

The authority of Jesus to call people into his kingdom

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is from Mark chapter 1, starting at verse 16. Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

And Jesus said to them, Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men. And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets.

And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.

And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit.

And he cried out, What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. But Jesus rebuked him, saying, Be silent and come out of him.

[1 : 24] And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this?

A new teaching with authority? He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

Thanks, Emily. Keep that open. We're going to be focusing today on the verses 16 to 20. And then next week we'll come to 21 to 28.

Let me pray. Let's pray as we begin. My soul clings to the dust. Give me life according to your word. Father, we pray, indeed, that you would give us life according to your word. Thank you that your word is life-giving. And thank you that it is encouraging, and it restores our hearts, it tells us the truth, and it gives light.

[2 : 37] So, Father, we would come to your word this morning, ready and humble. And we ask that you would indeed speak to each one of us. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, we were left on a bit of a cliffhanger last week. The cliffhanger last week was that God's everlasting king has arrived.

Chapter 1, verse 1 of Mark. Do you see that there? The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which means God's everlasting king. God's everlasting king has arrived.

The messenger has come. He's been anointed by the Holy Spirit. And therefore, do you see verse 15? Jesus goes out and proclaims the kingdom of God is near.

God's everlasting king has arrived. And therefore, the kingdom of God, the final rule of God, is near. And the cliffhanger we were left on is, what will God's everlasting king do?

[3 : 44] These first five verses of the body of the gospel, I think, teach us three very profound and very surprising lessons.

And can I just say, if you're with us here for the first time, or if you're looking into Christianity with us, you're so welcome with us, looking into the Christian faith. We love it when people come and join us, and I hope people feel they can invite, you can invite people to come and hear these talks in Mark.

I hope, if that's you, I hope you will be surprised by the real Jesus. He is very surprising. A lot of us, all we've heard of him is kind of secondhand or thirdhand, but when you actually come to see who he is, what he says, and what he does, actually were caused to go, hang on a second, that's not

what I thought he was about.

Jesus was passing by the Sea of Galilee. You'll see that in verse 16 on the western side of the lake. The Sea of Galilee, the word sea is quite a generous translation.

It's quite a generous word. The word can also mean lake. If you've ever been, it's 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. That is a big lake.

[5 : 11] It's much bigger than our biggest lake in England and Wales, which is the lake.

Windermere is the biggest one. I think there's a bigger one in Scotland, Loch Lomond. Windermere is 10 miles long, but only one mile wide.

So you've got the Lake of Galilee. It's a big lake, if you can imagine it. And Jesus is walking along the western shore. And as he's doing that, he calls these four fishermen to follow him.

And they left everything to follow him. Now, I wonder what you would expect the Son of God to do if he came to earth.

What would you expect God to do if he came to London? What we have here is the equivalent of the Son of God, if he came to London, came to Dulwich, walking around Hearn Hill, walking into Pizza Hotline, which is a pizza place which I'm yet to try out.

It looks good. And saying to the man behind, or woman behind the desk, follow me. And they leave everything. They leave the shop.

[6 : 34] And they just follow him. Or walking down one of the streets, knocking on a door, someone's working from home. Follow me. They leave their house. And they follow him.

Do you find that strange or striking? It's the first thing that the Son of God did, according to Mark. I think we have three lessons here from these five verses.

Firstly, Jesus' priority to call people. Secondly, his authority to call people. And thirdly, his impact when he calls people. Firstly, his priority to call people into his kingdom.

I think the placement makes the point. The first thing Jesus does, as reported by Mark, is to make a beeline for these four unremarkable fishermen. What, therefore, has Jesus, the Son of God, come to do at this point in history?

The time between his arrival and his return. Can I say, he has not come to change this world, but to call people to follow him into the next.

[7 : 53] He has come to fill his eternal kingdom with people. That's his priority. And once you've seen this, I think it's hard to miss the point that Mark is making.

It's a massive point. That is the work of Jesus in this age. And notice, to call people out from this world.

Do you see that? Both times, verse 18, they left their nets. And verse 20, they left their father. To call people out from this world.

To leave behind their nets, their jobs, their family. All the priorities and concerns of this world. To follow him into his eternal kingdom.

Jesus has not come to change this world. At least not in the sense that we might have expected or asked from the Son of God. But to call people to follow him into the next.

[8 : 57] What kind of people is he calling? Who are these blokes? It's quite fun reading the commentaries on this. Some people think, you know, they were fishermen and therefore they were poor on the bread line.

Others say they were fishermen and therefore they were actually really, really quite well off. To me, it seems neither really. You've got Peter and Simon and Andrew.

They've got their own business. They're working men. They're not poor. They're not rich. Similarly, James and John. But they were nobodies.

Nothing remarkable about these men. They were just average guys. Socially, nobody particular. Jesus makes a beeline for them.

They were nobodies in the culture, in society. But they were somebodies to Jesus. And they were somebodies to the Son of God.

[10 : 03] It's very personal, isn't it? Given the crowds around, we know from other Gospels there were crowds around on this day. Jesus calls these two.

You two, follow me. You two, follow me. One by one. One by one. One by one. One by one. One by one. We just need to pause here. Because in communicating what his priority is, he's also telling us what his priority is not in this age.

And that is that he did not come to end wars. Poverty. He did not come to make poverty history.

He did not come to bring justice now. He will do those things. He will do those things one day when he comes again. But that is not his work now.

The priority of the work of the Messiah in this last chapter of history. And if we think those things are his priority to change this world, we will completely misunderstand what God is doing today.

[11 : 21] In potentially a disastrous way. Because actually God is doing something much, much bigger. Much, much bigger.

Much, much better. God wants to fill heaven with redeemed, forgiven people who can enjoy him and his blessings forever.

That's what he's doing today. Filling heaven with people who can enjoy him forever. And if you think about it, that is much bigger, much greater, much better than simply tinkering with things in this world.

So that we can enjoy a slightly nicer life before we die. Remember the promise to Abraham. God's promise to Abraham all of those centuries ago.

God's promise to Abraham all of those centuries ago.

[12 : 41] Of course, that's what we've been seeing in the last 2,000 years, isn't it? Countless millions in every generation putting their trust in Christ. And it continues today.

I was reading just last week of thousands of Buddhist monks in Myanmar. Apparently in the last few years, quietly coming to faith in Christ.

It's even happening in Dulwich. As quietly, one by one, people are being called to follow the Lord Jesus.

And globally, he is filling his kingdom. His kingdom to come with people. And so first, the priority of Jesus in this age.

Don't miss it. That's Mark's point. He did not come to change this world, but to call people to follow him into the next. Secondly, his authority to call people.

[13 : 45] We don't only see his priority, but we also see the authority of the king. I don't know if you saw this as we read this. Something puzzling. Why on earth do these guys leave everything to follow Jesus?

Their job, their family. Do you see that verse 17? It's so abrupt, isn't it? Follow me. I will make you become fishers of men. And immediately, they left their nets and followed him.

It's really stark. Mark gives us no details about their reasons. But I think that's the point.

I think that's the point. It's going to be a constant theme in the gospel that Jesus speaks and then what he says happens.

Follow me. Immediately, they followed him. No reasons given. Be silent and come out.

[14 : 49] Immediately, it came out. Be clean, he says to the leper. Immediately, he was clean. Get up, he says to the paralyzed man.

Immediately, he gets up. Be still, he says to the wind and the waves. Immediately, they were still.

What is the point? The point is what we're seeing here.

What Mark is beginning to put on display for us is the authority of the king. Okay? Introduction. The king has arrived. Let me show you his authority.

But we're going to see his authority in many different spheres as we read through this first couple of chapters. But first of all, and perhaps the one we find least comfortable, his authority over people.

Do you see? Do you see? It's not that Peter and Andrew and James and John were invited by Jesus and he left it to them to decide. The point is he called them.

[15 : 58] Actually, from other Gospels, we know that Jesus on this day spent at least a day teaching them by the beach. And there were crowds and everyone was listening. In fact, Peter and Andrew, Simon and Andrew, had already met Jesus at least once before.

We know that from John's Gospel. So what meant that they followed him rather than the others?

Well, it was the authoritative words of Jesus acting on them.

Follow me. And his call was irresistible. That's Mark's point. Just as he spoke to the waves, be still, and they were still.

So he spoke to Andrew and Simon. Follow me. And they followed. And so begin to see the authority of God's king, Mark says. First, his authority to fill his kingdom with people.

Jesus is the initiator of salvation. His call is irresistible. Yes, he is that kind of king with that kind of authority.

[17 : 06] He is much more in charge of salvation than we might think. I used to work at, I was saying to guys who came yesterday, I used to work at ComRes, which was a polling company.

It no longer exists. Nothing to do with me, I'm sure. But we, I was young, in my 20s, and we had to do sales calls every morning.

So before 9 o'clock, we had to have done three sales calls, which is basically just calling people. It's the worst part of the day. Calling people completely out of the blue, probably people like some of you guys, and begging you to consider doing a survey with us, surveying MPs and that kind of thing.

Many people think Jesus is a bit like that, a bit like the sort of desperate ComRes salesman begging people to follow him.

Jesus is not a salesman. He's a king. And his call is irresistible. Let's think more about this, just a little bit.

[18 : 21] This means, therefore, if you are a Christian here today, it is not because you decided, but ultimately because he decided to call you.

He does that in a number of different ways. There's such wonderful variety. I mean, if we went around the room to hear the stories that people have, early in life, late in life, these circumstances, those circumstances, always through his word in the Bible, just as it was for Simon and Andrew.

But why are you a Christian? Because he said to you, follow me.

And you did. Because his call is irresistible. That's why, by the way, there's always a certain mystery about why some people come to faith in Jesus and others don't.

Even though they've heard the same stuff. I often think of my own story. When I was growing up, I was part of a little group of three of us, two other good mates.

[19 : 35] And we did everything together. And we went to the same church. We went to the same youth group. We heard all the same stuff for years through our teens.

Now, neither of my two dear friends today would call themselves Christians. And yet, for some reason, I was gripped by Jesus.

Why is that? The answer is here. Not because of anything in me. But because when the king of the universe calls, people follow.

And any one of you who's a Christian will be able to look back and be able to think, yes, there were means. But there's a certain mystery. Why were you gripped? When you heard the gospel.

And so many of your friends and family haven't. Because he called you. And you followed. Well, it should produce in us a deep humility, shouldn't it?

[20 : 38] And an utter sense of privilege. Why me, Lord? And if you're here today and you're not yet a Christian, can I suggest it may be, in fact, that the reason that you are here is that he is calling you to follow him.

There may be some here for whom this is uncomfortable to think about, this degree of authority.

Well, can I say, it is the first thing that Mark confronts us with about Jesus, the authority of the king. He is surprising. Jesus' call never fails. And he calls exactly who he wants. He chooses. He takes the initiative.

It is his work. And it is greatly humbling. And it means there's no room for boasting, is there, if we're Christian. No room for looking down on other people.

Oh, well, at least I can see the truth. At least I'm following Jesus. No room for that. He called us. And we followed.

[21 : 47] It means wonderfully, doesn't it, that heaven will be full of people. Rather than full of people who are able to think to themselves, oh, well done me, at least I made the right decision.

Full of people, packed to the rafters, to the man or the woman, who were called by the selection and the grace and the power of Jesus. It will be a wonderfully humble place.

No boasting in heaven. Only in him. And this truth is liberating as well as we share this message with others.

He does say, look down at verse 17. Those he calls, he makes into fishes of men and women.

That's what our lives become about. That becomes the heartbeat of our work in this world if we're Christians.

But this message is liberating as we do that. Because whether or not a colleague or a friend or a family member comes to faith in Jesus, it's not down to you and it's not down to me.

[22 : 58] But it rests entirely on his powerful call. Yes, we talk to them. Yes, we love them. We pray for them.

We open the Bible with them. But it is the Lord Jesus who must call them. And so that's why I've been praying recently when I pray for family.

Lord, please would you call them to follow you? It's all his work. It's all his power. So firstly, his priority to call people.

Secondly, his authority to call people. And then finally, his impact when he calls people. They leave their old lives behind for him.

Do you see that? It's very vivid, isn't it? Can you picture it for a second? These four men walking off with Jesus down the beach. Zebedee, the dad of James and John.

[23 : 55] Sitting in the boat, watching them as they walk off. Can you picture that? It actually happened. Can you picture Simon and Andrew's boat hauled up onto the beach, packed away, nets in it, maybe a cover over it and just left there as they walked off, away from their job to follow Jesus.

Well, that's what Jesus does. When he calls someone to follow him, he calls them to leave behind the dearest priorities of this world and of this life.

For him. For him. And for his kingdom to come. There's a phrase in cricket commentary. I know I've just alienated.

I know I've just alienated. I'm going to alienate most of the room in this. But there's a phrase in cricket commentary that they use for batsmen who can hit the ball a long way. You know, the big guys.

Well, they don't necessarily have to be that big. They're just great timing. But anyway, they can hit the ball out of the grounds and they're known for that. And the commentators will say, oh, you know, after he's just hit it, he says, when he hits it, it stays hit.

[25 : 18] Just means it goes out of the ground. They say it again and again. It doesn't seem to get old. Well, you might say, when Jesus calls someone, they stay called on their way out of this world.

Leaving behind the priorities and plans and dreams of an old life. We all know what they were. Our ambitions that we used to have. And instead filled with a new devotion, a new love and a new hope. And Jesus sets us free, therefore, from the miserable enslavement to things in this world. We all know what that's like.

We've got friends, family, living for that career, enslaved to it. That career that can never satisfy. Those dream grades, the dream university, all part of the same thing. He sets us free from miserable enslavement to the things in this world.

[26 : 30] And Jesus shows us true life and leads us into a glorious new future in his everlasting kingdom. Follow me, he says.

And so the genuine work of Jesus in a person's life. A leaving behind of the old priorities and ambitions of this life, of this world.

For him and for his everlasting kingdom. Let's pray. Let's just take a couple of moments to think and pray, perhaps, on our own, in silence.

To reflect on that. Father in heaven, we thank you for Jesus' wonderful authority.

Thank you for the wonderful hope. Thank you for what he does. He calls us away from this world into his eternal kingdom.

[27 : 37] Thank you, therefore, Father, for what you are doing today. Calling people into a great hope. The eternal life to come.

Thank you for the authority of the Lord Jesus in his call. Thank you, Jesus, for calling us to follow you.

Thank you for your grace and mercy to us and for the incredible privilege of being called by you.

And we do pray that you would help us to be about that work of being fishers of men and women in this world before you come back.

And we ask it in your name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.