

The Beginning of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Mark, chapter 1, the beginning of the good news, the gospel, about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Well, he tells us exactly what he's going to do, and he just gets on and does it. So I suppose I should do the same. Interesting, he starts off the beginning.

It's not a million miles away from the way Genesis begins, is it? In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And he's perhaps inviting us to think that here is a new beginning, that God's doing a new thing.

He created everything, and here is a new, mighty work of God. This is a new beginning.

And he tells us right up front in the first verse what the conclusion is. He says it's the good news of Jesus, but he says it's Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[1 : 14] And in saying that, he tells us what it takes other people in the gospel quite a long time to discover. So please turn to 829, and we'll find there that after eight chapters, Jesus says to Peter, Who do you say that I am?

So it's taken him eight chapters to get to this. And what does Peter say in answer to that question? You are the Christ. In the other accounts, he says you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

But it takes Peter eight chapters to get the hang of that. And in fact, when he gets to chapter 8, he still hasn't quite got the hang of it. And it is the 15th chapter when somebody else gets the hang of who Jesus is.

And this time, he does get the hang of it, because this is the cross. And this is in Mark chapter 15, verse 39.

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And there's a centurion, a Roman soldier, standing there at the cross.

[2 : 41] He hears the cry of Jesus and saw how he died. And he says, surely this man was, how does it finish?

Surely this man was the Son of God. And really, that's the high watermark of Mark's gospel. That's the highest expression of recognition of who Jesus is.

So it's going to take 15 chapters to get to that point. But Mark, he's sort of a very quick person. He says, well, I'm going to tell you straight away, this is the conclusion.

It's like turning to the back of the book and giving you the answers in a crossword puzzle. This is it. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Okay, now let's wind it back. And in the next section, he talks about something about the prophetic introduction, because he's going to say it's written in Isaiah the prophet.

[3 : 47] And then he's going to introduce us to John the Baptist, who was a very, a big figure. He was somebody that made a real mark on the nation.

And he's going to tell us about John. And in the section that we're at, it doesn't actually introduce us to Jesus, apart from second hand. So that's all we're going to look at this evening.

And I hope I can do it reasonably well without confusing us too much. Now, how does he set about doing this?

Well, it's interesting that the first thing he does, he doesn't tell us, you know, how tall Jesus was. He doesn't actually tell us about Jesus' birth. He doesn't tell us about Jesus, where Jesus was born or anything like that.

He says, oh, let me first tell you about the, what you Christians would call the Old Testament. It's written in Isaiah the prophet. So this is, you obviously think this is important.

[4 : 51] It's written in Isaiah the prophet, quote, I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way. The voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make

straight paths for him.

So he wants us to understand that. And he says that will help you to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. It will help you to understand who Jesus is.

So let's follow his lead and see where he's going. So have one finger in Mark. Don't forget that it was Mark quoting this. And turn, if you would, to Isaiah 40, verses 3 to 5 and around there.

Isaiah 40 is a grand and wonderful chapter. It's thinking about the coming exile.

So in Isaiah, he says to the people of Israel back in the day, he says, if you don't follow the Lord, if you don't put your trust in him, if you don't obey him, you can't be with him.

[6 : 11] And the terms and conditions have always been that if my people don't trust me and don't obey me, they can't live with me and I will kick them out and I'll send them into exile.

And in the previous chapter, Isaiah 39, the people who in the end would take the people of Israel into exile, the Babylonians, have just entered the scene.

And so we now look forward to, not just to the exile, when they get kicked out, but how God will bring them back again.

And Isaiah 40 is a wonderful chapter of restoration. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed.

That her sin has been paid for. That she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

[7 : 18] Sometimes that word double is like when you double over a piece of paper and you get two matching sides. So it might be that she's received from the Lord, from the Lord's hand, the match for all her sins.

Now, so what happens next? She says, listen, a voice of one calling. In the desert, prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be raised up. Every mountain and hill made low. The rough ground shall become level. The rugged places are plain.

And the glory of the Lord will be revealed. And all mankind together will see it. And that's the bit, that's where Mark is quoting from.

That's the situation that he's inviting us to connect with. So I want to ask you one question. If you look at the quote in Mark and the bit in Isaiah, do you notice anything?

[8 : 34] The voice of one calling. That's there in Mark chapter 1 verse 3. A voice of one calling in the desert. And it's there in Isaiah 40. A voice of one calling in the desert.

Prepare the way of the Lord. So that is definitely correspond to one another. Okay.

Okay. Thank you very much. Prepare. Which way? So what does Mark say? Ah. Right.

Well, that's what I was thinking. Because there's a whole other sentence in there. Which isn't in Isaiah. That's right, isn't it? So the bit, I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way.

That's not in Isaiah at all. That's in Malachi. So if you've got a spare finger. You need to put that in Malachi. Which is the last book of the Old Testament.

[9 : 39] And don't be alarmed by Mark telling you he's quoting from Isaiah. But bringing in a bit of Malachi.

Because they often do that. They often bring two or three things together. And don't necessarily tell you. I'm mainly focusing on Isaiah. But Malachi has something to say in the same vein.

And in Malachi chapter 3. That's where it comes from. So I'll go back a little bit in Malachi. You have wearied the Lord with your words.

So this is the people of God. Again, back in the day. How have we wearied him, you ask? By saying all who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord.

And he's pleased with them. And where is the God of justice? See, I will send my messenger. Who will prepare the way before me.

[10 : 37] Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come.

Says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire.

Or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner. Excuse me. And purifier of silver. He will take. He will purify the Levites.

And refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men. Who can bring offerings in righteousness. And the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem. Will be acceptable to the Lord.

As in days gone by. As in former years. So that's what Malachi is talking about. Somebody is going to come. And they are going to sort things out.

[11 : 33] Well we will come back to that in a moment. So let's see if we can. First of all think of exactly what Isaiah is telling us. So I have done a little picture of it.

And that's it. So. So. Here's the person. Calling out. Prepare the way for.

Prepare the way. And it says. Yeah. Prepare the way. Verse 3. Make straight. A highway. Highway. So.

So. What I've got here is. He's been moving in this direction. And that's where the highway used to go. But this guy has had his spade and shovel out. And he's made a straight highway.

And presumably he's knocked down some mountains. And rugged places as well. So there's a nice straight highway. And this person is saying. There's some mountains. And there's some deviations in the road.

[12 : 37] Straighten it up. Knock it down. Flatten it. Make a highway. Because somebody else is coming along after me.

And who's coming along after the messenger? The king of kings. Okay. King of kings. The Lord.

One other particular reference.

The Lord. So that's God's name. Yahweh. And also it says. A highway for our God. So that's the picture you see.

And Mark is saying. That's what I'm referring to. Have that picture right in your minds. The situation was. That the people had been carried away.

Far away. God's glory had departed. That's the bad news. They're in exile. But someone's coming. To sort them out.

[13 : 35] Perhaps to bring them home. And. Somebody goes ahead and says. He's coming. Get ready. Sort it out. Because.

The Lord God. Is the next person you'll see. It's rather like the Tour de France. Where. Which takes place in Yorkshire at the moment. Doesn't it.

Once the Tour de France came along through here. And went down Ditchling Road. And ahead of the Tour de France. Was all sorts of cars saying. Mind out. Here it comes.

Beep. Beep. Like that. And you all had to. What's going to happen there. And then. We waited for the Tour de France. And that was it. But this is it.

Get ready. Prepare the way. Something's coming. And in this text. It says. The Lord is coming. The Lord God is coming. And he's coming to sort out.

[14 : 31] The bad news. And. Bring the good news. And we could extend that thought. In. The.

The Lord comes. To the exiles. And takes them home again. So we've got texts like Isaiah 49. So Isaiah 49.

For example. From verse 8. This is what the Lord says. In the time of my favour. I will answer you.

In the day of salvation. I will help you. I will keep you. And make you a covenant. For the people.

To restore the land. To reassign. Its desolate inheritance. Is to say. To the captives. Who presumably. In the Babylonian prison. Come out. And those in darkness. Be free.

And they will feed. Beside the roads. They'll find pasture. On every barren hill. They will neither hunger. Nor thirst. Nor will the desert heat. Or sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them. Will guide them.

[15 : 45] And lead them. Beside springs of water. I will turn all my mountains. Into roads. All my highways. Will be raised up. They come from afar. From the north. The west. Shout for joy.

Oh heavens. Rejoice. Oh earth. Burst into song. Oh mountains. The Lord. Comforts. His people. And will have compassion. On his afflicted ones.

And the. The Lord. Zion says. The Lord's forgotten me. The Lord has forsaken me. And God says. I certainly haven't. Verse 17.

Your sons will hasten back. And those who laid you waste. Laid you waste. Depart from you. Look. Look around. Your sons gather and come to you. So the idea of God.

Presumably going and getting them. And then bringing them back. And that's the thought. In Isaiah 49. And I think it links with the thought in Isaiah 35.

[16 : 50] In the thought of Isaiah 35. Again. It's about the desert. And the parched land will be glad. And the glory of the Lord. And in verse 3.

It says. Strengthen the feeble hands. And steady the knees that give way. Say to those with fearful hearts. Be strong. Do not fear. Your God will come. He will come with vengeance. And divine retribution. He will come. And save you. And then all sorts of wonderful things will happen. One. The eyes of the blind will be opened. The ears of the deaf unstopped. The lame leap like a deer. The mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness. Streams in the desert. Verse 8. And a highway will be there. It will be called the way of holiness. The unclean will not journey on it. And so it says. But only the redeemed will walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord will return. And will enter Zion with singing. [17:49] And everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them. And sorrow and sighing will flee away. So I hope I'm not trying to connect together too many things that aren't supposed to be connected.

But I think that's meant to be connected. The idea that God will go to his people. And he'll bring them home. They'll be brought back home to God. And in Isaiah. They're saying. That would be brilliant. That would be good news. To hear that that's done. And we think of Mark.

As he says. Quoting that. I will send my messenger. I will send someone. Calling in the desert. Prepare the way.

For the Lord. And make straight paths for him. And he says. That's exactly how you should think of John the Baptist. That's exactly how you should think of John the Baptist.

[18:45] And if he's the.

Preparer of the way. Who are we expecting to come next? The Lord. Because he prepares the way for the Lord.

And the fascinating thing is. That as we look to see who comes next. We have to wait till verse 9. And he says. At that time. Jesus came.

From Nazareth in Galilee. And you think. Wow. That's very interesting. So we were expecting God to turn up.

We were expecting the Lord. To come along. And Mark says. And who comes next? Jesus. And it's a fascinating.

[19:47] Thought. Isn't it? Who is Jesus then? Well. Can it be. That he is the Lord. That he is the God.

Who turns up to redeem his people. That seems to be the implication. Of the way. John tells it to us. This is the point.

At which I wish that I had numbered my sheets. It's a little. A little bit ragged I'm afraid. Let's look at the Malachi.

Malachi. Let's look at the Malachi. The background. So. Malachi. Malachi. Tells us.

Verse 3. See I will prepare my. I will send my messenger. Who will prepare the way. So it is linked. And who comes after the messenger.

[20:47] While you're thinking about that. I'll just see whether I have a pen. Okay. So in Malachi 3.

The messenger comes. And who comes after the messenger. Okay. Well. Yes. It does say the messenger of the covenant.

But it also speaks. It gives him another title as well. The Lord you are seeking. And he does say. I will send my messenger.

Who will prepare the way before me. So again. We might be thinking. There's. The messenger. And then behind him. Secondly. Comes.

The Lord. Now he doesn't say Yahweh the Lord. But he does say the master. The Lord. And again we're thinking. Hmm.

[21:49] What's this telling us about Jesus. And in Malachi. The idea is that. The. This. The Lord. Comes.

To his temple. The messenger of the covenant. Whom you desire will come. Says the Lord Almighty. But this time. There's a slightly different. Vibe to it. Because he says.

This is going to be really. Something quite. Stressful. But who can endure. The day of his coming. Who can stand. When he appears.

Because he's got some really. Tough work to do. And it says. That he will refine. He will be like. A refiner's fire. Or a launderer's soap. There's going to be something. Really vigorous.

And deep acting. About what he does. So I have. Very little experience. Of a refiner's fire. Nor of. A launderer's soap. But I think. The idea of something.

[22 : 43] Being really. Deep acting. Sounds about right. So. A fire. To refine stuff. Has to be quite a hot fire. You know.

It's not just like. Bung it in the microwave. For 20 seconds. It's really a hot fire. And the launderer's soap. So I'm sure. Soap technology.

Has come on a huge amount. Since those days. But to get. To get. Stains out of. Stained clothing. Is really.

A vigorous thing. I can remember. When I went to Sri Lanka. And I thought. I've just got a. Little smudge on my jeans. And I was just sort of. Sponging it down. And one of the guys said. No no. You don't do it like that.

Took the jeans off me. And. Plunged it into water. And got. Some. What's the soap. That we used to have. In those big. Big yellow blocks. Was it. Carbolic fairy.

[23 : 40] Sunlight. Sunlight. Sunlight. Yes. It was that sort of stuff. The stuff that you see. Only in museums. Of the home. As it used to be. And he got some of that. He's going. Like this.

And then. And then. Like that. And plunging it in. And. Gosh. It was like a workout. And then. Takes it in. And.

Blunges in. Again. I was only trying to get a little. Smudge off. Anyway. He does that. And there you are. Rings it out. And. It was really hard work.

That he did on those jeans. And. This. One who's coming. Is going to be. Somebody who does. Deep. Deep work. On people.

And it says. He will purify. Verse three. He will sit as a refiner. And purifier of silver. He will purify the Levites. And refine them like gold and silver. And then.

[24 : 36] The Lord will have men. Who bring offerings in righteousness. And the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem. Will be acceptable to the Lord. As in days gone by.

As in former years. So what this. This invites us to think of. Somebody coming. Who does a powerful. Work of refining. And ends up.

Instead of with a stained. And. Mixed and corrupted people. With a. Pure people. And a. Washed. People. And a people. Able to approach the Lord. In his holiness. So. It's quite something. Isn't it? These. Prophecies. And. He. Says. Well what is this good news. The good news.

[25 : 34] Getting all in a muddle here. The good news. Well. It looks as though. It's about travel. Moving from one place.

To another. But I think really. In the fulfillment of it. It's about the substance. That. The good news is. That God's people. Have his presence.

And are blessed. In restoration. And in the way. The prophecy is presented. You think it might be to do with. Military stuff. And geography.

And the defeat of the Babylonians. But I think Mark. Would have us think. Actually what. Isaiah was getting at. Was far deeper than that. It's actually. Restoring. Relationship.

With God. So that there are. A people. Who trust him. And obey him. Because that was why. The exile happened. In the first place. Because the people. Didn't have the heart.

[26 : 28] To trust God. And obey God. That's why he. He expelled them. And Jesus is. Coming to deal with. The heart of the matter. To bring the presence. Of God. And the blessing.

Of God. And bring back. A relationship. With God. And that's why. Mark. Can start us off here. And say. This is how I'd like you. To think of it.

God's people. Are in a complete. Mess and muddle. And God has always. Been promising. He'll come and sort them out. Like Malachi. The Lord will come. And he'll. Radically.

Change his people. So they can. Worship him. And Isaiah is saying. That. The Lord will come. And bring his people home. And he'll come. To rescue them.

And in each case. Somebody goes ahead. To say the Lord is coming. To do that. So have that in your mind. And John says. And I'm going to tell you. In a moment. About Jesus.

[27 : 24] But before he tells us. About Jesus. He tells us about John the Baptist. So if we may. Let's just have a little. Little think about. John the Baptist. John the Baptist. Straddles.

The dividing line. Between the Old Testament. And the New Testament. So. There's the dividing line. Of the Old Testament. And the New Testament. So he's partly.

Got a foot in the Old Testament. And he's partly. Got a foot in the New Testament. And it's said of him. John came. Baptizing in the desert region. And preaching a baptism.

Of repentance. For the forgiveness of sins. And this is. This is the preparing. Isn't it? Prepare the way. Get ready for God. And the people. Are. Scared by this.

God's coming. Let's try and get ourselves. Sort it out. Let's try and. Get ourselves right. For the coming. Of the Lord. And he. Gives them a baptism.

[28 : 19] And of course. Baptism is a very funny thing. To give to Jews. I mean. There are baptisms. In. In the Old Testament. There's washings. And things. But the people.

Who are usually baptized. In those days. Were Gentiles. Who wanted to become Jews. Jews. So. It's almost saying. To the. To the. These people. You know. You're not Jews.

Really. You need. You know. Even as you sit there. You need. To be. Changed. To be. What the people of God. Ought to be. So. Get your act together.

And he says. You need to turn. You need to change. And he. Preaches. A baptism. Of repentance. For the forgiveness. Of sins. So. There are the people. Being baptized. With.

In the river. Jordan. And he. His clothing. Reminds us. Of his. Old Testament. Roots. It says. That he. Wears clothing.

[29 : 14] Made of camel's. Hair. With a leather belt. Round his waist. And he ate locusts. And wild honey. Would Catherine. Have been able. To eat locusts. And wild honey.

Not the honey. I think the locusts. She would have been. All right with. Wouldn't she. Yeah.

Because she could eat meat. So. But wearing a leather belt. And camel's head. Does this remind us.

Of anybody. Elijah. Yeah. So he's a sort of. Old Testament. Elijah figure. And he's. Yeah.

That's him. So. He's baptizing people. Getting ready. For the coming. And he says. And somebody. Is coming.

After me. Somebody. Is coming. After me. And whereas. I baptize. With water. This one. Is far. Greater.

[30 : 06] Than I am. And I. Admitted to put the word. Greater. In there. So I'll put. Greater. He's far. Greater. Than I am. That I'm not.

Worth. Worthy. To undo. His. Shoelaces. And. He. Will. I baptize. With water. But he will. Baptize. With the Holy Spirit.

Spirit. I've. Dipped you in water. Or poured out water. On you. Or a mixture of both. And this one.

Will. Dip you in the Holy Spirit. Or pour out the Holy Spirit. On you. Or whichever way.

You want to think of it. That's what I can do. That's what he's going to do. And it's a huge.

Statement. About Jesus. Isn't it? I make you wet.

On the outside. And tell you. To sort yourself out. He. Immerses you. In God. He fills you. With God. He covers you. With God. He dips you.

[30 : 59] Into God. And. I've got out of step here. But it's the one. Who does this. I think. Is the Lord. Isn't it? Who could.

Fill us with God. Who could. Immerse us in God. Who could. Plunge. Our souls. Into God. He. Will. Baptize you. With the Holy Spirit. So we've got. Two situations. Here. And with this. We'll. We'll finish. There's. John.

He has a baptism. Which is. Pre-Messiah. He's saying. Getting ready. For the Messiah. And it's. Pre-Trinitarian. In other words. It's not. It doesn't know. It's not to do with. Father. Son. And Holy Spirit. It's to do with. Getting ready. For the one. Who's coming. It's.

[31 : 55] A baptism. Of turning. To. Well. Really. Turning back. To what they should have been. From Moses. Isn't it? It's getting yourself. Jewish again.

Because in a sense. They're hardly even behaving. Like Jews should behave. Like the people.

People of Israel. Getting back to that. And preparing. For. Well. Preparing.

For. The coming one. Whereas. Jesus. As we. Cross the boundary.

To what Jesus does. He. Is. Now. Bringing us. Into. Well. It's a baptism. By the Messiah. It's a Trinitarian. Baptism. Isn't it? He's.

He's. Baptizing. In the Holy Spirit. He's. The Son of God. And. The turning. That. The Lord Jesus.

[32 : 48] Will bring. Is not turning. To what the Old Testament. Always said. But turning to the one. Who can do. What the Old Testament. Never could quite manage.

And looked forward to. It's turning. To. Himself. And whereas the Old Testament. One is saying. Prepare for the coming one. So it's a sort of. Hope thing. What Jesus brings. Is not. Hoping for someone. Yet to come. But arriving. If we have Jesus. We've actually. Arrived. At faith. And. So let's.

Simply say. That we've. We've. We haven't even. Heard Jesus. Himself. Speak. But we're set up. For really. Quite an interesting. Encounter. Who's the person. Coming along. Well. Who is he? With. By implication. He's the Lord God. What's that. Going to look like. And. According to the.

[33 : 47] According to John. He is. Worthy. And he is. Far greater. Than John. The Baptist. And. John.

Could make people. Wet on the outside. But this person. Can plunge. People. Into. With. The Holy Spirit. That's a. Breathtaking. To say.

And who comes along. Jesus. Comes along. Well. We look forward. To hearing a bit. More about him. When we go further. Into. Into Mark's gospel. Let's close.

By singing. Number. Eight. One. Four. Four. Thank you.