

The Shepherd King

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Date: 12 February 2012

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[0 : 00] We pray. Our Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. Our Father, we ask this morning that you would help me to speak clearly and faithfully. More importantly, that you would help us all to hear, not just hear, but to put into practice the things we ought, that we might keep following our Shepherd King Jesus.

We ask it in his name. Amen. Well, we all follow leaders at different times in life, whether it's leaders of a country or a team leader at work or a coach in sport or even leaders at church.

And of course, some leaders are better than others. And so I thought I'd start this morning by mentioning some leaders and asking you to tell me if you would entrust your life to them.

OK, so this is a bit of a crowd participation moment. I know they're dicey, but I have confidence in you. So what I want you to do is I'm going to mention a name and put a picture up. And if you would entrust your life to them, thumbs up.

If you don't like crowd participation, you just do one hand, if you like. If you wouldn't entrust your life to them, then thumbs down. OK, so first person. Thumbs down. Yeah.

[1 : 13] OK, Adolf Hitler. What about the next one? Thumbs down. We had a couple at eight o'clock that went like that. OK, the next one. Now, it's not.

I love the captain's comment. You know how he ended up on a life raft before a lot of the passengers. He said, I just tripped and fell into it. Would you entrust your life to that captain? I don't know. What about the next one? Yeah. Yeah. OK. What about this one? There are no thumbs up.

I'm worried. Oh, good. Fantastic. Actually, you look quite young there, Andrew. OK, thanks, Joe. Well, today, as we return to the book of Mark, which we'll be working our way through from now to Easter, you might remember that Mark announces in his very first verse of his book that Jesus is the Christ or King, the Son of God.

And in today's chapter, chapter six, we see what sort of king or leader he is and whether he is worth following. But before we get to the type of king he is, we're given a glimpse of what it means to follow him.

[2 : 25] And so we're trialing the NIV. I should have mentioned before. We've tried the Holman. So I'm going to use the insert. And on the back of the insert is an outline. So we're up to point one on the outline, verse six of the text.

Verse six. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village, calling the twelve to him. He sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. These were his instructions. Take nothing for the journey except a staff. No bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals, but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave as a testimony against them. And so they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them. Now he, Jesus, calls the twelve apostles to himself that they might continue his mission.

[3 : 25] Remember, from chapter one, Jesus had come to proclaim the good news about the kingdom of God and urged people to repent and believe. Chapter one, verse 15. And so now the apostles were to do the same.

I take it verse 12 here in our passage today, where it says they went out preaching that people should repent is a shorthand way of saying that people should turn from living their way and start living God's way.

Believing that Jesus was bringing in God's kingdom. And if people didn't listen, then the apostles were to shake the dust from their feet to show that these people were under God's judgment.

Now it's a funny kind of action, really, shaking your leg. If we saw someone do that, we might think they had a nervous twitch or something like that. But for the Jews, it was a common practice. You see, if you had visited a pagan country outside of Israel and they were coming back into Israel, you'd actually shake the dust from that pagan country off before you came into God's country, Israel.

And you wanted to, you see, you wanted to leave that pagan country outside of Israel because that country was without God and, in fact, under judgment of God. Now I actually recently tried this with my children.

[4 : 38] They got in trouble and so as I was leaving their room, I shook my foot off at them to show that they were under judgment because they'd been naughty. They just looked at me weirdly and laughed.

But what it symbolized certainly wasn't a laughing matter, was it? You see, by doing this to these places that rejected the gospel message, the apostles were saying that that town was now under God's judgment.

In fact, even what the apostles wore indicated that much of Israel was under God's judgment. You see, Jesus tells them to only wear sandals, clothes as well, but he specifically mentions sandals and a staff, that's it.

And that's exactly the very attire that the Israelites were wearing when they were about to leave Egypt. In Exodus chapter 12, Moses told the Israelites to have their sandals on their feet and their staff in their hand, ready to leave Egypt because God was about to bring the final plague, the plague of the firstborn son upon all of Egypt.

And so the apostles, very close, indicated that Israel was now like Egypt, soon to be under God's judgment, which is why, of course, Jesus sends them out to preach in the first place, that people should repent and so be saved from that judgment.

[5 : 50] But also notice what they were not to take. They were not to take any extra gear. You know, no bottle of water, no snacks for the road, no extra clothes to keep them warm at night, no cash to buy food.

When we go away on a trip, our car is packed to the roof. And I take it that the apostles would have packed substantially as well. But Jesus has told them not to.

What's more, this is not just a day trip that they were going on. It was months. In fact, one Bible commentator estimates that it took them nine months to go around in pairs to all the towns around Galilee.

In other words, this was no easy task to take no money, no extra jumper with you. But verse 12 simply says they went. In other words, they entrusted their lives to Jesus and obeyed him, which, as I said, wouldn't have been an easy thing to do in this case.

They trusted that God would provide for their needs, just like God provided for Israel's needs in the wilderness when they left Egypt. Now, before moving on, it's worth pausing and reflecting on what this means for us.

[7 : 01] There are other things to note, but there's a large chunk of passage today, so we'll have to move pretty quickly through it. Let's think about what it means for us, though, at this point. See, we can't just simply apply every detail about the apostles to ourselves, because there are many things about the apostles that are unique to them.

For example, they are apostles. We are not. Their mission was to the Galilean towns, to Jewish towns. Our mission is to all nations. They were given authority to drive out demons.

We are not. And they were told to shake the dust from their sandals, which, well, if we tried to do that, just wouldn't work well, would it? However, we are disciples. And as we heard last week, Jesus tells his disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel to go and make disciples of all nations.

And so we are still to engage in Jesus's mission as the apostles did. And the details will look different, because there are differences. But the main point is, we are still to engage in Jesus's mission, as the apostles did, in whatever way we can.

It will look different for different people, but we must all engage in it at some level. And while we can take an extra tunic or jumper, we are still to entrust our lives to Jesus, as the apostles did.

[8 : 21] Jesus says in Matthew 6 that we are not to worry about anything, but to seek first God's kingdom. This is what it means to follow Jesus, the King. I was talking with someone after church one day who hadn't been a Christian for that long.

And he was talking to me about, he was struggling about how he could share Jesus with some of his neighbours. And he decided that one of his neighbours was going through a tough time, so he decided that he was going to try and cook a meal for them and bring it around as a way of building relationships and hopefully talking about Jesus in due course.

And I commented that it was great to see him looking for ways to share Jesus, to engage in Jesus's mission. And he turned to me with a puzzled expression and said, isn't that what Christians do? Why are you so amazed at this? I thought, yeah, it is actually. It's what Christians are to do. You see, if we're going to follow Jesus the King, it means we will engage in his mission in whatever way we can.

Not worrying about the outcome, but entrusting our whole lives to God in the process. In fact, sharing Jesus is not meant to be a burden. It's actually an extraordinary act of grace on God's behalf, did you realise?

[9 : 28] You see, God is entrusting his precious gospel message to us, weak humans. It's a great act of grace that we get to partner God in his mission.

It's not meant to be a burden. It's meant to be a great act of grace. And sometimes there will be triumph. Just two weeks ago, I received an email from a friend who said his mate Kev has just become a Christian. There is triumph sometimes.

In fact, verse 13 seems to suggest that the apostles experienced some triumph, for they drove out many demons and healed many sick. They also provoked many people to come and find out more. Just skip over the page in your reading for a moment to verse number 30. Verse number 30 to 33, we have the report. After the mission. We kind of go from mission and then there's a story about Herod and John.

And then here comes the report about the mission in verse 30. The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught. Then because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, come with me by yourself to a quiet place and get some rest.

[10 : 34] So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

You see, lots of people were coming to find out more. So many people, in fact, that the apostles are exhausted. And so Jesus tries to go to a quiet place. But people from all the towns then run ahead of them while they're traveling across the lake in the boat.

They run around to get there. Such is the curiosity provoked by this mission. And we're told in verse 44 that this crowd was at least 5,000 people.

This is on the back of their mission. Imagine we did a mission for a few months and then the following Sunday, 5,000 people turn up. That would be pretty exciting, wouldn't it? And so there is, at this stage at least, there seems to be some triumph in their mission.

But why do you think, though, Mark has put this report in verses 30 to 33 after the story of Herod and John? So it kind of goes, mission, Herod and John, mission report.

[11 : 39] Why doesn't he just go from verse 13 straight to verse 30? I mean, it would make perfect sense. It wouldn't skip a beat in the account. So why insert the event about Herod and John in the middle of their mission account?

Well, I think it's because there we see that mission is not always triumphant. At this stage, it may seem triumphant for the apostles who preach God's truth.

But it's not so for John who preached God's truth to Herod. Instead, Herod arrested John and then later killed him. And I think Mark arranges his material like this to show that while there is triumph in mission, there is also tragedy and suffering.

As some of you may have heard about Pastor Yusuf, who is living in Iran. He was arrested last October and found guilty of evangelizing, engaging in Jesus' mission, if you like. And he has appealed twice without success, so he's being found guilty, and now he's waiting his verdict. He's sitting in prison since last October. His verdict is going to come this November. More than a year he has to sit and wait. And his sentence could very well be death. You see, while there will be times of triumph, there will also be times of tragedy.

[12 : 50] But the thing to remember is that we're not seeking our own comfort in the first place, are we? Rather, we are seeking Jesus' glory. And so if we do suffer in the process, that's actually okay.

We're not supposed to be in it for our own comfort, you see. In fact, Jesus says we are blessed if we are persecuted for his sake. Do you believe that? We are blessed if we are persecuted for Jesus' sake.

Now, I'm not suggesting we go looking for persecution. But if we are, what counts is not our comfort, but Christ's glory. After all, it's his mission.

The apostles go out with his authority, verse 7. And it's his name being proclaimed. See verse 14? Come back with me to verse 14. King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known.

In verse 14, the word this that Herod hears about is the mission. Herod hears about the mission. And notice it's not the disciples' name that becomes well known. It's Jesus' name that has become well known.

[13:59] You see, the mission has been all about Jesus. And rightly so. It's not about the messengers or whether we are comfortable or persecuted or not. It's about people coming to know Jesus.

Now, this may sound pretty tough. You know, we're engaged in Jesus' mission, entrust our lives to Jesus, and even sometimes suffer for him. Now, if that's what it means to follow the king, then one might ask, is it worth following this king?

Which brings us to point two in the tale of two kings. Here, Mark contrasts King Herod with King Jesus to highlight what sort of king Jesus is.

And he starts off with Herod. So, continuing on in verse 14, we meet Herod. And then it says, Some were saying, John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. And that is why miraculous powers are at work in Jesus.

Others said, he is Elijah. And still others claimed he is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago. But when Herod heard this, he said, John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead.

[15:01] Now, we meet Herod in the midst of great confusion about who Jesus is. Some say Jesus is Elijah. Some say he is another prophet. Some say he has John the Baptist's powers. You know, John the Baptist has been raised from the dead and has given his powers to Jesus.

But what alarms Herod is not who Jesus might be, but that John might be raised from the dead.

Why? Well, because verse 17 tells us that Herod had John arrested and thrown in prison.

And in fact, later, beheaded. And so presumably, Herod is now scared that John might be back to get him. And why did Herod imprison John in the first place? Well, as I said, because John told God's truth.

See verse 18? For John had been saying to Herod, It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. You see, Herod and Herodias had an affair while they were staying at Philip's place.

And so Herod divorced his then wife and then stole his brother's wife. And John said, that's not right. It's not, is it? And so Herod put John in prison for saying that.

[16:06] But notice this didn't seem to worry Herod all that much. He just put him in prison and then got over it. It was Herodias, the new wife, that nursed a grudge, says verse 19.

Verse 19, Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man.

When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled, yet he liked to listen to him. You see, Herod wants to keep John, protect him. Now that sounds kind of admirable at first glance, doesn't it?

But he's keeping him more like a pet. He's more puzzled. He's puzzled by John. He likes to listen to him. He won't obey John. He won't change his life because of what John says. But he'll keep him alive for his own entertainment.

That's what Herod is doing. Well, in verse 21, Herodias finally gets her chance. Verse 21, finally the opportune time came. On his birthday, Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.

[17:08] When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, ask me for anything you want and I will give it to you. And he promised her with an oath, whatever you ask, I will give you up to half my kingdom.

She went out and said to her mother, what shall I ask for? The head of John the Baptist, she answered. And once the girl hurried to king with a request. I want you to give me right now. The head of John the Baptist on a platter, it says.

Now Herod knows John to be a holy and righteous man. He knows that this is not right. But because of his foolish promise to the girl, he is stuck. What will he do?

Will he stand up for what he knows is right? Well, verse 26 over the page. This is a gruesome, horrible story.

But it shows us what type of king Herod is. He is a selfish king. Not only takes his brother's wife, but he also takes John's life.

[18 : 27] First to be put in prison as his pet. And then to take his life by beheading him. And Herod is also a spineless king. Because he does all this to save face with his dinner guests.

Instead of standing out for what is right. This is our first king that Mark presents to us. Let's have a look at the second one. Pick it up at verse 34. Remember the mission report comes.

And then there's lots of people coming to Jesus. Verse 34. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them. Because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

You see, after the mission, people flock to Jesus. And when he sees them, he is moved with compassion. Why? Because they are like sheep without a shepherd or a leader.

You see, leaders or kings were often called shepherds because their job was to care for and provide for the people the way a shepherd does his sheep. But the people had had shepherds like King Herod who didn't do that.

[19 : 32] Who were selfish and looked after themselves only. And they had other Israelite kings before Herod who were not much better. In fact, some of them were much worse. And so as we heard from Ezekiel, our first reading, God will judge those dodgy shepherds.

And will himself be his people's shepherd. And will feed them in good and rich pasture, it said. In other words, he will give them abundant life.

If we have a look at the next slide, we see that. From verses 14 and 15 where God says, I myself will be their shepherd. And give them green pasture.

And then a couple of chapters later, though, it's interesting. In Ezekiel, from chapter 37, we then read, though, my servant David will be king over them. And they will all have one shepherd.

Now, of course, David has been dead for a long time by this point. And so what God is saying in Ezekiel is that he will shepherd his people through a descendant of David.

[20 : 32] You see what he's saying? God will shepherd his people through his chosen servant who will be a descendant of David. And here is Jesus, a descendant of David. About to feed these helpless people on the green grass or rich pasture.

In other words, Jesus is this chosen shepherd king through whom God will rule and care for his people. And unlike Herod, who cares only for himself and took his brother's wife and John's life, this shepherd king cares for others and gives to them.

But do you notice the first thing he gave them in verse 34? Look at verse 34 again. He saw the crowds and he had compassion on them. And so he began teaching them many things.

You see, this shepherd king knows what their greatest need is. Forgiveness and entry into God's kingdom. And so the first thing he gives them is teaching. They might hear and repent.

That is, there's a priority here to people looking after people's spiritual needs. Of course, the Bible doesn't divorce spiritual from physical, even though there's a priority to spiritual needs.

[21 : 40] And physical needs are also important. And that's what we come to in verse 35. Have a look there. By this time, it was late in the day. So his disciples came to him. This is a remote place or a wilderness place, they said.

And it's already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat. But he answered, you give them something to eat.

They said to him, that would take eight months of a man's wage. Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat? I like verse 37. You know, the disciples come with Jesus.

There's a big problem. And Jesus says, well, you do something about it. Now, it's interesting. I wonder why Jesus does that. I've got a theory. The Bible doesn't say this, so take it with a grain of salt.

They've had somewhat of a triumphant success with the mission. You know, 5,000 people. That's pretty good turnout. I wonder if the mission has gone to their head. And I wonder if that's the case, whether Jesus is reminding them that he is the source of life.

[22 : 43] And that they can do nothing without him. Just a theory. Either way, Jesus now shows them that he is the one who can provide for his people.

For verse 38, he says, how many loaves do you have? Go and see. When they found out, they said five and two fish. Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass.

So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties, taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven. He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to sit before the people.

He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied. And the disciples picked up 12 basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of men who had eaten was 5,000.

Jesus gives thanks to God to acknowledge where this food will come from. And God, through Jesus, then feeds his sheep.

[23 : 41] Just as God, through David, will shepherd Israel. And just as God, through Moses, fed Israel in the wilderness with bread, where they also sat down in fifties and hundreds. There's a link there.

So, too, God, through Jesus, feeds his people, provides for them. And notice this provision is complete. It's full. In other words, Jesus provides fully and abundantly.

He is the true shepherd, king, who cares for people and provides completely for their needs.

Indeed, he cares so much so that he goes to the cross to lay down his life for his people so that he might not just provide for their physical needs, but for their spiritual needs and give them life to the full, abundant life.

If we will but repent and believe in him. And so this is the first thing that makes Jesus worth following, you see. He is the one who loves you, who cares for you, who gave his life for you.

Now, I know many of you have heard this before, but it is truly extraordinary. Last month, I was up at Katoomba in New South Wales, catching up with some friends at CMS Summer School.

[25 : 00] It's like summer under the sun here in Victoria, down at Phillip Island. And the speaker was Peter Jensen, who's the Archbishop of Sydney, and he's a significant figure in world Anglicanism. And as he was recounting how he became a Christian, his eyes actually welled up as he spoke about Jesus, who gave his life for him.

Here's a significant leader who's been a Christian for 53 years, I think it is, who has taught the gospel many times, knows the story off the back of his hand, yet is still moved by the fact that Jesus died for him.

And that motivates him to keep living for Jesus as his shepherd king, you see. No other leader, religious or not, no other king, good or bad, has done that for you.

And if he's done that for you, for me, then how can we not follow him, you see? Well, we're running out of time, so let me just quickly go over the last section, where we see a second reason why it's worth following Jesus.

Jesus sends his disciples onto a boat, they go onto the lake, and they're struggling, and then Jesus goes out onto the lake walking on water. Not something you see every day, is it?

[26 : 22] And then he was about to pass them by, and then pick it up at verse 49. But when they saw Jesus walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost.

They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, take courage, it is I. Don't be afraid.

In the Old Testament, the only person who can control the wind and the waves is God. And here is Jesus walking on water. That's a pretty amazing control of water, isn't it?

And when he steps in the boat, it's calm. And so by his actions, he's declaring himself to be God. In fact, by his words, he does the same thing. Literally, verse 50, Jesus says, be brave, I am.

Don't be afraid. The phrase I am is the name God gave himself back in Exodus 3. And Jesus calls himself that same name. In other words, Jesus is calling himself God.

[27 : 26] And so this is another reason, a second reason why it's worth following the shepherd king. Because not only is he the one who cares for you and gives you life, but he's God himself. What other leader could put that on their CV or election campaign?

I mean, could the queen say that? I love the queen. She's not God. Could Andrew Reid say that? I love Andrew Reid too, but he's not God. Jesus is, though.

Jesus is God himself who cares for his people as their shepherd king. And so as God, nothing is too hard for him. And as our shepherd king, he will always have our best interests at heart, even if you're going through a tough time like John did.

Perhaps John's death was a way that Jesus could free John from being Herod's pet. Who knows? But what we do know is that Jesus cares and provides for his people to the point of even giving his life that he might provide us with abundant life, life eternal.

And so it is worth following him now. It is worth engaging in his mission and entrusting him with our lives, even if we suffer. Let me finish with a story. An elderly lady from one of my old churches called Beryl Box would often go around and visit people and pray with them, even her non-Christian neighbours.

[28 : 41] One day, she saw one of her non-Christian neighbours walking along the footpath, and she wanted to go out and say that she'd been praying for her son. And the reason she wanted to do this was so that it might open an opportunity to talk more about Jesus with her.

And so Beryl came out of the house, and she ran across the front lawn to try and catch the neighbour. But she tripped and fell. She broke a hip, bruised her face. I visited her in hospital, all battered and bruised, and she said, Andrew, I forgot I was 83 when I skipped along that lawn like a little girl.

She was very cross with herself, you see. And so I tried to encourage her, well, at least your motives were pure. You know, you're still trying to serve Jesus by telling others about him. And she looked almost in shock and said, Andrew, after all the Lord has done for me, how could I ever stop serving him?

I thought, spot on. Let's pray that we may never stop serving our shepherd king. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for Jesus.

We thank you that he is our shepherd king, who gave his life for us so that he might provide us with life abundant, eternal life.

[29 : 59] Father, we pray that you would help us to follow him by engaging in his mission in whatever way we can, by entrusting our whole lives to you, even when we suffer.

We ask this for the sake of Jesus, for his glory and in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.