



No, Mark is coming right out of the gate. Good morning, he says, Christ Church Chicago. You who are heavy hearted, who are knowing that hope is hard to lift.

I've got some good news. The beginning of the good news. Then he wants to tell us about Jesus, who is the Christ.

Simply a term that would indicate some kind of messianic hope, some kind of savior king. Someone who actually might rule our world well.

[5:44] That would give us some hope. This one who is the savior king likened also here to this incredible title, the Son of God.

He picks up his pen and says, I think I want to write about Jesus. And the first thing I want you to know is in the midst of your life and your failings and your frailties and your family and your relationships and your future and all the things that end up on the dust heap of our minds by Friday noon.

He says, I've got some good news. I want to write to you about Jesus. Now, it's going to take some work for him to convince us, isn't it?

Most of us are a bit jaded when it comes to good news. Some of us are cynical even. All of us have experienced seasons of disappointment.

Disappointment in ourselves. Disappointment in others. Disappointment in the direction that everything seems to be moving in or moving away from. And you're going to tell me you've got good news.

[7:01] I'm going to need some definite reasons to be able to entertain it. He has some convincing to do. Especially when the good news we normally get doesn't rise to the level of the heart's desire or the body's need.

The good news of a good weather day is nice, but doesn't solve the problems that provide the anxieties of my mind and my heart in the middle of the night.

So how does he, well, let me put it this way. How would you go about convincing a reader to follow your writings, which you claim to be good, concerning Jesus?

That's his challenge, really. This prologue, this word before he begins, is simply here to help you determine whether you want to keep on reading or not.

How does he resuscitate our willingness to believe in anything good again? Interestingly, the first reason he provides is that the prophetic record of scriptures promised it.

[8:25] That's his opening salvo. I've got good news and you need to understand that the prophetic record of Israel put down in scripture promised it.

That's reason number one. You can see it there as it opens in verse two. 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 paths straight.

Evidently there was, for those of us who read the Old Testament record, an expectation that we could rightly hold that something good was coming in a world gone wrong.

And that which was coming was that God himself would arrive on the scene. You could almost call it the arrival of a king.

And the king was himself God. Interestingly, while it says, as it is written in Isaiah, the prophet, that opening little glance comes from Malachi. This line, behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way.

[9:44] I looked it up this week again and took a fresh read just to see what the prophetic record promised. Chapter three, verse one in Malachi, that last of the prophets written in our scriptures.

Behold, it says, chapter three, verse one, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. Back to verse two.

Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord. And they're asking, where is the God of justice? You see, the heavy heartedness of the people were the injustices that continue to unravel lives.

And the promise in the prophetic record was God is going to come. God's going to come. Now, Isaiah picks up on that.

That's the latter half, what you'd find in our Bibles in verse three, the voice of one crying in the wilderness. This indicates that not only was God going to come, but that a messenger would precede God and his arrival to God.

[10:55] The arrival to make things right. Forerunner, as it were, an advanced team. In fact, this came from our call to worship this morning, Isaiah chapter 40.

There was to be a voice crying out in the wilderness that would prepare the way for God's arrival. In fact, in Isaiah 40, when it finally gets there, it says, Arise, get up on the mountain and say, behold your God.

That's Mark's opening. He's put the prophetic record on its feet. I actually like the fact that there's a little gloss from Malachi, this kind of short and final word.

400 years before the birth of Christ, wedded to Isaiah, who's kind of the heavyweight and a long winded witness of what God would do.

In other words, what he's doing, Mark that is, is he's putting Isaiah on his feet and saying the prophetic record promises good news.

[12:15] God's going to actually come and lift the weight of your heavy heart. Do something with the guilt of the sin, which you know you're incapable of doing. Unwinding the frailties of our body, which are subject to sickness and disease and even death.

That God is going to arrive on the scene and fix things. That's the record. And so Isaiah, the big long standing voice says, I promise it.

And Malachi, the last of the writing prophets says, I do too. And so the 17 books, which close your Old Testament are wrapped into verses two and three.

And Mark has muscled them to their feet to say, good news. What the prophetic record promised is here in Jesus.

Now we don't have time, do we, to go through all those promises. But suffice it to say, it would meet the heaviest weight that your heart enters into worship with today.

[13:37] For your family, for your future, for your own self and your sin.

The prophetic record stands on its feet. He, in a sense then, is echoing, or I should say that G.K. Chesterton in 1953 echoes what this opening salvo does.

He's a great writer and he wrote a play called The Surprise. And the last line of the play is astounding. It's a play in which everything went wrong, although the author intended it all to go well. And he envisions high above the stage, an author of the play, leaning over the edge of the scenery, seeing how the characters beneath him have totally ruined his good intentions.

And all of a sudden you hear coming from the author himself, this wonderful phrase, stop!

[14:52] I'm coming down! That's the prophetic record. I mean, it'd be nice, wouldn't it, to be entering into the presence of the King.

But the hope that the Bible's providing is that God would come and enter into our presence to meet your need. There's a second reason that he would put before us.

It isn't merely the written record of the prophetic promises. It's the first century's greatest preacher himself, John the Baptist.

You can see he appears suddenly in verse 4. John the Baptist appears baptizing. The masses are coming to him.

They're confessing their sins. They're being prepared to live well in God's world. And he's preaching.

[15:57] And the preaching of John is that there's somebody coming behind me who is that promised one. Jesus himself would say that John was the messenger of the Old Testament in flesh.

That the Baptist is none other than the Elijah who would come to get things ready for God's descent. And so here he is.

The preeminent preacher joins Isaiah, joins Malachi, joins the 15 books of the prophetic record. And he says, there's reason to hope.

Good news is on the cusp. It's here on the horizon. It's almost here. And I'm not even worthy to untie the sandals of the one God who is coming.

You know, the servant in the first century household, if you had the lowest menial job, you were washing the feet of those who came in to prepare them to live well in your home.

[17:06] You know, I was recently in Vietnam. They all take their shoes off inside. I couldn't do it. They were gracious enough to let me keep my clothes, toed shoes on.

But I've seen men preaching bare feet. I've seen homes where, well, you go to the knee household. You know, I kind of just barely tip over the threshold and wave at everybody.

Because I know the practice in that home is everybody takes their shoes off. Well, what he's saying here is, I'm not only not worthy to wash the feet of the one who's coming with good news, I can't even take his sandals off.

The fascinating thing, though, is what John the Baptist does. In the scriptures, as the messenger whose promise to proclaim God's presence now come, He points us to Jesus instead.

We're expecting God. And the baptizer says, let me give you Jesus. This is a mystery.

[18:24] This means that according to John's preaching, Jesus is both the promised Christ who would arise as a servant, savior, king, and at the same time, God the Son come in the flesh.

John the Baptist witnesses that while you're looking for God, I'm going to show you Jesus, who is God. In fact, when he sees them, another gospel record says, behold, the Lamb of God was going to take away the sin of the world.

Now, this is a surprise. How is it that Jesus can be both the promised heir of David's throne and the divine judge who would bring justice, God himself?

It's been a perplexing conundrum for many. Maybe you're here this morning saying, yes, this is one of the questions I have before ever committing to the gospel of Jesus Christ, is to have some reasonableness expressed to me about how Jesus is God, therefore executing justice by his payment for sin, yet also merciful in meeting the requirements of the kingship that would allow us to enter into God's presence.

You know, there was a guy mid-20th century that was asking the same kinds of things. He was an atheist, become agnostic, and now kind of a renowned writer.

[20:14] His name was C.S. Lewis. His name is C.S. Lewis. He did these things for children in ways to help them express things.

I looked up this week what he said when he was moving from atheism to agnosticism to becoming a Christian. He said, if Shakespeare, that's the author, and Hamlet, that's a character in his play, could ever meet, it must be Shakespeare's doing.

Hamlet couldn't initiate a thing. But Shakespeare, that is the author, could, in principle, make himself appear as author within the play, and write a dialogue between Hamlet and himself.

The Shakespeare within the play would, of course, be at once Shakespeare and one of Shakespeare's creatures. And then he says, it would bear some analogy to the incarnation.

I find that fascinating that God, the author, the one the prophetic record promises will come, writes himself into the script through Jesus, who is now both the author and the creature, who fulfills the author's intention.

[21:58] This is the witness of the Baptist preaching. So I started by asking, anyone need some good news? And I think we all feel like we need it, but it's got to be legitimate.

Got to be strong enough to hold the heaviness of my heart. Well, here it is, twofold thus far. The prophetic record is on its feet. The promise was there. The preaching of John is now joining it and saying, the one that God promised to come in himself is arriving in the person of Jesus.

And then the witnesses continue to come. I mean, look how they build. Verse nine. In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, was baptized by John. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open, a spirit descending, a voice from heaven. You are my beloved son with you. I am well pleased. Heaven's voice authenticating at the baptism of Christ.

Good news. The King has come. We're reading this prologue on the arrival of the King.

[23:18] The fascinating description. Jesus now walking in obedience under the law. The heavens being torn open. The word there is like schizo, where we would get like schizophrenia, this tearing.

It's the same word you're going to get months from now in chapter 15 when the curtain is schizo. The curtain is torn. But here, the tearing of the heavens is attended by the voice of the Father that says, yes, good news.

This one is my son. It won't be until chapter 15 that what's tearing down here is a curtain which separated our relationship with God, that the voice will go back up to heaven.

The voice of the centurion who will say, truly, this was the son of God. But at the opening of the book, the gospel, the good news, God's voice says, yes, you can trust this record.

My beloved son. Even so, softest of subtle hints here that this son will undergo suffering.

[24:38] It's called the beloved son. The only other time you get this, I've been taught by Dr. Rothschild herself on this, is in the Old Testament record when Abraham has his beloved son, Isaac.

And Isaac, as the beloved son, is the one who is wedded to the sacrificial moment which God requires.

So even here, at the beginning of the gospel, you're beginning to see that the good news is not only about Jesus. It's not only promised in the prophetic writings.

It's not only attended by the preaching of the preeminent preacher of the first century, the one who Josephus gives three times as much material to than he does to even Jesus.

It's attended by the voice from heaven. And look at this. It's also attended, I love it, by the opposition of hell. Look at this.

[25:44] The spirit immediately drove him into the wilderness. Verse 12. He was in it 40 days being tempted by Satan. Now, again, you know me well enough to know I'm not a legal scholar, but I've been told that there are benefits at times to having a hostile witness.

I think Satan is a hostile witness. Now, from what I understand, you get a hostile witness on the stand, you begin to question them with leading sentiments that might actually bolster your case. The fact that Satan is here opposing Jesus makes me want to ask him, why do you care so much about Jesus?

Why are you in opposition to this one? You see, the opposition of Satan bolsters the claim of Mark that Jesus is worthy of our attention.

Because all the things that are wrong in the world stem from the prince of the darkness of the air, the unwinding of our lives. And if that one wants to hinder this one, then this one might have something good to deliver to all of us.

[27:08] And if that's not enough, come on, right there at the end. Strange language. He's with wild animals and the angels were ministering to him.

Think of it. Good news. Good news. Got to get that across to people at Christ Church Chicago who are heavy hearted and need news good enough, but solid enough to trust.

The prophetic record promised it. The preaching of the Baptist confirmed it. The voice of the father authenticated it.

The opposition of Satan bolsters it. And the angelic help from heaven, angels, well it supports it. Anybody in need of some good news? Anybody got a family member? Subject? Subject? Subject to the frailty of life?

[28:25] Anybody got a child? Wayward to the ways of the Lord? Anybody got a future that you had planned out that seems to be failing and is frail?

Anybody got a mother-in-law like we're going to see later that's on a sick bed? Anybody got a sin that's just eating away at you and even though you came on Easter, you're not quite yet sure where you go to get it off you?

Anybody heavy hearted? Anybody needing good news but wanting something strong enough that you can actually trust? Mark is trying to say to you, my prologue's almost done and I hope you'll come back and read on.

And notice how he closes verses 14 and 15. The preaching of Jesus announces that very same good news.

Notice the word gospel. We saw it in verse 1. The beginning of the gospel. Now Jesus comes proclaiming the gospel of God.

[29:44] And then at the end of verse 15, repent and believe in the gospel. What you've got to understand here in the prologue is simply this. According to Mark, Jesus is God's good news for you.

It's the gospel of Jesus, verse 1, verse 14. It's the gospel of God. The gospel of God is the good news of Jesus.

Jesus is the one you and I need. And so he says, the time is fulfilled.

The kingdom of God is at hand. Heaven has broken into a broken world in Jesus to begin the transformational work of overthrowing the fall, our frailties, our failings, our sins, the world's sicknesses, the pretenders.

The long seasons of disappointment. He says, it's now here. Now notice what Mark declares, Jesus demands.

[31:12] Look at the very end. There's a demand to repent and believe in the gospel. I'm going to call you to that even now to begin thinking, I've got to start changing the way I think.

I've got to supremely change the way I think about Jesus. I've got to start believing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophetic record written down.

That Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world as John preached it. That Jesus is the son and he's the one that pleased the father and I now hold it.

That Jesus is the one that's opposed and there was good reason for it. That Jesus had help just even as I now need it. That Jesus preached good news that I have to repent and start believing in it. Anybody need good news? I offer to you today, Jesus, the balm of Gilead.

[32:14] The healing ointment of your heart. The Messiah that has mercy on your mind.

The one that was dead and now raised to life. Who guides and guards our own body. Not a hair can fall from my head without my Savior's command from heaven.

Because he is my hope in life and in death. He is my comfort. If I have Jesus, I got good news.

Our Heavenly Father, we all need good news. Thank you that Mark opens his book on Jesus providing reasonableness for belief that will jar us from our depressed minds that wonder if anything good yet is there in the world for us.

And we pray now that we would affirm all the things that this gospel says for us as a congregation in his name.

[33:41] Amen.