

Jesus, God's Messiah for the World

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Date: 30 March 2025

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[0 : 00] Do keep your Bibles open to the Gospel Mark there, 1010. And then, of course, follow along if you would like in the outline or the insert to your newsletters.

Well, I don't know whether you've already realized this, but every society or every organization has a hierarchical structure. Even in a democracy such as ours, where power is widely distributed, everyone gets to vote, one person, one vote.

Even in such a society like ours, people still need to be organized. Which means that there are some people that will be given more authority or influence, or some people will acquire them for themselves over time.

Because no matter the type of society, without some form of authority, what we have instead is chaos. And the word for chaos really is anarchy, which is the opposite of hierarchy.

Now, some of you have already started full-time work, and the first thing I'm hoping that you might do when you first join a company is look up the org chart.

[1 : 24] Right? Find out who your boss is, and how far down the food chain you are. And even when the structures are informal, like you're part of an extended family, like the mafia, perhaps, there is still a head.

Right? Who is the patriarch? Or, in some instances, who is the matriarch? Now, many of you I know have been visiting Japan, the favorite destination of Asian Australians.

But for many years, Japan had an emperor. And, you know, the Japanese believed that the emperor was descended from the gods. But, for a long time, it was actually the shoguns, or the samurai class, that had the real power.

Until 1868, which is the Meiji Restoration. Now, I say all this because this was very similar in Jesus' day. And, interestingly, in his time, there were actually two hierarchies that sat side by side.

On the one hand, we had Israel. And, given the importance of God's laws, it was the religious elite that sat at the top of the pile. The priests, the teachers of the law, the Pharisees, the righteous, so-called.

[2 : 44] On the top. Then, that was followed by the Jewish people, generally. And then, below them were the outsiders. People that the Jews called the Gentiles.

But, at the same time, Israel was also under Roman occupation. And so, there was a second hierarchy, where the Roman governors, and we've seen some of them, like Herod, the Tetrarch, or later on, Pilate.

They sat at the top of that hierarchy. And then, it was followed by the army, I guess, with all those ranks, you know, centurion and all that, right down to the foot soldier.

And, even the foot soldier in that hierarchy was more powerful, had more influence than the common people. So, it's into this world that Jesus came.

A Jewish man, yes. But, he was someone that grew up in Galilee. Far from the center of religious power in Jerusalem. He was a carpenter, therefore, not trained in the law.

[3 : 49] And, not much, not rich either, it seems. But, throughout Mark's gospel, what Mark, I think, has been showing are glimpses of God's, or Jesus' kingdom, and its different structure.

And, what Mark has been doing, he's been alternating between events that show Jesus' power, and then extended portions of teaching by Jesus.

And, from both of these, we see how the kingdom works. Who is valued in Jesus' kingdom? What his values are. So, by way of example, in chapter 4, we had quite a lengthy teaching on the parable of the sower.

And, that was followed by the miracles of calming the psalm, and healing the demon-possessed man. Then, straight after that, there was the healing of Jairus' daughter, and the woman with the bleeding.

But, after that, we had instructions by Jesus, as he sent out the twelve. Then, in chapter 7, we had, again, miracles.

[4 : 57] The feeding of the five thousand, and Jesus walking on water. And, then, last week, what we saw, or what we were given, was teaching by Jesus around what was clean, and what was unclean.

And, now, this week, we have another two miracles, where we see more evidence of Jesus as king and God. But, I think today, what we have as well is an understanding on the types of people that belong to the kingdom.

Who's in, who's out. Or, to use the language of last week, who's clean, and who's not. So, by way of background, let's now get into the scene, as it begins in verse 24.

And, Jesus is being placed in location. So, verse 24, Jesus left that place, and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house, and did not want anyone to know it. Yet, he could not keep his presence secret.

In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman, whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit, came and fell at his feet. Well, Tyre, as the map shows, is a bit small, but hopefully you can see it.

[6 : 06] Tyre is that little second dot, red dot, on the left there. And, as you can see, it's actually in Gentile country, not in Israel itself.

Now, it is likely that Jews would have lived there. And, so, it would be that, perhaps, that as Jesus went to Tyre, and entered one of their houses, it was one of the Jewish houses that he went into to eat and to sleep.

Now, we're not told why Jesus would go there, particularly as his Gentile country. But, perhaps it was to, as the text suggests, hide from the crowds. But, unfortunately, even here in Tyre, it seems Jesus can't escape from them.

And, one woman in particular, like Jairus, is desperate for her little daughter to be healed, or to have the demon cast out. And, so, she pushes away into the house to seek healing for her.

And, when we find out the identity of this woman, this is actually quite a bold thing to do, if what she's doing is entering a Jewish house. And, Mark now reveals the background of this woman in verse 26.

[7 : 15] He says, the man was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. So, this woman is not a Jew.

She is local, because Syrian Phoenicia is the area around Tyre. And, the reference to her being Greek may also imply that, although she's not a Jew, she was part of the ruling elite.

Her ancestors may have likely arrived as part of the, you know, when Alexander the Great conquered and expanded the Greek Empire.

But, yeah, she might have been, or her descendants, ancestors might have been one of the migrants that came to this area. So, if you recall the two hierarchies that I've been talking about, she may not be highly ranked when it comes to that hierarchy with Israel, because she's not a Jew, but she probably had some status among the ruling class.

And yet, here she is, begging at the feet of Jesus. So, we really then have a scene where a well-to-do Gentile is desperately begging Jesus, a Jew, even though he's not seen to be high up in the hierarchy.

[8 : 39] And, so what we have really are two hierarchies coming together. And, so Jesus responds firstly in verse 27. First, let the children eat all they want, he told her, for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.

Now, if you think this is shocking, that Jesus could really, Jesus say something like this, this person that I admire, this perfect man, yeah, he did say it.

So, is it as derogatory as it sounds? Well, yes, dogs were indeed a derogatory term. So, sorry to all dog lovers.

But, for the Jews, dogs were unclean animals. And, to call a Jew a dog is actually a big insult. And, Jesus is comparing the Gentiles, that's a reference to the dogs, with the children who are people of Israel.

Now, why is Jesus doing this? It is quite possible that what he's doing here is merely echoing a view commonly expressed by or among the Jews.

[9 : 47] So, it's not like he came up with it, people talk like that, and so he was just using language that was familiar to the Jews. But, I think he is saying this, expecting to provoke a strong reaction from this woman.

Does this woman really know what she's asking of me? That is actually something that's quite outrageous. For a Jew to engage, let alone heal a Gentile in this way, is simply a no-no.

Now, Israel, it's true, saw themselves as God's chosen people. They saw themselves as the only ones with the right to feast at God's table. Whereas, the Gentiles were unclean and couldn't.

And, Jesus did understand his mission initially to be to the Israelites, or to Israel, because that was the promise of God in the Old Testament.

That is just part of the story, not the whole story, but that is true too as well. So, I think Jesus' provocative statement, however, was a test for this woman's faith and humility.

[11 : 02] Having heard this, how would she respond to this reality that as a Gentile, she really had no claim on God's promises to Israel? And, this is her reply on that slide again, verse 28, Lord, which is a term of reverence, Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.

So, you might expect, for example, that as part of the ruling class, she might be indignant. But, no, she responds with humility.

She even calls herself, or implies that she is part of the dogs. But, she knows that before God, and before Jesus, whom she sees as a prophet, she had no rights.

And yet, her answer also indicates that she is bold in her faith. She's saying, I have no right to ask, but, I will still ask.

I'm sure you know friends that are a bit like this. Maybe you're one of them as well. You know, you go to a restaurant, and, you know, you're audacious enough to ask for freebies, even though you know you should pay for it, and do it with a straight face.

[12 : 16] Well, this is a bit like her, isn't it? She knows she has no right, but she does it anyway. After all, what else, you know, what else could she lose? But, I think it's more than that, because this woman was desperate, wasn't she?

And so, she begs. She does not appeal to her own rights, but she appeals to God's mercy. And she's saying, look, Jesus, if even I got just the crumbs, right, the leftovers of God's blessing to Israel, that would be enough.

That's all it will take to save my daughter. And so, Jesus duly obliges. For he says, for such a reply, you may go.

The demon has left your daughter. And she went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. And we can see here, can't we, that so powerful was Jesus that he's able to heal from afar.

He doesn't need to go, doesn't need to see her, doesn't need to touch her, lay hands and pray on her. No, just the very word, and she was healed from a distance.

[13 : 26] Right, so that's the first encounter, but let's now move on to the second, where I think there are similar dimensions as well. So, verse 31 tells us that Jesus has now moved to the Decapolis.

And so we read, then Jesus left the vicinity of Ty and went through Sidon down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. And if you were with us a few weeks ago, you might remember this slide.

This is where the Decapolis is. Sidon and Ty is unseen now to the north. And so what Jesus would have done was to move north, then to the, back inland, and then down to the Sea of Galilee, and then further east again to this entire region called the Decapolis.

And if you recall, when I showed you this map, that was the place where the demons were sent into the herd of pigs, and then they ran over the cliff. And also, about three weeks ago, we see that this was the same territory over which Herod was ruling.

And this region here, although we have Jews living, was also a place where there were many Gentiles. So when we come now to this death and mute man, we're not certain whether he was a Jew or Gentile.

[14 : 45] But either way, I think given his disability, we would expect him to feature at the bottom of both the Jewish and the Roman hierarchy. But, just like the paralytic in chapter 2, this man had people who cared for him.

And so they're the ones that bring him to Jesus, as we read. There, some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. And they begged Jesus to put his hand on him.

So again, we don't know about the faith of this man, but we see, don't we, the desperation and faith of those who brought him there. And again, Jesus is moved to heal.

So, as we look at the next verses, don't get too grossed out by the spit and all that kind of stuff. It was actually quite normal for healing to occur in that way in those days.

But we read, after he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, Ephathah, which means be opened.

[15 : 57] At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue were loosened and he began to speak plainly. Now, some people have thought that because of the use of the Aramaic there of Ephathah, that maybe we can infer that this man or his friends were Jewish.

Likely, I think. But what is sure though and what is plain is that Jesus healed him. And so again, in verse 36, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone but because I think he didn't want people to focus on his healing.

That was why he was drawing the crowds. And yes, it was evidence of his power and identity as God. But there was more important things that Jesus wanted them to realize and that was the good news that he was preaching to repent and believe in him.

But of course, people, as even today, don't they? They naturally fixate on what they can see, the sign, rather than what the sign was pointing to him as Lord and Savior.

And so, we read that the more he told people not to speak, the more they did. They kept talking. It's a bit like little children, isn't it?

[17 : 10] When you tell them, please keep this surprise a secret, the more you tell them to do it, the more they can't keep it to themselves. So, that's a bit of what's happening here, I think.

But, I think, you know, we ought not to be too judgmental of them because if you look at the reactions in verse 37, they actually understand, I think, more than it first appears. More than it first appears.

For they responded with amazement and then they say two things. First, he has done everything well and then secondly, he even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.

And actually, these reactions are a big contrast, aren't they, to what we saw last week with the Pharisees from Jerusalem because there they were hard-hearted, they were judging Jesus, you know, criticizing the disciples.

But in this particular incident, the people respond with amazement and praise almost because I think it shows an awareness of Old Testament prophecies, of what to expect when the promised Messiah comes to bring in God's kingdom.

[18 : 18] And these messianic expectations as they are called were actually widespread and quite rife among the people because they had been living under the rule of the Romans, harsh rule of the Romans for a while and they were longing to be freed.

And they remembered the Old Testament promises where God would raise up from the line of David, from the stump of Jesse, that's David's father, a king to rule over Israel.

And so in this next part here, I want to just select a few of these promises from Isaiah which I've got on the slide just to show you what these expectations were and how actually Jesus fulfills them.

So in our reading today by Ruth, Isaiah 2 was our first reading, it says this in verse 2, In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains. It will be exalted above the hills and all nations, notice that phrase, all nations will stream to it.

Many people will come and say, Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways so that we may walk in His path.

[19 : 31] So Isaiah actually has a vision of what God's kingdom will look like when it's restored, that here it is, God's mountain in Jerusalem where the temple is, will be the focal point, and yes, Jews will come to it, but so will all the nations.

At the time when God's Messiah or king appears, He will usher in this age. And that means the Gentiles, the dogs, so-called, will be allowed into God's holy city.

And once more, when we get to another passage in Isaiah 25, the vision develops further with the people gathering all these nations not just to learn, not just to be taught, but actually to feast on the mountain.

Right? So on the next slide it says in verse 6, On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples. Right?

Not just the Jews. A banquet of aged wine, the best of meats, and the finest of wines. On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that unfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations.

[20 : 42] So, this is like the dogs are given the privilege of eating with God's children, isn't it? And such a vision, I think, even in the Old Testament is actually shocking.

And no devout Jew could have conceived of it, because in Jesus' day they would have no power of eating with a Gentile. That to them was a defiling act.

Now I want to then also go to Isaiah chapter 9, because here's where we see that as was prophesied, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. And notice the places here, in the past He humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future He will honour Galilee of the nations by the way of Jordan, or by the way of the sea beyond the Jordan.

People walking in darkness have seen a great light on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. Now, guess where the land of Zebulun and Naphtali is?

It is the exact place that Jesus was now ministering, the land of Galilee, of the nations. Right? So again, in Isaiah, that was the prophecy that now Jesus is fulfilling.

[21 : 58] And then, lastly, in chapter 35, which is where they are quoting from, Isaiah spoke of the signs that the Messiah will perform once He comes to usher in His kingdom.

For, on the next slide, in verses 5 and 6, He says, or Isaiah says, Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy. And, what have we been seeing throughout Mark in his gospel? The healing of the blind we actually haven't got to yet.

That will be in chapter 8. But, in chapter 2, we have the healing of the lame, right? Of the paralytic. And now, in this passage, in the one healing of this man, we have the unstopping of the ears of the deaf, literally, by Jesus pulling His fingers out, and the mute speaking.

So, I think when the people said in amazement, He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. they are echoing this very passage in Isaiah. In fact, scholars have said that there are only two places where this word for the mute, the word mute appears here in Mark in Greek and then in the Greek Old Testament in that very passage, Isaiah 35.

[23 : 20] And so, what's happening is that I think they recognize in the signs that Jesus was performing that the new age promised by Isaiah may have come.

And so, you can't blame them, can you, for not being able to keep their mouths shut. It was exciting and amazing news. So, I think that even though our passage today, two shorter miracles, is in some way quite similar to a number of the others earlier, what Mark is doing as he's building up his gospel is painting a picture of Jesus as God and of Jesus as the Messiah and also, increasingly, telling us what kind of king he is and what type of kingdom he ushers in.

And key to all of this is the question, who then is welcomed into God's kingdom? Who's in and who's out? And it's no surprise to us that the hierarchy that Jesus has in his kingdom is very different to the one of the world.

It's one where it's not the rich or the powerful or the righteous that are welcome, not Herod, not the teachers of the law, but instead it's the sinner and the sick.

For Jesus had already said all the way back in Mark 2 verse 17, it is not the healthy who needs a doctor but a sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.

[24 : 54] So it's not the self-righteous but the humble and most importantly humility that's expressed itself in faith that allows us to be welcomed into God's kingdom.

For although Jesus is often moved to heal physically, salvation in his kingdom is more than just physical healing. Often Jesus healed physically to reward the faith of those who came to him.

So let's not mistake the sign for the real thing, which is that belonging to his kingdom, whether we are healed or not, requires faith.

faith. The sole criterion for welcome into God's kingdom is faith in Jesus. All the way to the start, Jesus already started his preaching by saying, the kingdom of God is near, repent and believe the good news.

Right? Faith. And faith was something that this woman had, that the friends of the deaf mute had. and for us too, it is our faith in Jesus' power to save, because he died for our sins on the cross, that will save us.

[26 : 13] Now, so I think the first point here then is to understand that faith is the sole criterion for welcoming to God's kingdom, but also I think from today's passage we are beginning to see who these sinners and sick are that are welcome.

not just those who belong to Israel, but all of us, even us Gentiles, the unclean, the defiled, we too can by faith be welcomed into Jesus, the Israel's Messiah, into his kingdom.

And we are made clean, not by washing of hands and all that kind of stuff, but we are made clean by the blood of Jesus. Now, it's not that Jesus here is abandoning the Jews, he's not saying, all right, I'm done with them and I'm now going to focus on the Gentiles only, because he does say, doesn't he, that to the woman, that he's here first to honor God's promise to the children, to Israel.

But, Jesus does that so that Israel can then fulfill its special purpose in God's plan. The Jews have a special place in God's plan to welcome all nations into Jerusalem.

They are given, firstly, the chance to enter, but after that, their job then is to welcome all of us, Gentiles, into that same place.

[27 : 42] And God's kingdom, God's temple, God's city, that's no longer a physical place in Jerusalem today, but rather it's centered on Jesus himself. This is how Isaiah's prophecy will be fulfilled, in Christ.

All of us come, not to a place, but we come to a person, the person of Jesus, to be welcomed into his kingdom. But I think the principle with God's plan is still the same, isn't it?

That those who have already entered then now have the privilege and the responsibility to go back out, to serve and to bring others in. Jesus himself did that by laying down his life for us, even though he was already, as it were, preeminent in his own kingdom.

Likewise, God blessed Israel so that they can be a blessing to the nations. And so that's the same for us as Christians as well, isn't it? We've been welcomed into God's kingdom, whether we're Jew or Gentile, based only on faith, but after we've done that, we are then to have the same mindset of going back out to serve others so that they too may be welcomed into God's kingdom.

We're not in God's kingdom and then so we're in, we're safe, and then we just scoff at others who are outside or look down upon their sin or unbelief. Rather, we work so that without distinction, all will have the chance to sit at the Lord's table as his children.

[29 : 13] everyone still needs to put their faith in Jesus. Yes, that's for them to respond, but we mustn't put a stumbling block based on their status or their race or whatever, their background.

Now, I know that sometimes the church in ages past and even today, we've not been perfect in doing this, but it is wonderful. Just look around the church today.

it is wonderful that even for us, we're a small expression of the old nations, isn't it? This is actually God's work.

It is marvelous in his eyes. But we, you know, I ran out of time, but I was going to make little flags and then give to, I don't know, Daniel, an Iranian flag there over down the back.

Someone gets a Chinese flag, Malaysian flag maybe. I don't know, where's Ronald's Sri Lankan flag maybe. Yeah. I was going to do that just to see actually, we have a lot of nations represented here.

[30 : 18] I ran out of time and I didn't have enough toothpicks and things like that. But, you know, if you look at the rest of the world and you look at all the conflicts that we keep praying for each week, what is the thing that causes, more often than not, people are divided, aren't they, on race and ethnicity.

And so I think as a church, we have a privilege, isn't it? A joy to show the world a better way. Now, we don't need to deny our cultural heritage. Yep, it's really good, you know, when we eat some of these curries and stuff like that, sharing culturally.

So we don't have to deny all of that. But I also think that in Christ, we need to accentuate what we have in common, focus and celebrate on the things that do unite us, even though when we look at each other, we look very different.

And I'm not just talking about skin color, I'm talking about all sorts of things, right? We need to celebrate that in Christ, we have the gift of the same spirit. We have the same hope of eternal life.

We have the same way to be forgiven for our sins, through faith in Jesus. And most importantly, we have the same Lord and Savior, the same person that we all worship together, Jesus.

[31 : 36] That he's the one that broke down the wall of the division between us. He has upturned all the hierarchies of this world. And he has welcomed all of us, whether we're blind, deaf, lame, mute, physically or spiritually, he has welcomed all of us.

Anyone can come into God's kingdom. There is only one criterion. And that is faith in Jesus. But apart from that, Jesus, God's kingdom, is filled with people of all nations, and from every tribe and town, from every background.

And let's rejoice with that, and let's work to see more of that happen in our midst. Let's pray. Father, thank you that you have welcomed us in your kingdom, into your kingdom, through faith in Jesus, that this way is now open for all of us, whether Jew or Gentile.

Help us to turn this blessing into motivation to see others welcome into his kingdom, and please open our eyes to those around us whom we can reach out to with this great gift.

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