

2. An Unrecognised King

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[0 : 00] Well, before we come to Mark chapter 3, let's bow our heads and pray. Father, as we meet together now to pray and hear your living word to us, we rejoice in the truths we've just sung.

Our song is love unknown, the great love with which you first loved us, the love which, though there was nothing worthy in any of us, adopted us as sons and daughters to the praise of your grace.

And so we come before you now, Father, with confidence, expectant that you will hear our prayer. And we ask, Lord, for your mercy on the many whom we know and love, who crowd the way of the Lord Jesus and yet seem so far from him in their hearts.

For our friends and family, our work colleagues, our neighbours. We ask, Lord, for our government and leaders, the new cabinet beginning work this morning in Westminster.

And those in Holyrood bringing forward another year of legislation. We ask, Lord, that you would give them wisdom and humble hearts and that they would govern justly before you.

[1 : 28] And finally, Father, as we prepare now to read the scriptures and open up your word, our prayer is that by your spirit, you would use this time well.

Teach us to see our Lord and King clearly and make us joyful and obedient citizens of his kingdom. For we ask it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Well, friends, turn with me back to Mark chapter 3, page 838 in the Vista's Bibles.

And this week we'll be looking at verses 7 to 20. Last week we saw the two Sabbath confrontations, which ended with the Pharisees leaving the synagogue in Capernaum to strike an unholy alliance with the Herodians, their natural enemies, to plot Jesus' death.

And so we continue today in verse 7. Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea. And a great crowd followed from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Edomir and from beyond the Jordan, from around Tyre and Sidon.

[3 : 00] When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him. For he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him.

And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, You are the Son of God. And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired. And they came to him. And he appointed twelve whom he named apostles, so that they might be with him, and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.

He appointed the twelve, Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter, James, the son of Zebedee, and John, the brother of James, to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder, Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus, and Simon the Canaanian, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, he's out of his mind.

[4 : 33] Well, very occasionally, we live through a moment in history which will always be looked back on as an instance in which the world changed.

The day the Berlin Wall came down, or the day captured airplanes were flown into the Twin Towers. Two days which left their mark on the world, one for good, one for evil.

But often, the most significant moments for humankind pass by unnoticed. It's only when we look back on them that we see their importance. One day in September 1928, a laboratory assistant would have washed up yet another contaminated Petri dish with no idea that in his hands he was holding penicillin, a drug which, before the century was out, would save millions of lives.

And our passage is another one of those moments. It doesn't look like much, but it marks a massive change in the history of God's kingdom.

Last week, we saw the decisive rejection of Jesus by the Jewish elite after a string of nasty opposition from right back in chapter 2.

[5 : 55] Verse 6 recorded the moment the religious and political leaders swore an unholy alliance to destroy their Messiah.

And for his part, our passage begins in verse 7 with Jesus withdrawing from them. He takes his teaching from the synagogue to the sea and begins to build a new kingdom.

His confrontation with the grace-rejecting false teachers of Israel has, for now at least, run its course. And now Christ will spend his time laying the foundations of the church.

These verses are the story of an unrecognized king building his kingdom. And they begin, firstly, in verses 7 to 12 with Jesus turning his back on those who won't have him.

In verse 7, as we've seen, Jesus, followed by a great crowd, withdraws from the Pharisees, withdraws from the Capernaum, synagogue, to continue teaching on the Galilee seashore.

[7 : 09] But as the chapter progresses, just notice how the opposition continues to intensify. By verse 21, it spread all the way from the Pharisees to family.

And in between, even though things appear a little better, the attempts to set back the message continue to come thick and fast.

Now you have to look a little carefully at the comments Mark makes in verses 7 to 12, because on the surface, things look pretty good.

There's a huge crowd following Jesus, and even the demons are professing him as son of God. But look a little closer, and you see that the hostility which dogs Christ in the rest of the chapter hasn't gone away.

Let's look first at the great crowd. Do you see how Mark mentions them several times, both at the beginning and the end of the passage? There are so many of them in this first paragraph that the disciples have to take Jesus out in a boat to preach from offshore.

[8 : 21] And then they appear again in verse 20, don't they? So eager that they follow Jesus home. Well, most evangelists would think that was a fantastic opportunity, wouldn't they?

But do you see the little warning signs that Mark gives us? In verse 9, they're crushing in on the Lord so heavily that he needs the boat.

That's why he sends his disciples to get it. He needs to escape offshore. And then in verse 20, again, they seem to be a mixed blessing. There's so many of them that even at home, Jesus and his disciples can't manage a bite to eat.

You can begin to see why the family are worried in verse 21, can't you? How many gospel workers have burnt themselves out that way? But more than the sheer numbers of the crowd, there's the nagging suspicion that they're not here simply to listen to the gospel.

You can imagine, can't you, in an age without doctors or a welfare state or even basic care, what hysteria there would be when a man like this arrives.

[9 : 37] And that's why they're pressing in on him, verse 10. It's in the hope of physical healing. Hundreds, maybe thousands of people getting very close to Jesus indeed.

need. But you have to wonder how many of them, amid all the chaos, really got close to the Lord. Is it a king they want or a doctor?

Many were made well. But how many are given new life? We'll never know. the crowd seems like a very good thing, doesn't it?

But at times it looks an awful lot like more of the opposition. And by the end of Mark's gospel there's little doubt where their allegiance lies. The Pharisees, the family, the crowd, and then there's even the demonic world.

Verses 11 and 12 again seem to show a great breakthrough. the kingdom of God advancing deep into enemy territory. These spirits in verse 11 and 12 are called unclean because they are morally filthy.

[10 : 49] In other words they're in rebellion to the God who is morally good and pure and just. And the effect they had on the men and women they controlled was one of absolute moral and spiritual ruin.

So on the one hand what's happening in those verses is an amazing thing. God's Christ is rescuing people from Satan's grip and delivering their lives and restoring them to his kingdom.

So when these spirits fall down before him and cry out his identity you might ask why Jesus is so keen to silence them.

you see son of God at its most basic level was simply another term for the Messiah. In the Old Testament God's kings God's anointed Messiah were known as his sons.

So why not allow their testimony the words of these demons to add to all the other evidence. Here is the Messiah God's son and God's king ushering in his kingdom.

[12 : 04] Well I think the reason that Jesus silences them is that the enemy is playing a very clever game. They might have no chance against the son of God but you can bet they aren't shouting out his identity to help his cause.

Satan seems to know that Jesus' agenda doesn't quite match up to what the Jews were expecting of their Messiah. So perhaps by outing Jesus they can interfere with his mission.

It certainly has one even more crafty effect. In just a few verses as we'll see next week the scribes will claim that Jesus is in league with Satan.

So perhaps these unclean spirits have managed to tarnish Christ by insinuating that they somehow play for the same team. They're collaborating. Religious, popular, now even satanic.

The opposition over chapter three has continued to intensify. What looks great on the outside, what looks like great signs of success, has in fact at times become a hindrance to the gospel.

[13 : 22] And yet Jesus' ministry carries on. he turns his back on the synagogue and sets up camp by the seaside. And despite the setbacks, just look what's beginning to take shape.

Instead of the pious religious Pharisees, the blessings of Jesus' kingdom are being given to people who might never have expected it. From Tyre and Sidon, right in the north, to Edomir, or Edom, the old enemy of Israel in the far south, in fact, from every direction, people whom the Pharisees would probably look down on, were finding something through Jesus which their dead system of formal religion could never offer.

Healing from the crippling effect of sin in our world, and even for the most dehumanized people, those with lives defiled by unclean spirits, people whose society would probably view in the way we view the worst sorts of criminals today, even they were restored and made clean, given a new start.

Something new and desperately exciting is beginning to happen, something which will become much more plain in the next little section, but it began with Jesus turning away from those who didn't want to see it.

And so when even by the Galilee seaside, the work becomes hindered by the crowds, Jesus moves on again in verse 13, up a mountain. He's not simply here for a healing crusade.

[15 : 11] The kingdom he's building has a far bigger aim, and Mark won't let us miss that. sometimes when the gospel is rejected and faces barrier after barrier, the time comes to walk away and carry on the work elsewhere.

That's an important thing to notice, isn't it? There comes a time when enough is enough. If you're dallying with Christianity, you've thought about the gospel, but always find something which holds you back, you need to know there comes a time when it's too late.

You can skirt around Jesus like the crowd here, getting very close to him, but getting nowhere at all. Here's a man who the demons fall down before in terror, a man with the authority to silence them with just a word, but when it comes to human beings, for now at least, he offers us the chance to come to him joyfully.

Eventually though, Jesus turns away from those who won't have him, and he offers the gospel to others. We need to notice that too, don't we?

When we're toiling to witness to a friend or a loved one who stays stubbornly sceptical, there does come a time to move on. Jesus eventually turns his back on those who don't want him, he keeps calm, and he carries on.

[16 : 48] And then secondly, in verses 13 to 20, Jesus builds his kingdom with those he chooses. Now it's easy to overlook the significance of these verses, to miss the penicillin moment, but when you read this paragraph as part of the unfolding drama of Mark's gospel, then it's obvious that what's happening here is first a decisive act of judgment by Jesus on the old, broken religious system.

It's a seismic shift, an exciting new start in the story of his kingdom. And the crucible in which that new kingdom is forged is the rejection by old Israel of her Messiah, the opposition which has dominated the chapter.

Just notice first who sets the agenda in verse 13. Jesus withdraws again up a mountain and calls to him those whom he desired and they came to him.

Did you notice that? There's a strange contrast, isn't there, between the crowds very close to Jesus and now Jesus, far off, calling to him those whom he wants.

Are we near to him or far away? Now there are some very, very boring commentaries and deeds I've discovered over the last week written on these verses which give full, detailed biographies of every name, of every apostle, but I really think that misses the point.

[18 : 29] You see, what's significant here isn't so much who Jesus chooses, but what he chooses to do and why? In the face of mounting rejection from the religious leaders, Jesus has not only withdrawn from them, but in appointing the twelve, he's making a very definite choice to bypass the old religious establishment and found a new Israel.

He'll found his new kingdom, the church, not through the twelve ethnic tribes of Israel, but through the twelve men who will take his gospel to the world.

It's this new kingdom for which Christ would achieve that great rescue on the cross and through this new kingdom, beginning with these twelve men from old Israel, that wonderful rescue from sin and death would be offered to more people than ever before.

perhaps you notice the way this echoes the Sinai story of the Old Testament, Jesus laying the building blocks of this new Israel from a distance, up a mountain, and that just heightens the sense of an exciting new start, doesn't it, of a dawning era in salvation history.

So Jesus is acting out here the judgment which he announced in the last confrontation of chapter 2. Do you see that? He's not pouring himself into the old wineskins, the old garments of the Pharisees, but into fresh vessels, the twelve apostles of his new kingdom.

[20 : 16] And that's why, surely, a few of these apostles receive new names as a sign of the grace shown to them, just as the forefather of Israel, old Jacob, was given a new name to show God's work in him.

So these forefathers of the coming kingdom will be transformed by their king. One writer says this about Peter. His new name, meaning rock, was not a description of what Simon was when he was called, but what by grace he was to become.

Simon was anything but a model of steadfastness. He was constantly swaying from trust to doubt, from open profession of Jesus as the Christ, to rebuking that very same Christ, from vehement declarations of loyalty to base denial.

Nevertheless, by the grace and power of the Lord, that changeable Simon was transformed into a true Peter.

Peter. You see, it's not about these twelve men, it's about the transforming grace of Christ, the king of this new Israel.

[21 : 35] Why else would such a ragtag bunch of men be chosen? Who would build their kingdom by choosing a former tax collector and Roman collaborator like Matthew, and placing him right alongside a fanatic nationalist zealot like Simon?

That's like coming to Scotland and choosing a militant SNP activist and placing him alongside a posh English bloke like me, and then into the mix he threw a few Abedonian oil workers and fishermen.

But that is just what Christ's church would be like. A quick look around this room would tell you that, wouldn't it? Christ would build his kingdom through all sorts of surprising people.

So how would it take place, that transformation from fisherman to apostle? Well, Mark gives them a little job description, doesn't he? It's very brief, verse 14.

And in some ways their job will set the pattern for all future disciples of Christ's kingdom. But of course, it's only the apostles, the twelve men who Jesus was actually talking to, who would carry out this job in its fullest and literal sense and lay the foundations of the church.

[22 : 59] So their job description is both unique to them and it sets the agenda which the church is following to this day. They're to be with Jesus, to be sent out to preach, and thirdly to have authority, verse 15, to tear down the work of the enemy in opposing Christ's kingdom.

So to put it simply, first of all, they need to come to know Jesus themselves. Being with him means a real living relationship, doesn't it? Where they're transformed by his teaching and his character and where they support and encourage him in his mission.

And that's true, isn't it, for every single Christian. Not physically, like these twelve, love. But even so, you can't be a disciple of Jesus unless you know the real Jesus, unless you've met him through his word and come to love him.

Otherwise, just like the Pharisees and the crowd and even the demons, we can seem to be talking all the right words and doing all the right things, but our hearts are stumbling in the dark.

they'll be with Jesus, they'll be sent out to preach and that, in fact, is what it means to be an apostle, to be sent away. This new kingdom will only be founded when these men take the gospel teaching that Christ has given them and share it with others.

[24 : 33] And again, we disciples have a similar job, don't we? Of course, we don't hear our teaching straight from the mouth of Christ. We hear it from these apostles and from those they've taught, from the scriptures they wrote.

We don't receive new teaching and yet, even so, we're sent out to build on their foundations, aren't we? To share this gospel with others. And through doing that, even we have a mandate to tear down the work of Satan.

Again, in our case, it's not the spectacular demon possession that was seen so obviously in the day of the apostles. But their gospel is the weapon that extends Christ's kingdom into Satan's realm.

It's the gospel of Christ which delivers people from the enemy's grip and brings them under Jesus' rule. Just look ahead to verse 27 where Jesus describes himself as the strong man binding Satan and plundering him of his possession.

salvation. So there's the foundations for this new kingdom. A kingdom of grace ruled by Christ and extended by those whom in his mercy he chooses.

[25 : 50] Not the religiously impressive who reject his grace and on whom he's turned his back, but a ragtag assortment of individuals who come to him.

Now next week, Mark will show us a lot more about the unlikely members of Christ's kingdom and just what it means to belong to him. But I think we should be left by this passage to examine our allegiance.

It is possible to reject God's king and in the end for him to walk away. It's possible, isn't it, to be crowding around Jesus, pressing in on him for health and healing and happiness, and yet never really know him or his agenda.

And yet all sorts of unlikely candidates are called to him to serve his new kingdom. So which kingdom do we belong to?

You see, by the end of the passage, the kingdom marked by hostility and serving its own program is alive and well, isn't it? By verse 20, the crowds are back and even his own family are ready to bundle Jesus into a straitjacket.

[27 : 08] But almost unnoticed, another kingdom is being shaped, one which will soon shape the world and which beckons each one of us.

It's marked by the love of its king. It's transformed by his grace and it's serving his agenda. Now it's our loves and our action, isn't it, which betray which kingdom we belong to.

Pride, rejection, selfishness, or grace, love, and a life bent on advancing the gospel of Christ.

Which kingdom do we belong to? Let's pray. Father God, as we read these verses, we see in your son the king we so desperately need.

We see the one with the authority to re-humanize our lives and restore our world and even redeem our sin. And yet we also look at our world and see that many still want nothing to do with the Lord Jesus or his gospel.

[28 : 31] Father, we thank you that despite hatred and defiance and even the coldness of your own people, Christ is at work building his kingdom.

We thank you that through your cross and the gospel handed to us by your apostles, even we have all we need to throw down the work of Satan.

So by your grace, Father, would you strengthen us for that task till your kingdom come. For we ask it in Jesus' strong name. Amen.