

The Gospel of the Conquering King

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Preacher: Rev. Daniel Avitan

[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your word. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. Lord, as we open up your gospel, we ask that your Holy Spirit would do a work in our lives through your word.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Please have a seat. It's a wonderful day. We're together at last.

Some of you guys are visiting, which is tremendous. We are opening up our service, our first service in the Gospel of Mark. It's a wonderful place to open up God's word, or to open up for our first service.

If you have a Bible, fantastic. I'd ask you guys to follow along. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles on the back table. Anytime you can just get up and grab a Bible, feel free to do that.

There are some movies, and this is a very common illustration that I've heard recently, actually.

[1 : 05] But there are some movies where if you miss the first bits of the movie, you fail to understand the plot.

There is something very important for some movies, the way they have that opening scene being so important for the rest of the narrative, for the rest of the plot.

Interestingly, sometimes there's an important bit that is revisited at the beginning, and it's also that we see again in the back. So the placement of certain instances in a movie, I mean, it's very critical.

It's very critical if we're to watch a movie, understand the importance of the narrative plot. This is exactly what we're going to explore this morning in Mark's Gospel.

Before we get into the Gospel, a little bit about Mark. Mark doesn't write his Gospel in such a way that we hang on every single word Jesus says, that Mark communicates in such a way that we hear the words of Jesus, but more importantly, we see what Jesus does, how he interacts with people, how he heals people and their reaction to him.

[2 : 29] One commentator I read said that Mark, what he does is he writes with a paintbrush. He asks us to enter into the drama that he is describing, for us to understand who this Jesus really is, what he has come to do, how he interacts with the rich and the poor and the marginalized or the proud.

And that's a revelation of who he is, who God is. It's very important that as we read in these next coming weeks and months, enter into the narrative, enter into the story.

Mark is writing with a paintbrush. And it's really, really, it's a fantastic, fantastic way to read the Scriptures. This morning, we are in the opening verses of Mark.

And like I mentioned about certain movies having an opening scene that is critical for the whole narrative and it's revisited at the end, we have two of those instances in our section of Scripture this morning.

It's very important that we understand this, actually, for the rest of our time in Mark. It's a critical bit for us. And we're going to be looking at two things that will present themselves in this opening section, but that we'll also revisit at the end of chapter 15, at the end of Mark's Gospel.

[3 : 59] The first thing is right off the bat, Mark 1, 1, and we see it again in verse 11, where Jesus is called the Son of God. This title that is given to him, the Son of God.

The second thing is when Jesus gets baptized, the heavens are torn open. It's interesting. We see this right off the bat.

We're actually going to see it again in the latter part of chapter 15. Very critical, very critical bit for us to keep our eye on as we read the Scriptures.

So let's take a look first at the Son of God. Right off the bat, Mark 1, 1, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus gets baptized.

The heavens are torn. The Spirit descends. And in verse 10, verse 11, And a voice came from heaven. This is God the Father speaking. You are my beloved Son. With you, I am well pleased.

[5 : 01] In Scripture, no other person was called the Son of God. No other person. Moses was a servant of God. Aaron, the chosen one of God.

Abraham was the friend of God. David was the man after God's own heart. The Apostle Paul was the apostle of God. Only the nation of Israel is called the beloved Son of God.

But Israel proves to be unfaithful time and time again. And so, this title, the Son of God, it begins to evolve in the story of Scripture.

And eventually becomes a messianic title for the offspring of King David. That somebody would come from Israel, and he would be called the Son of God, and he would save Israel.

And this title, Son of God, very important, begins to evolve. But there was no specifics with this messianic title. That the Messiah would come, and he would save Israel.

[6 : 02] But how? How would he save Israel? How would he go about doing it? There's allusions to it. We can read back, you know, from the Gospels. We know about Jesus.

We can read back into the prophetic books, especially in Isaiah, in the servant of the Lord. But if you're there, present, before Jesus' time, who's the Messiah?

What is he going to do? How is he going to save us? The Son of God, this idea, it begins to evolve. And by the time Jesus comes on the scene, there's centuries go by without God speaking to his people.

And the Son of God became this title for the Messiah. The expectations were that the Messiah would come and would absolutely smite Israel's foes.

But even then, the Messiah was still just a man. That's it. He was just a man in the minds of the Israelites. A mighty man. A fantastic man. A man of excellence.

[7 : 04] A man full of God's strength. But still a man. A man. Jesus, right off the bat, it seems like just, not like a throwaway bit, but verse 1-1, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

It's like the intro credits to a movie. It seems like it's just some kind of passing title. But right off the bat, what Mark is doing, he's saying, let me introduce you to the hope of Israel.

Israel. The hope of the Messiah. The one who will come to save Israel. And we'll see what that kind of looks like.

Because it's not just Israel. But Mark here is declaring that the hope has arrived. He's on the scene. He's come.

It's interesting. Right off the bat, following on the heels of Mark's declaration, we see that this Son of God is no mere man.

[8 : 08] He is most certainly a man. But there's something divine about him. He's, he's, can't quite put your finger on, on who this Son of Man is, because right off the bat, in verse 2 and verse 3, Mark quotes prophetic books that talk about the Son of Man, the Messiah.

And all of a sudden, it's using the language allotted just to God. Talking about John the Baptist. Behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way.

This is talking about John the Baptist. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord. Make his path straight. This Son of God is divine.

He is not just a mere man. Not just a savior. Not a guy that is just a bit stronger than the foe is able to vanquish them. No, there's something, there's something greater to this Son of Man.

Verse 8 also. John the Baptist speaking of the Son of Man, of Jesus. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 21] Only God gives the Holy Spirit. Nobody else can give the Holy Spirit of the Almighty God but God himself. All of a sudden, this Son of Man, like it is an incredible, all of a sudden, it's like we double click on it.

And we see that the Son of Man is pregnant, like the title is pregnant with meaning. It's no mere generic title.

God has visited Israel and he will save her. And it is so interesting because we will see that this term doesn't show up again on the lips of anybody else until the very end of chapter 15.

If you turn with me to chapter 15, keep your finger or thumb in chapter 1. In 15, I'll just, I mean, we're not going to get to this for some time as we preach through the gospel of Mark chapter by chapter.

But here we are. Jesus is on the cross. He has died. And this is what it says. This is a Roman centurion. Verse 39 of chapter 15.

[10 : 40] See, Mark has, it seems like there's a bit of a secret about who Jesus really is.

That Jesus is keeping from his disciples, from the religious leaders, from those who are poor. Basically, all of Israel.

He keeps, it's almost a bit of a messianic secret. And the first person in Mark's gospel to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God is a Roman centurion.

And it's very likely that he was the captain of the guard squad that put Jesus to death. It was his enemy. Jesus' enemy.

A foreign ruler. Jesus' son of God. Jesus' son of God. The Messiah was supposed to smite the Romans into oblivion. To crush them. That was the messianic hope.

[11 : 43] And here Mark has, the first person to confess the Son of God, is the captain of the death squad. It's remarkable. And all of a sudden, this small picture of the Messiah, the Son of God, who was just supposed to save Israel, we get a glimpse into the Son of God saving the entire world.

There is no insider or outsider if you confess who Christ is. There is no greater outsider than the centurion who put him to death.

He is a pagan. He is a man of blood. A man of terror. And Mark here, remember, right? He bookends the entire gospel with the Son of God.

And we see it at the beginning and we see it at the end. This is a very important scene. And why is this important for us? God is eliminating the boundary markers of who's in and who's out.

Who's clean and who's dirty. Who's beloved and who is just refuse. And it's not based on where you come from or who you are.

[12 : 56] It's based on what Christ has done. What he has done. And all of a sudden, in our culture, in Canada, where there is so much polarization. And there always is polarization, of course.

But it seems it's hit a bit of a fever pitch. We see here God throwing all that stuff on its head. The centurion doesn't...

I mean, he's still a centurion. He doesn't go through some kind of de-radicalization class before he is brought into the kingdom.

Or at least recognizes that Christ truly is God himself. On the spot. On the spot. And we remember him. We're reading about him 2,000 years later.

Remarkable. What do we do? We, in our culture, we decide who are the clean and unclean. And we're polite about it. We are. We don't say it... We scoff at the people who are overt in how they draw lines in the sand between the good and the bad.

[14 : 07] Based on politics. Based on vaccination status. Based on who you have a history with.

What your history is. What part of town you live in. It's true. I mean, those are a few examples. You could fill in other examples yourselves, I'm sure.

If you're honest with yourselves, think about ways that you've done this. Or maybe you have been on the receiving end. You haven't been the one who has decided who's clean and unclean.

You're just unclean. It's just been... It's just... It's been your experience. People talking down to you. Or marginalizing you. This is... This happens.

And why does it happen? We... What we do is we put ourselves in the judgment seat that only God can occupy.

[15 : 07] Only God can occupy that judgment seat to declare who truly is clean and unclean. And he has, in fact. The scriptures speak very clearly that sin, it makes all of us unclean.

And nobody in here, nobody in here is faultless. Nobody is. Certainly the Roman centurion wasn't. And yet, a work was done in his heart to open his eyes to the truth.

Remember, moments before, earlier that day, he participated in a mock... of mocking Jesus, of spitting on him, of striking him.

And then all of a sudden, he recognizes. And if that's not the work of the Holy Spirit, I mean, this is... that's exactly it. So what we see here is that Jesus, he is reconstituting humanity into clean and unclean.

And it is based upon what he has done on the cross at Golgotha. That he has taken upon the sins of the world so that we are made clean and right by what he has done.

[16 : 21] It's remarkable. Son of God. God. We don't see it too often in the scriptures. And yet, it is the very title that really marks the gospel of Mark.

So that is one aspect, one thing that starts at the beginning, we see at the beginning, and then we see at the end. What is the other one?

Well, the other one, like I mentioned, is in verse 10. I'm going to read verses 9 to 11, the baptism of Jesus, and we'll see it again. In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open 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. So at this baptism, the heavens are torn, and the image is of a violent tearing, like a child opening their gift at Christmas.

[17 : 25] You aren't saving the wrapping paper. It is done. I also like the example, it's like when certain people get home decor boxes in the mail from Wayfair, and they just tear into them, and the box is shredded to confetti.

The idea is that there's a violent tearing. There is a violent tearing that is pictured here. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus.

The Father affirms his delight with the Son. And here, it's a bit of a side bit, we won't get into it, but it's not that God the Father is adopting Jesus as his Son.

It's presupposed from the beginning of time. This isn't like a divine adoption. But here we see the Father affirming his delight with the Son. We see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit glorifying one another, distinct yet together.

And this is a monumental event, because like I mentioned, we will see something very similar to it at the end of chapter 15. And by the way, this was witnessed publicly.

[18 : 31] This wasn't just an existential experience that Jesus had. There were witnesses to Jesus' baptism, and witnesses to the heavens being torn, and the Holy Spirit descending upon him.

And the voice of God declaring his delight in the Son. So what is this other example? Well, again, put your thumb in to chapter 1, and join with me in chapter 15.

And this is right before the centurion says what he says about Jesus being the Son of God. So Jesus, why don't we back it up a little bit, starting in verse 33.

Chapter 15, verse 33. And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?

Which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And some of the bystanders hearing it said, Behold, he is calling Elijah. And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink, saying, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.

[19 : 40] And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. Verse 38. Here it is. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. It's the same word.

It's the same idea. It's the same picture of a violent tearing of the curtain temple in the second temple in Herod's temple that represented the separation between man and God.

So we have the heavens being torn open and the spirit descending, and we have, after Jesus has breathed his last, as the Son of God on the cross.

The very thing that separated symbolically mankind from God, it's torn in a way where it's not going to be stitched up again.

Just in case anybody wanted to give that a go. It's done. The curtain's done. There's always been this separation between God and man from our first father and mother, Adam and Eve, sinning in the garden.

[20 : 53] They were expelled from the garden. They were separated from God. There's always been some kind of separation. We have this wonderful kids' book. It's called The Garden, The Curtain, and The Cross, and it tells this story.

And the refrain is, because of your sin, you can't come in. That's what God says to people. Not because God is mean, but because He is holy.

And because the holy God can't interact with sinful, broken, messy people. And how do we sin? Because sin can be, again, a term thrown around to ostracize this group from that group.

But in this case, I'll say this. Instead of recognizing the kingship of God, we fancy ourselves as kings. Once again, our autonomous rule bubbles up, our ego takes over, we know what's best.

We put ourselves in the seat of the Creator. We assume His throne. And here's the thing. The irony is that at best, we're puppet kings of our own lives, if we think that we are the kings and queens of our lives.

[22 : 08] Puppets. Puppets. Because the real ruler will be our flesh, our desires, that are not kept in check, but that just rage, our bellies, our eyes, our sexual drives, our desires for prestige.

The world will also direct the way we, what will be our king, will be the true king and we'll just be puppets. The world has a wonderful way of saying what is the right way to live from one moment to the next.

And that's exhausting to keep up with. And it's also false. And then there's the enemy. He will tempt, and if we give in, He is ruling the roost.

He is the king. And we are just puppet kings. That's if, that's if we assume the throne of God. The thing is, I mean, we don't want to be ruled by anybody, but the fact is we were made to be ruled.

And that's not exactly a fun thing to say. But it's the right thing to say. Because when we live under God's rule, it's, it's the most freeing we can be.

[23 : 23] the most free we can be. The most authentic selves we may be will be under God's rule. There's this wonderful, I think it is, the collect for Concord.

It talks about, in your service there's perfect freedom. It's in the liturgy for morning prayer. In your service to the king there's perfect freedom.

It's a wonderful kind of juxtaposition. But this is the reality of it. I mean, God, what he has done in Christ, the son of God, the king of the universe, he has made a way for us to enter into his presence again.

So that we are free. And what are we free to do? We are free to serve him. So we have this tearing at the baptism and we have this tearing at his death and it means for us that we get to be under the reign and rule of Christ.

And it is freedom. It is freedom. It's wonderful. So how should we live? There's two ways. The first is to live a humble life of worship to Jesus.

[24 : 42] In certain homiletics classes that's like a preaching class. You talk about application. And, you know, the best application is to come away from a sermon, from a church service and worshipping Christ.

Knowing him more and worshipping him. Having your desire to please him be the very main desire guiding your life.

So the first way that we should live in light of the Son of God who dies on the cross to save humanity, who tears the curtain in two, ushering us back into the very presence and rule of God is to worship.

You will live a more free life, a life more full of peace because your sins are counted against you no more. A clean conscience.

It is wonderful. We see this in John the Baptist. We'll go back with me. Chapter 1, verse 7. John says this.

[25 : 54] And he preached, John 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. The job of the man who was to take off the sandals and wash the feet was the slave, was the servant, was the lowest in the pecking order.

The feet, it was disgusting. And John is saying the right thing. I am not even worthy to stoop down to untie his sandal.

May we have that heart. May we have that heart. We will partake in Holy Communion soon. And one of the prayers we'll pray is the prayer of humble access.

And it says, We do not presume to come to this, your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. It's the same heart that John is having here.

We humbly, humbly submit. And the fact is, what Christ does on the cross, we come into the throne room of God, and yes, we can approach God boldly because of Christ.

[27 : 06] We can call him Abba Father, like a closeness to that fatherly relationship, but he is still a king. He is still a king and he deserves reverence. And it's a humble heart that approaches the living God.

That is the way of the Christian. The second thing is linked to that humble life of worship to Jesus.

And it's to expect hardship. It really is to expect hardship. To follow the way of Christ as the people of God. The wilderness is always the destiny.

Israel gets rescued from slavery and bondage to Egypt right into the wilderness for 40 days. And here we have Jesus going into the wilderness for 40 years and Jesus going into the wilderness for 40 days.

That's no coincidence. Mark is helping us to remember the way of God's people. The way of God. John, his whole ministry is in the wilderness.

[28 : 11] It is difficult. It means that when we put ourselves under the lordship of Christ and submit to his ways, yes, we will have peace. we will have joy but we also have hardships because his way is not the world's way.

He came to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth and just remember you were part of the kingdom of earth. You don't like you feel straight jacketed.

You are in active rebellion against the kingdom of heaven. The centurion, remember, he is inactive actively opposing the kingdom of heaven.

Now he is a part of it and it comes with great sacrifice and hardships and it doesn't necessarily mean you will be facing martyrdom but it might mean that you don't compromise that work in a way that would get you promoted.

That there is a thankfulness that totally trumps the desire to climb over people stepping over them stepping on them.

[29 : 23] It might mean living a celibate life and that's hard it's lonely but it's the right way to do it it's hard there's hardships getting reviled for sharing your faith faith.

We have brothers and sisters in Central Asia we support Church of the Messiah a brother in East Asia that this is his very reality is the potential the ever possible likelihood of him getting persecuted for his faith facing hardships and yet if you talk with him he has joy he has peace so how should we live in light of all of this as God being our king the son of God in worship and in expectation that he will lead us down the same path that he walked friends if you do not know this king if you are new to the Christian faith or you fall in the way you're a seeker in some kind of capacity like the Roman centurion who says truly this was the son of God this is just like that just in a moment and you are part of his kingdom you are a son or a daughter of the living

God you come under the lordship and kingship of the son of God Jesus Christ and for us may we ask that the Holy Spirit would work in our lives work in our lives helping us to put away sin it's like we still like the Israelites we still kind of pine after the food the life of Egypt failing to remember that it is bondage and that God offers us so much more we struggle with living in the kingdom of heaven on earth and we need to ask that the Lord will give us strength to do so let's stand and let's pray ask if you have children you can get them now and sign them out and bring them back for a time of holy communion heavenly father we thank you so much for your wonderful truth in scripture that the son of

God was much more than just a savior for Israel against their occupying enemies but he was the savior for all mankind that his death on the cross tore the separating barrier between us and you Lord let us live into that every day by your spirit in Jesus name Amen