

Meet Jesus: As he bursts onto the scene

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[0 : 00] Please sit down as we lift things to the Lord in prayer. Dear Heavenly Father, we first of all think of global situations.

We think of so many areas of conflict in this world just now. Now, every day it seems that we're bombarded by news of bloodshed and violence.

And there's such potential, Father, for escalation. And in particular we worry about the new government in Palestine and their attitude towards Jerusalem.

We worry about the nuclear ambitions of Iran. And of course, Father, we do long for peace. And so we ask for wisdom and restraint.

We pray that political leaders would be guided by the priorities of love and respect for humankind. And yet, Father, at the same time we turn to your word and you give us the grand interpretation of these hostilities of nations rising against nations, of the worship of false gods.

[1 : 25] And we know that until your son returns, we live in a world warped and distorted by its rebellion against you. We experience this in our own city.

Violence, hatred, murder. And these global confrontations are an amplification of what we already encounter each week over here.

And, Father, we know our own hearts are far from perfect. And so we thank you for forgiving our sin through your son, Jesus Christ, for revealing to us the way in which we ought to live in your world, and for encouraging us to seek your hand through prayer.

And so, Father, we ask for an outpouring of your spirit in these foreboding times, that people would be drawn to your son, that the gospel message would break through.

And we pray for churches meeting in areas of conflict. We pray for the churches in Iraq in particular. A number were bombed last Sunday. We lift our brothers and sisters to you, praying that you'd hold them together and use them for your glory.

[2 : 43] We also pray for ourselves, Father, that you'd prompt us to be sensitive to the needs of the wider church, and that we'd express our unity through prayer.

We look ahead to that great meeting that the Apostle John glimpsed. People of every tongue and nation joined together in worship. And we ask that we'd work out that international unity in our own personal prayer lives.

And we move on now, Father, to think of the family of Gwynfy Jones, a retired minister who died after he was knocked down by a taxi last Wednesday, as he crossed the road to attend a prayer meeting at Sandeford Henderson Church.

We thank you for his life, Father, and all that you have accomplished through his faithful ministry. And we pray that in many ways, even through his tragic death, glory would be given to you.

We lift his wife and family into your arms, your abounding love and faithfulness. And we ask that you'd intimately indwell this family during their time of grief and mourning, and that they'd be assured of Gwynfy's peace and delight at finally being lifted into your very presence.

[4 : 08] And for those of us, Father, amidst us just now, feeling the tearing away of bereavement, we also ask for comfort, that you'd give us hope amidst such natural despair and mourning.

We move now to think of particular personal situations, things that might be weighing heavily just now upon us.

Perhaps situations at work, maybe difficult decisions that need to be made, or have been made just recently. Perhaps there's a recollection of a mistake that's persistently throwing us off balance just now.

We pray that through your word, Father, our lives would be increasingly framed by the big picture of you drawing a people to yourself, and that we'd be able to deal with these things in the context of your eternal priorities.

We ask that you'd answer the pledge of your Son in these situations, come unto me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. And that's our prayer, Father, we lift it to you.

[5 : 21] And so, Father, we lift all our prayers to you, and we ask that you'd accompany us now through your Spirit as we look at your word, and we lift all these prayers to you in your Son's name, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Well, we're beginning a new series of four talks from the beginning of Mark's Gospel, and you might like to turn Mark's Gospel up in your Bibles.

It's on page 836, and we're going to be looking at Mark chapter 1 from verses 1 to 15. So I'll read them to us.

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. John appeared, baptising 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 baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

[6 : 33] Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 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 baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit. In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised 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 for forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals and the angels were ministering to him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.

[7 : 37] Well Mark hits the road running, doesn't he? There's no scenes from the maternity ward in Mark's gospel. There's, well I guess he's excluded himself, hasn't he, from a lucrative royalties contract, you know, with a Christmas card manufacturer.

There's no birth scenes, no shepherds, no wise men, no cattle are lowing. And we ask, we say to Mark, what have you done with all that material?

Mark, where is it all? Well, it's on the cutting room floor, he says. Chopped it all out. And instead we've got verse one. And verse one, friends, it's jam-packed with information.

It lets us, the readers, in on what everyone else will be struggling to understand through Mark's gospel. When we read verse one, we're sort of suddenly in the know.

You and me, we like being in the know, don't we? We're suddenly in the know. So as we look on with enlightened minds at Mark's gospel as things unfold, it's like, I suppose it's like watching your daughter unfold a present.

[8 : 51] You know more than she does. And so as she unfolds it, you're filled with anticipation and a sense of delight as you watch her open it.

And this is a dynamic of Mark's gospel. So let's look at that verse one. Just look there at verse one. The beginning of the gospel of who? Jesus Christ.

And that is Jesus Christ. He's the long-anticipated, the Hebrew word is Messiah from the Old Testament. He's the anticipated saviour and king.

It takes Peter up until chapter eight, verse 29, to work that one out. And we sort of ride with him along the way, knowing the verdict but unable to tell him.

Jesus calms the storm. Do you remember? And all the disciples are terrified. And they say, who is this? And we want to shout down, it's the Messiah, it's Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[9 : 50] And then verse one. Just look there at the end of verse one. We've got that, haven't we? The Son of God. Mark gives this, the verdict of his whole gospel up front.

It is really good to be in the know, isn't it? To have secret information. I guess it's like that in many work situations. You like sensitive information. You can get a competitive advantage.

We all like to have information, don't we? Secret information. Yet it takes the rest of the gospel until someone else finds the pulse of the second person of the Godhead in their very midst.

Apart from the demons, that is. They know who he is. And what a shock to us all in chapter 15 and verse 39. It's a Roman centurion. He's the one who works it all out.

Just imagine the scene there, the crucifixion. A Roman centurion, he's dignified, he'll have his military uniform on. He stands there having overseen the crucifixion.

[10 : 55] He exudes, doesn't he, power and dignity of the Roman Empire. It's quite the opposite to Jesus. He's in the Roman Empire, isn't he, a Gentile, and Jesus is a Jew.

He exudes power. Jesus is impaled on the cross, humiliated. He's alive. Jesus is dead. He's just killed him. But he knows that the man, listen, he knows the man in front of him has turned the tables.

And this Roman centurion, he has the verdict. He has the verdict. Listen, he's not got the verdict of sight. Chapter 15, verse 39. His verdict clashes with what his eyes are taking in.

He says, surely this man was the son of God. It's like Mark says, here it is, reader, verse 1, I'm crediting your account with all of this as we set out.

Do you see? Are you with me with the dynamic of it? And as we explore Mark's gospel, we watch people encountering Jesus and bringing in their verdicts. And the unwritten question, friend, is what's your verdict?

[12 : 08] What do you make of this Jesus Christ? And so Mark says, here's the verdict, verse 1, now pull up a seat and sit with me and follow Jesus as everyone grapples with who he is, why he came and what it means to follow him.

Willie often mentions newspapers, doesn't he? Have you noticed that? Last week, he said that he reads two newspapers on a Saturday, the Daily Telegraph and the Guardian. Well, Mark's gospel is more like the Daily Express.

It's faster moving and it's for a wider readership. And just imagine the first century. Just imagine the first century. You've heard accounts of this man Jesus and then suddenly Mark's gospel arrives in town.

I think we've lost something of the shock of it, really. Mark's claiming nothing less than God visited his creation, listen, in time, space, history.

Check the coins, friends, in your pocket or in your purse. Am I right? Got the date on, haven't they? The Roman Empire reset the dating system.

[13 : 18] It's 2006, the coins are in your pocket. We mustn't let our familiarity drain the impact of this. Our worldly thinking, you know, it ought to be staggering around, shell-shocked as we realise the magnitude of what happened back then in the first century.

And for the rest of this talk, I'd like us to capture with astonishment the news that God should visit his planet and that he should utter to us his creation those words.

Do you remember those words there? In verse 15, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.

Think about it this way. God has climbed into his creation to meet us. That's what he's done. And Mark's aim is to transport that truth into our thinking to rouse us from our slumber.

Here's a here's a preschool team down here. It's from the Sunday Telegraph. And it's from a world that hasn't understood verse 15. It's about the kingdom of self rather than the kingdom of God in verse 15.

[14 : 35] Just listen to this. The heading on it is how to take it with you into the afterlife and it's talking about money. I hereby leave all my worldly wealth to myself.

A new form of will being drawn up in America allows people planning to be cryogenically suspended after death to nominate themselves as their beneficiaries. Known as personal revival trusts they are proving popular with the growing number of super rich Americans opting to have their bodies deep frozen in the hope that the technology will one day exist to revive them.

Many hope high interest rates on their fortunes will mean that they return to life even richer than when they left it. Well that's a world isn't it that rejects God.

If you think about it cryogenic suspension if it was 100% successful think about this it would be eternal life on earth wouldn't it if this worked it was 100% successful but Genesis chapter 3 won't allow that.

So that was a brief introduction to Mark's gospel and a signpost towards our destination today which is verse 15. Now before verse 15 I'd like us to consider where this passage fits in God's unfolding plans and purposes and his unfolding plan of salvation.

[16 : 01] You could call this point according to plan. Now it seems to me that you and me live in the same world as Mark who wrote this gospel here.

It's the world of Genesis chapter 3 the world of death of broken relationships of pain of futility of disappointment the world of Auschwitz of terror of foreboding Middle Eastern nuclear programs murders and violence every week here in Glasgow.

Mark lived in this world and we breathe it in wherever we go am I right? That's the sort of world in which we live. We want to run don't we and jump into Genesis chapter 2 into the arms of God but there's exclusion.

Think about this we're on the wrong side and there's no way back. We look ahead ahead of us and death winks an eye we're sort of hemmed in.

We want God's presence our creator but as Adam was banished so are we. In our bones our DNA is Adam's and our own sin confirms it.

[17 : 15] Naturally we're banished from God. Yet God's reconciling love bleeps onto the radar screen. A covenant with Abraham an exodus from Egypt let my people go a kingdom a temple but like like me and you his people continually reject him and do their own thing.

And by the time Jesus is born Rome is the dominant superpower and the temple still being rebuilt and the prophets well the prophets have been silent for 400 years and it seems like things have stopped in God's unfolding plan of salvation.

It's like the clock stopped. I often wish it would stop here when I'm speaking. Mark well what does Mark say into that situation? The beginning do you see that?

Verse 1 the beginning and it's not Genesis chapter 1 not that beginning but a new beginning and verses 2 and 3 are verses that have been patiently waiting waiting to embrace the event itself faithfully waiting for Jesus.

Do you see verses 2 and 3 that prophecy there? It's like it's like you know have you been to the Falkirk wheel? It's a little like in some ways like that experience going to the Falkirk wheel.

[18 : 41] You've seen so many photographs of it and the images are sort of etched in your mind somewhere in your subconscious and your first sight you realise that's it.

That's the Falkirk wheel. You know it and there's a sort of rendezvous of confirmation in your mind. The images the photographs you've seen they embrace the sight itself and this is what's happening here.

He's the billing for Jesus isn't it? Verses 2 and 3 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet behold I send my messenger before your face you will prepare your way the voice of one crying in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord make his path straight.

Just imagine if John the Baptist had sort of made that into a poster and plastered it onto the wall of a house in the first century. Jesus could be walking along to the Jordan and see it there a sort of rendezvous between the words and the event itself.

and as Jesus walks onto the scene we pass the microphone listen to John the Baptist and what does he say there in verse 8? I have baptised you with water but he will baptise you with what?

[19 : 54] Do you see? The Holy Spirit it's of a different order this Jesus Christ says John the Baptist. And think of the logic of this friends just think of the logic of it.

We humans are naturally excluded from God's presence. Genesis chapter 3 verse 23 we're banished. You and me because of the way we live without reference to our creator.

Yet that blip on the radar screen those Old Testament promises have been transported into verse 8 and have become flesh.

And the promise is you and me can move from being banished from God to being what in verse 8 being baptised by God. Isn't that amazing?

It's a reconciliation going on do you see? And if that's not good news friends there's something about it that you've not properly understood yet. I'll just read that verse again.

[20 : 54] I have baptised you with water but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a third person of the Trinity isn't it? So verse 9 Jesus associates with us sinners he's baptised with his creation.

Don't you just sort of love somebody who's prepared to get their hands dirty who comes to sort things out for you? Jesus is in the Jordan the creator of the universe with a bunch of sinners and this strange John the Baptist.

You know it's a reversal isn't it of exclusion. Surely friend you must feel in your heart of hearts that he's the sort of God who comes after you.

Who's prepared to enter your environment and find you. Verses 10 and 11 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.

That's actually unusually it's an under translation in the ESV the NIV translation is better the NIV says that the heavens are torn open it's a word that Mark only uses twice the second time he uses it is when the curtain of the temple is torn in two from top to bottom it's a tearing word schizo is the Greek word and it's used by Luke in chapter 5 when he's trying to sew Jesus is saying if you sew a new garment a new cloth onto an old garment it'll tear and John 21 when the nets don't schizo it's a tearing word and I think Mark's trying to convey to us that this is a big event the heavens are tearing apart for God's spirit to come on Jesus it's a big it's not a small thing for Jesus to begin his ministry just listen to what Isaiah says here oh that you would rend the heavens and come down that the mountains might quake at your presence so Mark's trying to convey it's not a sliding door at

[23 : 09] Tesco's that goes swish swish this is a big event here and I think it was a dramatic rending of the heavens to demonstrate God's personal dwelling with mankind there's an interface going on and so with the sun in the Jordan haven't we we've got God's spirit descending and the father speaking the holy trinity do you see verse 11 look at verse 11 again you are my beloved son with you I am well pleased Genesis chapter 1 and what was the verdict of creation very good and now the same verdict reaches our ears as his son comes to meet us with you I am well pleased and then verses 12 and 13 and his temptation much very brief with that think of verses 12 and 13 like Genesis chapter 3 Adam failed we failed but Jesus walks through walks through towards us with a clean sheet and he leaves

Satan empty handed and we arrive at that verse 15 don't we friends do you see there the verse 15 the time is fulfilled all those prophecies all those blips on the radar screen it's here it's fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God is at hand and what's the response there repent and believe in the gospel repent says Jesus that is turn from our self-centered lives to Jesus centered lives that hymn that we sung was appropriate wasn't it Lord be my vision supreme in my heart that's a kingdom of God prayer and did you notice this isn't a philosophical debate that Jesus is inviting he doesn't want your opinions no it's a command to stop playing games with God and to believe this good news all I once held dear built my life upon do you remember that hymn all this world reveres and wars to own all I once thought gain

I have counted loss spent and worthless now compared to this knowing you Jesus knowing you there is no greater thing you're my all you're the best you're my joy my righteousness and I love you Lord and that's a proper response so here it is it seemed like the clock had stopped didn't it in God's unfolding plan of salvation it seemed like the clock had stopped and perhaps friends there might be one or two here that might be an expression of your lives in these times and then Jesus walked onto the scene didn't he he wants to walk into our lives the beginning of the good news says Mark and we saw how we can move from eternal banishment into his kingdom into God's kingdom isn't that good news shall we pray dear heavenly father we thank you for this amazing event you sending your son and then this event in the river Jordan when you come upon him in your spirit and inaugurate his work we thank you father that he was prepared to go to the cross for us to associate once again with us sinners and to take to take everything that would have excluded our fellowship with you and to take the punishment that's associated with it and we pray father that in light of this truth we live lives that are appropriate and consistent with redeemed people we pray each day you'd help us to repent help us to repent joyfully and be more like your son Jesus

Christ and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore Amen Amen and there's there is a bookstool plenty of interesting books and I'll be on the bookstool you're welcome to come and chat thank you for coming it's you're welcome that is kolejhuh what's you're here