

The King : Building His Kingdom

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Well, I'm sure many of you have seen this on the internet or over the TV, but we've all seen these time-lapse videos of photography, of these massive building projects, where they film the building being constructed over a number of months, but then condense it into a clip that's no more than a few minutes long.

I managed to find one over the internet. So sorry about the advertising, but have a look at it. There should be music as well. All right.

That happened to be the Mercedes Stadium in Atlanta. There was actually one that I found of the rectangular stadium down here in Melbourne, but didn't have a flashy sponsor, and it didn't have music to go with it, so I chose this other one instead.

But anyway, it's sort of quite magical, isn't it, when you condense it down to a few minutes, to see sort of this building rise up from the ground from scratch. Well, today in our passage, Mark didn't have time-lapse photography in his day, but what we have in his opening chapter of his gospel is that he's cleverly given us a sort of similar time-lapse, but in words of Jesus' early ministry.

As we begin to see Jesus' kingdom growing and taking shape, all in the short space of this one chapter. Now, if you recall last week, it was revealed to us that Jesus' coming fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies.

[2 : 01] He, Mark, provided witnesses to testify about the forerunner, which was John, who then prepared the way for Jesus himself, the Messiah. And then when Jesus came, he declared that in him the kingdom of God has come near.

And people are to respond by repenting and believing the good news. Well, here in verse 16, Mark shows how as people believe the kingdom grows, and Jesus builds his kingdom.

So this is not a time-lapse of a physical building, but rather the building of a spiritual kingdom. Now, these events that we read here probably took place over a period of weeks or months, but Mark has summarized them in quick succession to give us a very quick overview of how the kingdom grows. Brief though they are, what we're also given are insights into the priorities of the kingdom. So let's begin then with verse 16, with our first snippet, which occurs on the Sea of Galilee with the fishermen Peter and Andrew, James and John.

And so we read, As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will send you out to fish for people.

[3 : 27] At once they left their nets and followed him. And when he had gone a little further, he saw James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay, he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired man and followed him.

And so what we have is, back in verse 15, the call to repent and believe, but now straight away, for those who do repent and believe, there is a call for those who are already in the kingdom to follow Jesus.

And here, in both instances, whether it's Peter and Andrew or James and John, following Jesus meant for them leaving their livelihood. Now, in a sense, these four, they're unique.

They eventually become part of the 12 apostles, which none of us are called to do as Christians.

And yet, this instruction to leave all and follow Jesus is not just for them, is it?

Jesus will say later in Mark 8 and verse 34, that whoever wants to be my disciple, that is you, me, anyone, must deny themselves and take up their cross, and, same word, follow me.

[4 : 44] And so, this call, really, to follow Jesus is applicable to all. And if you want to be in God's kingdom, it requires that you leave all and follow him.

Now, let me say something about being fishing for people. I think we need to be careful not to push this analogy too far. It's not like building God's kingdom requires you to understand fishing. Okay? You don't need to know about what kind of bait to use, you know, where to cast the net, what time to set the boat out to sea. Rather, Jesus is simply using the fishing analogy, because these four men were fishermen.

He was trying to explain kingdom building in language that would resonate with them. So, for example, if they had been shepherds instead, Jesus might have said, follow me and I will send you into the pasture to tend human sheep.

Or if they were builders, he might say, come follow me and you will build a temple with living stones. Now, all of these, some of you might have already picked up, are analogies that are found in the New Testament.

[5 : 55] Right? But for these men, fishing was their thing, wasn't it? It was their livelihood. Now, I think, in fact, for James and John, they weren't just leaving their jobs, because it says that they were leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hard men.

So, this was likely the family business they were leaving. You know, I imagine on the boat, on the stern or hull or whatever, there may have been the sign, Zebedee and sons.

Limited. So, it was a big decision, wasn't it? For them to leave. Fishing was what they did to live. And probably also what they lived to do.

It was costly for them to follow Jesus. So, how does this then apply to us, those who are called to follow Jesus, but not called to be apostles?

Well, it's similar, isn't it? Because we're required to take up our cross. That is, leave all for Jesus. Now, for some of us, that may be literally leaving what we do.

[7 : 01] So, Enoch today, he's leaving whatever ambitions he had to become a full-time gospel worker. For the rest of us, however, that may not.

We may continue to do what we're doing in our place of work. But even though it's not literal, we're all called to leave figuratively.

That is, leave behind the worldly ambitions that we once had. Leave behind our selfish motivations for life. At one time, before we became Christians, that's all we had, wasn't it?

We were living for all this life had to offer alone. That was it. But now that we have Jesus and his kingdom, we have a different master to please, don't we?

One who has saved us and reconciled us to God. And so now we live for Jesus, our king. It's his goals that we live for in life. Our pursuits, our priorities, they've all changed.

[8 : 05] And so even if we haven't left our jobs, we've left our old ways, haven't we? We're now motivated by God's way. And God's way is to see his kingdom grow in us, among us, and through the people around us.

That's not an option, is it? Jesus has said, if you want to be my disciple, you have to leave all, take up your cross, and follow me.

Now does that mean, therefore, that since I'm focused on God's kingdom and if I still remain in my job, that I can just, you know, slack off and do a slack job? I know some of you might be tempted to think that.

But no. Because, as a disciple of Jesus, for you to just collect a paycheck and do a poor job, that would dishonor God's name and his kingdom, wouldn't it?

Or you might ask, am I allowed to seek promotion in my career or do further studies to improve my prospects? And again, the point is not what you do precisely, but why?

[9 : 12] What are your motivations? Is it for the kingdom or is it for selfish gain? It's all about checking our motives. And believe you me, you can have wrong motives even as a pastor doing God's work.

Enoch can do that too. Not that I'm saying he will, but it's possible to be serving God and still doing it for self-glory rather than Jesus, isn't it? And so at the end of the day, we have to leave all and follow Jesus, meaning we have to check what our motivations are for what we do.

Are we serving God and his kingdom, whatever our situation? Now if you remain in your secular job or workplace, so-called, then consider as a disciple how you are doing it in a way that grows God's kingdom.

How are you shining the light of Christ? And when the opportunity arises, do you share the good news as people are seeking to know?

Now of course, there will be some others where you will be literally leaving your livelihood, whether you're a banker or builder or baker, in order to dedicate your time fully to teaching the gospel.

[10:31] But even there, as I said before, we need to check our motivations for doing so. We need to truly deny ourselves to follow Jesus.

And of course, we mustn't forget that we also do this as a church, don't we? As we come together and do ministry, here, but also as we reach out, we are growing God's kingdom together.

And we ought to be doing it with the right motivations as well. And so for each and every one of us, every individual will be different. but it is the same calling and it is to be done with the same motivation, that of denying ourselves, taking up the cross in order to grow the kingdom.

Now of course, Jesus also calls us to follow him practically because we are his chosen workers, isn't it? It's a privilege for us to be called to grow God's kingdom for him.

God is wanting to use us and that's a great honor for us to be able to do. He's giving us his spirit in order to enable us to do that. Now what does this entail?

[11:42] Well, let's get on to the next section because, and the next point because that's where we see God growing his kingdom, Jesus growing his kingdom, chiefly in the teaching and preaching of the good news.

So verse 21, they went to Capernaum and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

So immediately here, we see that the people knew that teaching of Jesus was different to the others because why? He taught with authority. He didn't just quote from the Old Testament to lend weight to his own teaching.

Rather, his preaching and teaching pointed to the fact that he was the fulfillment of those prophecies. He spoke as though the scriptures were his very own words because they were.

And this is the teaching that people needed to hear because this was the only way into the kingdom. Now Mark doesn't give us the details of what he taught in Capernaum, but we get an idea of what he might have by looking at the Gospel of Luke in chapter 4.

[12:54] There he was in the synagogue in Nazareth and he read out that Isaiah passage chapter 61 which Brendan read today for us. And I've got it on the screen and it says this, The spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance for our God.

And here throughout chapter 1 we actually see Jesus doing all that, don't we? He has just been anointed with the Spirit and Isaiah says that that anointing is first and foremost for the task of preaching and teaching, proclaiming the good news to the poor.

It is by this means that those who believe are set free from captivity where they find forgiveness, where they find favor with the Lord. And in fact, further on, when we get to it in a while, in verse 38 and 39, Jesus makes this all explicit, doesn't he?

When he tries to avoid the crowds who have just come to witness his miracles by saying to the disciples that no, no, no, his aim for coming is to preach because he said that is why I have come.

[14:18] And yet, this little time lapse that we have in chapter 1 shows us that Jesus did do miracles as part of his ministry. His teaching and preaching were accompanied by signs and wonders.

We won't read the passage that Jenny read for us earlier, but in it, you would have recalled that Mark describes two of such miracles, isn't it?

One immediately after his teaching in the synagogue was the exorcism of an evil spirit, and then followed by him going to Simon's mother-in-law's house to heal her so that then she got up and served and waited on others.

Now, as you read through the rest of the Gospels, you will see more examples of Jesus healing and doing miracles. That was part and parcel of his ministry. But I think what Mark is doing here is to make it a point to explain to us just why Jesus did do his miracles.

It's important to understand so as not to misconstrue the place of miracles and signs in the role of Jesus' ministry.

[15 : 33] So what is the reason? Firstly, I think these miracles serve to authenticate Jesus' identity and ministry. That is, it showed that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah.

It showed and demonstrated that he was anointed by the Spirit even though his preaching and the authority by which he preached also showed that. Secondly, these miracles were an expression of the power of the Gospel.

Yes, the power of the Gospel sets people free from their sin and darkness as Isaiah proclaimed. But if this captivity came also in the form of demon possession, then of course Jesus would be moved to set them free from their bondage to Satan as well, wouldn't it?

It made no sense otherwise to say, oh, your sins are forgiven, you're free now, and then for them to still be under the control of the evil one. But thirdly, I think these signs and wonders showed Jesus' love and compassion.

It showed his character and who he is, that he cared for those who were sick or possessed. and so he's moved to act because he had the power to do so. He healed, he cast out demons because he cared for the people that were afflicted by them.

[16 : 54] And yet, when we now move on to verse 35, we also see Jesus being weary of being distracted by the demands of performing miracles.

because he knew that it took him away from his main task of preaching and teaching the gospel. So yes, the signs and wonders accompanied his preaching and teaching, but it was the preaching and teaching that Jesus saw as primary to his work.

And so we read in verse 35, very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him and when they found him, they exclaimed, everyone is looking for you.

Jesus replied, not let's go and meet them, but let us go somewhere else to the nearby villages so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come.

And so he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Jesus was indignant.

[18 : 06] He reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said, be clean.

Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning.

See that you don't tell this to anyone, but go show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony for them. instead he went out and began to talk freely spreading the news.

As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. So it's pretty clear from these two incidents that Jesus was ambivalent towards the demands of the crowd.

When the disciples came to say everyone is looking for Jesus, he was reticent to go with them. And the answer gives us the impression, doesn't it, that he knew that the crowds weren't interested in hearing his teaching.

But more so they were looking for him because all they wanted was his miracles. We've seen that already earlier with the synagogue in Capernaum and in Simon's mother-in-law's house.

[19 : 21] As the news spread of the news about his powers to heal, that was the thing that was drawing people to come. They were bringing not everyone but just those with illness and demon-possessed to be healed, wasn't it?

It was the healing that they were looking for first and foremost. And so likewise here with the healing of the man of leprosy, Jesus asked him not to tell anyone. Why?

Because he did not want the crowds to then come seek him out just for his powers to heal. Instead he said, no, you go and show yourself as a testimony to the priests.

Get yourself cleansed so that you can then come back and worship in the temple and worship God. All of these shows us, isn't it, that the focus on the miracles hindered Jesus' ability to preach.

The people were distracted, weren't they, from hearing the gospel because when they saw those things, that's what they latched on to, even though that was the secondary thing in Jesus' ministry.

[20 : 28] And yet, and this is where we see Jesus' character, despite this human tendency, Jesus still healed them because he was compassionate.

And so, when the man with leprosy begged him, if you are willing, you can make me clean, Jesus says that is indignant, or in your notes at the bottom of the Bible, he was moved by compassion. of course unwilling, is what Jesus is saying, because this man's suffering grieved Jesus deeply. And yet, Jesus also knew that what this man needed, as do all of us, more than the physical healing, was the spiritual healing, the forgiveness of sins, which only Jesus' death on the cross can achieve.

And next week, if you come back, you'll see that in Mark 2, where Jesus talks about comparing the forgiveness with the ability to heal. And so, we need to be clear too, don't we, that this is how Jesus built his kingdom.

[21 : 35] Not through the physical healing and the miracles, but first and foremost through preaching and teaching. The miracles were simply an expression of Jesus' power and compassion.

But it is true, the teaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins, that people enter God's kingdom. That is the only way. Which is why that, if you are new to this church, that is the focus of our church here.

That is the primary emphasis of us as pastors, to equip the body of Christ to do that. Now, it doesn't mean, of course, please don't get me wrong, that we don't look after people's physical needs.

No, loving our neighbor means that we share the gospel and help them practically when we can.

But, it's important to remember that of the two, what is more important is the word of God, the good news of Jesus.

Otherwise, we, like the crowds, can be easily distracted too by the physical needs. And if you think about it, the physical needs of this world is overwhelming, isn't it?

[22 : 47] We will never be able to satisfy all of that. And so, we give in to this human tendency which, after all, easy to do, isn't it? When we're hungry, first thing we want is to get our bellies filled.

When there's suffering, we want to alleviate it physically immediately. If we focus too much just on that in our ministry, then we are blinded, aren't we, to the real need of this world, which is to hear the gospel.

I'll just share two examples here at Holy Trinity just to give you an idea of what we mean. A number of years ago, and some of you might know this person, a man did walk off the streets on Christmas morning.

He was in a bad way, but amazingly he heard the gospel and he became a Christian. He put his faith in Jesus. Now, of course, once he did that, or even if he didn't do that, we helped him out.

One family was so kind as to give him shelter because he was homeless and put him out for a few months. And we all tried to help him get back on his feet. It's a long journey, some of you will realize, but he's still a member of our church today.

[23 : 58] And some of the guys in the morning service have been continuing to support him and help him. Now, about the same time, there was another man. He too came off the streets, I think it was a Friday night when youth group was on.

And he met with me and Andrew and he said he was sleeping in his car, got kicked out by his wife from home because of gambling debts. He said he needed some money for petrol and some money to, I don't know, fix up his business or something.

So we helped him too. We put him up for a night at a motel, I think. And then I sort of, I didn't give him any money, but I drove in my car, he went in his car, we went to the BP station just down the road.

And I put petrol in his tank for him. And then the man turned up again a few weeks later, sort of another similar story. And then again afterwards, a little while, did the same thing.

And then the more we heard his story, the more we became, you know, the story to us became more and more suspect. Andrew formed a suspicion, had the suspicion that he was just doing this because he wanted the money.

[25 : 07] And so eventually we stopped helping him. Not because we didn't want to help him, but because we realized that really his true need was not the money, is it?

But rather, for him to turn his life around, what he needed to do was hear about Jesus, who is the one who truly saves. Now sadly, I don't think he was too interested in that, and so he didn't return. That's the same dynamic that's occurring here with Jesus, isn't it? Jesus is always willing to heal, but even though he was compassionate, he knew that if all he did was perform miracles, the people would be tempted just to focus on that, and then ultimately ignore the message of the gospel

altogether.

And so I think we are called to follow the same example as Jesus, to focus on what really grows God's kingdom. Yes, and again I say this, we ought to offer practical help when we can, as a church, as individuals, but when it comes to growing God's kingdom, we need to remain focused on the teaching and preaching of the gospel.

That's why, incidentally, for those of you who are members here, our gospel partners, if you look at who we support, including Enoch, we prefer to support people who are teaching and preaching the gospel.

[26 : 30] Yes, there may be other ministries of mercy and help that goes along with that, but we decide and chose to, with the resources that God has given to us, to use it to support growing God's kingdom in that way.

And the good news, friends, is that God's kingdom is growing. We may not be able to see it with the naked eye, there's no time lapse of God's kingdom growing in front of our eyes, but God's kingdom is growing because Jesus is committed to it.

Now, if you're not yet part of this kingdom, then let me encourage you to come, join us, to repent and believe the good news. God's kingdom is growing all the time, and you're more than welcome to start coming and joining us.

But if we're already a member of his kingdom, then tonight the call is to follow Jesus, isn't it? To leave all, whether that means leaving our jobs like Enoch has done, being dedicated to preaching the gospel, or simply leaving all figuratively, remaining where we are, and also doing it as a church together in our ministries.

We're all called to be part of this amazing work of building God's kingdom, this miraculous work of building God's kingdom. And we do that by focusing on teaching and preaching the good news of Jesus.

[27 : 56] Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, thank you that your kingdom is growing and that even as we speak, more and more people are repenting and believing and following Jesus.

We praise you for that. Help us to believe, help us to continue to believe, and to take up this call to promote and proclaim the gospel so that many more can come into your kingdom.

In Jesus' mighty name we pray. Amen. Amen.