

# The Beginning of Something Amazing & World Changing

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Hello. Okay, we're going to be going into the book of Mark this morning. If you have a Bible, perhaps in a pew there, then the Gospel of Mark.
- It's the second book in the New Testament. Although it's the second of the four Gospels in the Bibles in front of us, it was the first written account of Jesus' ministry in earth.
- And it was a very early account of Jesus' life, all the things that He taught and did. And so this morning we're just going to be looking at the first three verses, and I'm going to be giving us a kind of overview of the book.
- I would encourage you, if you've not, just to read through. It's the shortest of all the Gospels. It doesn't take long to read through. But even if you read through big sections at a time, and perhaps have a pen or something, and just jot down recurring themes or words or patterns, you'll be surprised at how much you can learn just by having a wee look for repeated things.
- Honestly, you will find out so much if you just read through with a careful eye and just see things that Mark repeats or themes that he places in certain places, just observations.
- [ 1 : 5 0 ] Like, for instance, you notice that a lot of times at the first number of chapters, the opposition comes in the form of a question, why?
- Why did you do this? Or why did you do that? Very often in the first few chapters, you get people asking questions of Jesus.
- So, have a read through it. I would encourage you, if you've not already began to do that, just have a read through Mark's Gospel.
- See what you can learn. You'll be surprised at how much you observe and also how much perhaps God speaks to you through certain things or something catches you there.
- So, I'm going to just read the first three verses of Mark's Gospel. Mark writes, 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.
- [ 3 : 0 2 ] The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Now, I want to ask a question to help us get into the mindset of understanding Mark's Gospel.
- When was the last time that you had a visitor to your house? Just think of that. Just think of the last time you had visitors or perhaps the last time you visited someone else's house.
- Have a wee think just now. What if someone this morning, after the service, while you were here, said to you, Oh, good to see you.
- By the way, we are coming round to your house this afternoon. What is the first things that would go through your head? You don't need to say them out loud. But what are the first things that would go through your head if someone said that to you today?

Perhaps you would think, Great, I'll get the kettle on and the biscuits ready for you. Or maybe you would think, If I knew that, I would have tidied up a bit. Perhaps you would think, I wasn't expecting visitors today.

[ 4 : 14 ] Or maybe, I was planning on being somewhere else. Perhaps you would think, I'm sorry, it's not the best time for visitors. Or maybe, depending on who it was, you might think, We don't really have that kind of relationship.

Or perhaps, you would think, If you just gave me some notice, then I could have you over to visit. Now, no judgment on whatever your thoughts would be, but having this illustration in mind will help us understand certain aspects of Mark's gospel.

It will help us understand direction of travel. This is a thing in Mark's, the direction of travel in Mark's gospel. It will help us understand the intention of travel.

It will help us understand who is traveling somewhere and why they have come. And yet, also, why it turns out the way that it does when he visits the place that he visits.

And so, when Mark opens his book in verse 1, he makes this great, big statement about the beginning of something good involving a particular person.

[ 5 : 31 ] And then, verse 2 to 3, he quotes the Old Testament. And it's a composite, although he says Isaiah, it's a composite quotation from Exodus, Malachi, and Isaiah.

And the context of these verses are about preparation and a direction of travel to a particular place. There's a blend of hope in the context of these quotations, yet also, there is great warning in these quotations in the Old Testament.

And these quotes that Mark introduces, this big statement in verse 1, and these Old Testament quotes in verse 2 and 3, and these will shape the whole gospel of Mark.

To put it the way that my mentor put it to me, Jesus is the answer, but what is the question? Now, that's a deep thing.

Have a think about that. Jesus is the answer, but what is the question? Because depending on what the question is and how we understand the Old Testament, and if we don't understand the Old Testament, the question might then become a self-focused and self-defined question.

[ 6 : 46 ] which Jesus is the answer, and we have the wrong idea. So, Jesus is the answer to a question that is defined in the Old Testament, and particularly the latter prophets.

And much of Mark will follow the book of Isaiah. Mark will follow the book of Isaiah almost programmatically, and also mirrors the great rescue of the Old Testament, which is Exodus, which we have been going through.

So, let's see how Mark has the Old Testament in view as the question that Jesus is the answer to. And so, let me just take you on a journey very quickly through just some parts of the Old Testament to help us understand the question that Jesus is the answer to.

If you rewind to Genesis chapter 50, the last chapter in Genesis before Israel are left as slaves in Egypt. The last chapter of Genesis, Israel are now in Egypt, and Joseph is about to die, and he says his last words to his brothers, and these are his last words.

Joseph says to his brothers, God will surely visit you, and he will bring you up out of this land to the land that he promised.

[ 8 : 07 ] God did visit them in Egypt, namely through Moses, and God brought them up out of Egypt by the hand of Moses. And then, when they are at the mountain in Mount Sinai in the desert, God tells them about their journey to the promised land, and he says this in chapter 23.

We were in it before Christmas. He says, Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place I prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice.

Do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgressions, for my name is in him. So, think about John quoting this, right? Behold, I send an angel before you.

He's going to guard you. He's going to bring you to the place I prepared, but pay careful attention to him and obey him. It's a very serious thing. And then, along with Malachi, forms the first part of Mark's quote.

And so, it is during the Exodus on the way to the promised land. There is hope, but there is also warning. There is a hope that they are going somewhere good, but there is a warning in order to get there.

[ 9 : 26 ] You need to pay careful attention and obey the voice of this messenger. Secondly, Malachi chapter 3 is what John quotes as well, and it says, Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.

And then, it goes on to say this in Malachi. This is the context. 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, but who can endure the day of his coming?

And who can stand when he appears? And so, the context of Mark's quote is, the Lord is coming to visit his temple, but who can endure the day of his coming?

Who will stand? And then, further to the context of Malachi, this is after the exile. So, Israel has been kicked out of the land, and then they are brought back to the land, and they rebuild the temple, and then the very last voice of the Old Testament says, there's a messenger coming to prepare the way of the Lord, and the Lord is going to come and visit his temple, but who can endure it?

And these are the last words of the Old Testament, and the nation at this point. Back in the land, the temple has been rebuilt, but the nation, and particularly the priests, have been very unfaithful.

[ 10 : 56 ] And then chapter 4, and these are the last words of the Old Testament. If you were to flick back the very last words of the Old Testament before 400 years of silence, these are the last words of Malachi.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, and he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to the fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

And so, Elijah's coming to prepare a visit from the Lord, and whether or not you listen to Elijah will determine whether or not you will be saved or the land will be destroyed.

And so, there's hope, but there's warning here. And these are the last words of the Old Testament. And then the next thing that happens is that Elijah will come, prepare the way of the Lord to visit his temple, but how is it going to go?

How is this visit going to go? Mark will show how John the Baptist functions as Elijah. And finally, the last part of the quote, a voice of one crying in the wilderness, comes from Isaiah chapter 40.

[ 12 : 11 ] And that quote, the context of that, starts with hope. Comfort, comfort my people, says God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, thank God, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries, in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. And so you see, John is the messenger sent to prepare the way for the Lord, for God to visit with both hope and warning.

Jesus is the answer, but what is the question? So when God is going to visit, how is he going to visit? When will the Messiah arrive? When will God come and rescue us?

And what is it that we need rescued from? Are we prepared for a visit from God? Think about this. Is our house a mess?

Think about Israel at the time when Jesus came. Think about the temple, the house of God. Were they prepared for a visit from God? Was the house in tip-top order or was it a mess?

[ 13 : 32 ] Are we prepared? Today, are we prepared for a visit from God? Have we been given enough notice from God? Were they given enough notice? Yes, they were.

Have we been given enough notice? You better believe it, absolutely, 2,000 years. What kind of visit were they expecting? What kind of relationship did they have with the visitor?

What kind of relationship do we have with this visitor? Do we even want a visit from God? Did the people, the unfaithful priests in the temple, did they even want a visit from God?

The answer, no, they didn't. Would it be good news or bad news if God turned up? Are we going to open the door and welcome God in?

Mark's story is going to present the events that lead up to the Lord visiting His temple and the fulfillment of the Old Testament law and prophets, a rescue and yet a reckoning, incredible hope mixed with much-needed warning.

[ 14 : 39 ] And yet Mark's story, we need to know, is actually Peter's story. Mark's story is Peter's story. And so this gospel account, why is Mark the first to write a gospel account?

Who is Mark anyway? Well, we learn in Colossians 4 that Mark was the cousin of Barnabas and he was also known by the name John or John Mark and he traveled with Barnabas and Paul for a time, we learn that in Acts 15.

Mark's mother's house was used as a base for the prayers of the disciples in Acts 12. This is where Peter went when he was released from prison. And Mark was very useful to Paul, we learn this in 2 Timothy 4.

And finally, Mark was like a son to Peter. And 1 Peter 5, that's what Peter says. Later, church fathers tell us that Mark was an interpreter for Peter and he wrote down Peter's message about Jesus.

And there are different aspects of Peter's preaching in the New Testament in which you can see a similar outline. Like if you were to go to how Peter preaches a sermon to Cornelius, it's the same outline for the whole of Mark's gospel.

[ 15 : 51 ] And when considering that this was Peter's message of Jesus, it makes sense of the way things are presented in Mark's gospel and put together to emphasize certain things.

And you'll notice that if you go through Mark's gospel, you'll notice how, particularly how Peter is presented. And if this was Peter writing this, you would understand why the disciples and Peter are presented in this way.

In the first line of Mark's gospel, he tells us about a beginning. It is a beginning of something good, the beginning of the good news. Something worth heralding, something worth proclaiming.

It is a beginning involving a great person in which the world will never be the same again because of him. And the person that Mark's talking about is Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God.

That's the identification is Jesus, and he is the Messiah, the Son of God. The subject of the whole book is that his arrival, his whole ministry, the entire person and work of Jesus himself is the beginning of the good news that will change the world forever.

[ 17 : 03 ] And so, when Mark writes the beginning of the gospel, he's not saying this is the beginning of my book. He's not saying this is the beginning of the gospel of Mark. The beginning of the good news, he isn't introducing his book.

The term, the gospel, did not at that time refer to a literary book. The term itself meant good news, and it was used of monumental events in history like a victory of a great battle or like the birth of a great emperor.

And so, an event that would change things for good, that's where the term gospel was used, and it was heralded. Herald the good news, the emperor has been born, the world's never going to be the same again, or a great victory has happened.

Herald it, good news, good news. And so, an event that would change things for good, this is the kind of thing that was used in Rome for the new emperor. And his rule would cease wars and would bring great benefit to his subjects, and his birth was worthy of marking a new era in history.

Caesar would do that. let's mark this as a new era in history. And so, when Mark says the beginning of the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, he's actually saying this, and this is what we need to understand about this opening of this book.

[ 18 : 28 ] He is saying that Jesus, when he arrived and lived, Jesus marks a new beginning in world history. Jesus marks a new era of something really, really good, something worth proclaiming to the whole world because it is something that will mark a new era in the history of the entire world forever.

The whole story, the person, the earthly ministry of Jesus is itself just the beginning. And so, this will help us understand when we get to the end of Mark's gospel, which originally was verse 8 of chapter 16.

It ends very abruptly, but it will help us understand that it's not an end. It is really just the end of the beginning. So, the entire book, the entire life of Jesus that's recorded in Mark is itself just the beginning of the good news.

Just the beginning. And so, if the subject of Mark's whole book, i.e. Jesus' entire earthly ministry, is just the beginning of the good news, then it follows that after that, the good news continues.

This is similar to what Luke does. And so, if you're familiar with Luke in the book of Acts, so in his gospel, Luke wrote about Jesus since his birth till his ascension.

[ 19 : 58 ] And then, in the book of Acts, Luke says this right at the start of Acts. He says, in the first book, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up.

He didn't say, I've written about all that Jesus did. He says, I have only written about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up. And so, clearly, Luke means that the book of Acts is all that Jesus continued to do.

And so, this opening line of Mark is not Mark saying, this is the beginning of my book. He is saying, this entire book is about the beginning of the good news of Jesus in the world.

The Messiah, the Son of God has arrived, and this is just the beginning of something really, really good. Because after this book, the good news continues. Otherwise, we would all be left behind.

If the good news didn't continue after Jesus left this earth, we would all be left behind in our failure to understand Jesus, who he is, and what he is really doing.

[ 21 : 04 ] But we are not left behind in our failure to understand because the good news continues. Jesus is coming to visit. What if Jesus were to come and visit this church today without giving us any notice?

We have seven churches in Revelation that got a letter from Jesus, and most of them were not good. What if Jesus were to come and visit? The Lord did come and visit.

He came as the anointed king, but was he received when he came? He came to visit his temple, but would the report be good?

He came as the Messiah, the Son of God, but not in the way that people expected. not in the way that some people wanted. Imagine that.

Imagine God not meeting our expectations and our preconceived ideas of him. His rescue would be like Exodus, but greater, yet not quite in the way that people expected.

[ 22 : 13 ] God and so the lack of understanding, the level of rejection and even betrayal, and we'll learn this in Mark's gospel, the lack of understanding of who Jesus is, the level of rejection of Jesus, and even betrayal come from places that you should least expect it.

lack of understanding, rejection, and betrayal come from places you should least expect it. And yet, despite that, often faith throughout Mark's gospel, throughout Jesus' life, in our world today, often faith comes from unexpected places and unexpected people, places we would not expect it.

Even for those who are slow to understand and quick to fail, that is all the disciples in Mark's gospel are slow to understand and quick to fail, and I'm sure we could raise our hands in this room and say, we are all pretty slow to understand and quick to fail.

And yet, even for them, that was not the end of their story. Not the end of their story. It was merely the beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God.

So when you look at that opening line of Mark, think about what Jesus is doing, has done, or might do in your life. Think, is He going to leave me here as I am at this stage?

[ 23 : 54 ] What would the report be like for you and I? And yet, Jesus doesn't leave us there because this is merely just the beginning of the good news about Jesus.

And if you've ever met Jesus, if you have ever encountered Him, if He has ever visited you through the message of good news about Him, and you have received Him, then you are only just tasting the beginning of the good news of the Son of God.

And so this is what we're going to learn. And there is great hope, great hope. Let me pray. Lord, we are very aware that there are so many things that we just do not understand about You.

So many things we do not understand about the world, about what is happening, about what You are doing, about who You are, and even if You are there, and if You care.

so many things that we just do not understand. There are so many ways in which we fail when we know better, so many things that we do when we should know better.

[ 25 : 11 ] even the people that we would least expect to misunderstand You and fail often do, and yet You are so good and You do not leave us here.

And I thank You for the promise in Your Word that if You start a good work, You will finish it. and I thank You that if we even come to know You just a little, that You will not leave us there, that that will just be the beginning of the good news of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, that You will continue to help us in our understanding, in our vision, in our learning, and in our actions, to understand who You are, to enjoy who You are, to herald who You are, and to give You praise for who You are.

Lord, we thank You for the great hope that there is. Please help us to obey Your voice and to look toward You to help us in our understanding. We pray in Your name.

Amen. Amen.