and the beginning of verse 2 together and read them like this.

The beginning of the gospel as it is written in the prophets. You see, friends, Jesus Christ didn't appear on the world stage like an unwanted baby left in the doorstep of an orphanage.

No, Jesus' appearing wasn't unexpected. Mark is saying that the origins of the gospel, the good news of Jesus, must be traced back to God's first dealings with his people.

And now, friends, what that means is this. The whole Bible, the whole Bible, not just the New Testament, bears witness to Jesus Christ. The history of the Bible is his story.

[11:27] From Genesis to Revelation and throughout, the subject matter is one, Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, we might say Jesus Christ is predicted, prophesied, prepared for.

In the Gospels, Jesus Christ is presented. In the book of Acts, Jesus Christ is preached. In the epistles, Jesus Christ is expounded.

And in Revelation, Jesus Christ is unveiled in his glory as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. So, to whatever part of the Scriptures we turn, it is always Christ that is the subject matter.

And here, in verse 2 and 3, brings together prophecies from Malachi chapter 3 and Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3. These prophets, hundreds of years earlier, looked forward to a day when God was going to do something new.

And this was all in God's plan. Prepare the way of the Lord. God is doing something new. And this time, it's not just another prophet who will come. No, this time, it will be none other than God himself who is coming into the world.

[12:38] God is coming in human form in the person of Jesus Christ. God's final word to humanity. And Mark's main emphasis here, I suppose, is to show that the Gospel is not an emergency measure.

It's not a desperate, last-minute attempt by God to retrieve something from a broken world. No, but a clear, decisive, well-prepared plan of action to deal with sin and to destroy the works of the devil. And before the king comes, well, a messenger will be sent to prepare the way. A voice crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord and make his path straight.

And so, verse 4, John appeared. So we have thirdly and finally for today, verses 4 to 8, John the Baptist announces the king. Mark announces the king.

The Old Testament announces the king. And now in verses 4 to 8, John the Baptist announces the king. The king is coming into the world and this would need prepared for.

[13:44] And this is always the case with royalty, isn't it? If any of the royal family are visiting anywhere in Great Britain, then that place needs to be prepared for their visit. I remember about 30 odd years ago when I was just a wee boy, Prince Charles came to the housing scheme that I was born in.

A place in the north of Glasgow, a place called Black Hill. And we had a new community centre and Prince Charles was coming to officially open this new community centre.

And my housing scheme certainly needed preparing for his visit. because the walls of the community centre that had just been built that Prince Charles was about to open were all covered in abusive graffiti about Prince Charles.

And so the night and the morning before he came there was a team of painters frantically painting over the graffiti to prepare for Charles coming. That's the old joke, isn't it? The royal family think that Britain smells of paint because there's always painters going ahead of them to prepare the way.

The rightful king, the only king, God himself was coming into the world and this would need preparing for. But God doesn't send a painter to prepare the way.

[14 : 58] He sends a preacher. He always sends a preacher. His messenger, the voice crying in the wilderness. So John comes and he's not a very attractive looking person.

Verse 6. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waists. And he ate locusts and wild honey. This guy makes Tom Gregg look like a very fashionable dresser. He's certainly not the type of person you would be inviting home for Sunday lunch. You would tell the children to stay away from this fellow or maybe you would threaten the children with this fellow if they didn't behave themselves.

Now Mark highlights John's dress. Why? Well to show that he was definitely of the line of the Old Testament prophets. prophets. And in particular in the mold of the Old Testament prophet Elijah. As in 2 Kings chapter 1 verse 8 we have this description of Elijah. He wore a garment of hair with a belt of leather around his waist.

[15 : 58] And he said it is Elijah the Tishpate. He wasn't a very attractive looking person. And this his message was not too attractive either. John appeared baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

At the heart of John's message was this. You need to get right with God. You need to repent. And that means you need a change of heart.

A change of mind. A change of direction. You need to turn from your sin. You need to recognize that you are guilty before God. And you need to change.

John preached to them that they were under God's judgment. And only by turning back to the Lord and his ways would they be ready when the long promised Messiah came.

The starting point for John's message was repentance and forgiveness. What a contrast with many so-called Christian ministries who proclaim this sort of a message.

[17 : 05] Come to Jesus fulfill your potential. Come to Jesus have wealth health and prosperity. Come to Jesus and be healed of all your ills and troubles.

Friends the starting point of John's message was repentance and forgiveness. At the heart of any true Christian ministry must be the call to get right with God by turning away from sins and to turning to God through Jesus Christ with no reliance on human worth or effort seeking his forgiveness. Is this the message at the heart of the pulpit in the churches that you belong to? If it's not it's not the Christian gospel that is being preached but a softer easier way which is no way at all and no gospel at all.

Is this the message that gets preached from the pulpit of the church that you belong to? Will you give thanks then for those who preach it and you pray that they continue to preach it that they stay true to the gospel message?

Because it requires courage to proclaim the true gospel. Well how would the people respond to this unattractive person with this unattractive message?

[18 : 33] Verse 5 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.

There was what we would call a revival people were flocking to John and having heard him preached and having been convicted by what he preached they were baptized confessing their sins publicly demonstrating that they were really wanting to do business with God.

Now baptism wasn't new it was common practice in Judaism but it was usually reserved for Gentiles non-Jews who wished to identify with God's people. It was usually the non-Jews the Gentiles who were baptized.

So therefore friends these Jews undergoing baptism was a big deal. What they were really saying was this that we are as far away from God as the Gentiles and they were expressing their desire to live a new life of repentance in response to God's forgiveness.

And friends John totally understood that his role was a preparatory role that he was the forerunner. I suppose a wee bit like if you've ever been to a concert or any event usually there's a warm-up act comes on before the main event to get the crowd ready for the main event.

[19 : 56] John gets his role. He knew that he was the warm-up act so to speak getting folks ready for the main event. His concern in verse 7 and 8 was to point away from himself and to the coming Messiah.

And friends there is a great lesson here for all who are involved with the responsibility of teaching God's word. And whatever shape or form that teaching takes place whether it's from the pulpit or in small groups of various kinds we need to be like John the Baptist.

We need to be ourselves but don't preach ourselves. We need to prepare the way, declare the way, and then get out the way. John was not in any way absorbed with his own success as a preacher, as many are.

No, his main concern was to point the people away from himself and to the coming Messiah. Hear what he says in John chapter 3 verse 30. Speaking about the Lord Jesus, he said, he must become greater and I must become less.

Great temptation for preachers, myself included, to say, yeah, I'm happy for him to become greater as long as I become greater too. But that can never be so. John's main concern was to point people away from himself and to the coming Messiah.

[21 : 17] Verse 7 and 8. And he preached saying, after me comes he who is mightier than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

John explained to the people the significance of the Messiah's coming. He would be mightier than John, so much greater than John, that John doesn't even see himself as worthy to do even the most menial task of untying his sandals.

But also mightier too in terms of ministry. Verse 8, I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. And what John is saying here is this, what I have done is symbolic and is preparatory, but what he will do will be the reality.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. He won't just dip you under the water and get you wet. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. In other words, he will immerse you in the very presence of God. He will bring God himself into your life. I can't do anything like that, but the one who is coming after me, he can and he will.

[22 : 33] In the past, the Holy Spirit had been reserved mostly for kings and prophets, but now, says John, the new age was dawning. The new age was dawning that God had promised through the prophet Joel and many other prophets, when God would pour out his spirit in all flesh, bringing salvation.

But this day when the spirit was poured out bringing salvation, we're also to announce the day of the coming judgment of God. As Joel says, God will pour out his spirit before the great and awesome day of the Lord.

John was proclaiming the coming days of salvation and the coming days of judgment. In closing today, friends, John's message was simple, it was straight, and it was uncompromising.

Repent, turn around, let Jesus Christ bring God himself into your life. Good news?

Well, that depends on how you respond. Let us pray together. We indeed give you great thanks, Father, for this amazing announcement, the coming of your Son into the world.

[24 : 00] God, in order that he might bring God into our lives. We pray that you would take heed to the Baptist words.

We pray that you would help us to turn around and turn from our sin and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and know the forgiveness that he alone brings. And as we part, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all and those whom we love, both now and forevermore.

Amen.