

Mark 1:16-39

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 September 2022

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] As you open your Bibles to Mark chapter 1 to the passage that Marva read to us, 1.14-39, there's a Christian writer whose name is Philip Yancey and he reckons that rediscovery is better than first-time discovery. And he tells the story of having written four chapters of a book, worked hard over them, had them fully edited, they were really great, and he left them in a hotel room in a drawer next to the bed and left and went home and realised what he had done, rang the hotel and they said, oh no, everything's been thrown away. And a couple of weeks later, someone from the hotel called him and said, you know what we found? We found those four chapters. And he said, rediscovery is much sweeter than first discovery. This is my favourite pen. This has been missing since mid-COVID.

And today, when I packed up my things getting ready to come to church, behind the little stand where I have my text, I pulled it off and there hiding underneath it is my favourite pen. And rediscovery is better than first-time discovery. Now the Gospel of Mark may be familiar to many of us, most of us, not all of us perhaps, but I confess I have been shocked by the power and the compassion of Jesus.

And I hope as you come to church, you pray for yourselves and for others that we will know this either first discovery or rediscovery, something of the sweetness of the real Jesus.

Because the passage today drives us to this question, does Jesus have enough power to make real change, change in me, change in the world, to deal with evil, to bring about genuine good?

And does he have enough kindness in his heart to include us in that blessing? In other words, does his grace and goodness match his strength and majesty? And can we trust his strength and majesty to really back up his power? Because if the answer to any of those questions is no, we may as well pack it up. We're just playing games, I think. And this, I've just named it a bit differently.

[2 : 29] This is the biggest hurdle, I think, today to people considering Jesus. They look at the mess in the world, the mess in their own lives, the depth of injustice and suffering and violence. And they say either God is not powerful enough to change it, or if he was powerful enough, he's not good enough to care about it.

He just doesn't do it. And after the opening section of Mark's gospel, those first 13 verses, we have very high expectations, don't we? You know, the heavens have opened, the Holy Spirit has come on Jesus. God, the Father has spoken audibly, and we are expecting something absolutely sensational.

And what we get is, in my view, better. The Son of God comes delivering men and women from all the enemies of humanity, visible and invisible, waging war on all that stands against us.

And I've got three points this morning. Mark drives us in three directions. The first I've called good news for real people. The second is a sensational Sabbath synagogue service.

Would you like that? The third is prayer and the priority of God's word. Let's look at these together. So verses 14 to 20, good news for real people. Verse 14 is the first time Jesus is the actor.

[3 : 52] He steps onto stage in his public ministry, and there's no lightning and no thunder and no mountain shaking. All he does is he speaks, which may be a little bit of a letdown to some of us who don't like sermons very much. But his speaking is electrifying. Listen, he says, the time has filled up.

The decisive moment in the history of the world from God's point of view is now here. And the great good news from God is that the kingdom of God, the rule of God is at hand.

It's so close you can reach out and touch it. You can even enter into it. That's why I've come. I used to think that the kingdom of God was near because Jesus was near.

And that's certainly true in the other gospels. But here, the nearness of the kingdom is the preaching of the gospel, as we'll see.

The time has come, Jesus says, for God to fix up the world, to make wrong what is right, and he's going to do it through the word of Jesus. But before we move on quickly, there's this little subtle signal from Mark in verse 14 that what signals Jesus to begin his public ministry is that John the Baptist is arrested. And the word arrested means handed over.

[5 : 20] Handed over is used 10 times of Jesus' crucifixion, arrest and crucifixion. So there's this little, right at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, a reminder of the coming of the death of Jesus Christ. The shadow of the cross reaches right back to the start of his ministry because we know that the kingdom of God is only really going to come through the shameful crucifixion of the Son of God. And what this tells us is that Jesus has come into a war zone with the good news of the kingdom, that this great good news of the gospel is only going to go forward against opposition. And the handing over of John is a premonition that the mighty Son of God himself will suffer to bring about the good news. And then we race into verse 15, where Jesus gives us the gospel in a nutshell. And the gospel goes like this, God's action, our response. God's action, our response. You notice we don't bring the kingdom, he does.

We don't deliver ourselves. We don't make ourselves deserving. But in bringing salvation in the kingdom, Jesus, the Son of God, lays complete claim to all of us and all of all of us. Since the kingdom of God is near, he says, repent and believe or turn and trust the gospel. And that is a call not for some parts of us. Some people think about repentance as though it's for the naughty parts of my life. Some people think about believing as though that's for the good parts of my life. No, no, no. It's for the all of all of us, every part of us. He's saying creativity, ambition, affection, identity, all turn toward Jesus, all trusting in Jesus. And it's not a one-off thing that you do at the beginning of the Christian life. The way Jesus says it here is it goes on and on every day.

Very clear. Our response is very simply to repent and believe ongoingly today. And as Will said to the kids, repent means turning away from everything that stands between us and God.

And to believe means actively putting our trust in God. Here's the thing. You can't separate these two things. Let me try and explain it. We have no power to turn away from self and sin unless we trust in a greater good news and a greater power.

[7 : 54] That is, until I'm convinced in my heart of the wonder and reality of God's complete goodness and blessing to me, I'm never going to respond in true repentance.

I have a friend who was captured in public sin. Not one-off, but a whole cycle of sin. And he knew what the verses in the Bible said and every time he read them, it made him feel worse and more guilty and more disempowered.

And as we talked, it was very clear to me that his real barrier was that he just could not see the possibility that God would forgive him. That was the problem.

That God would bless him and welcome him and love him. And he had no conviction of the personal goodness of God toward him and so he continued and he destroyed his business and his family.

So our transformation and our change begins with hearing the good news over and over and over. that God is full of mercy and kindness and power and that he makes the way and loves to make the way for us to come back to him, dying in our place, putting an infinite price on our heads.

[9 : 11] It's only when we believe that can we turn away from our self-centeredness. It doesn't happen by getting up and saying, I must stop that, I will stop that, I'll try hard to stop that.

Because even if you do stop that, it'll only be temporary and then you've done it by yourself. It hasn't come from the transforming power of God's gospel in your heart.

It only comes when we see the astonishing grace of God to us, that he seeks us and comes for us and wants us and gives us his all in Jesus Christ.

And only when we stand on that wonderful foundation can we say no to evil. And you see this exactly the same pattern in verses 16 to 20.

And this is how the good news transforms ordinary people. What repentance and faith looks like. Mark gives us a picture for these four ordinary men. Again, they're not searching for Jesus, they're searching for fish.

[10 : 10] And Jesus comes right into their world and he speaks his word. It's just an unqualified command. He says, follow me. That's what Jesus says. Follow me.

He doesn't say, get your act together. He doesn't say, turn over a new leaf. He doesn't say, I can give you meaning in life and a good life and make you nicer. He doesn't say, join me for a Bible

study or a glorious gap year.

He says, walk with me on the way that I'm going and incidentally it's going to lead to the cross. I require your highest allegiance and you need to learn from me.

And the only way you can learn from me is if you move, if you get up and act and follow me. You're not going to have all the understanding at the beginning. You're not going to have all the understanding in the middle.

You need to keep following me. And what Jesus is doing here is forming a fellowship. He's creating the church by calling and promising. And he promises to these guys, if you act and follow me, I will change you.

[11:14] I will make you to become fishes of men. I will include you in what I am doing. This is good news for ordinary people. And this is the first point.

The question remains, is he adequate for me to rest my whole life on him? My finances, my future, my family, my dreams, my hopes, my present.

Can I really trust this word? Can I really trust the good news to deliver and change me? And now we move to the second point. And that is, all together now, the sensational Sabbath service in the synagogue and a healing at home, verses 21 to 31.

You with me so far? Okay. These two events show, I think, in a way, almost nothing else does, the power and compassion of Jesus. And the two events are written on top of each other and they're connected together by the word immediately.

You see, Satan comes into church, he comes into the synagogue one Sabbath and he dethrones Satan. And in these two stories, in the synagogue, Jesus is completely victorious against the invisible world.

[12:30] He defeats Satan's power, which anticipates a day when he will do away with Satan all evil. And then in the home, Jesus is completely victorious over the visible world of sickness and pain and death, which anticipates the day when all pain and suffering are done away with.

The enemies of humanity rise up here, both invisible and visible, and they bow before the sovereign word of the Son of God, this Jesus who has come to destroy Satan and the power Satan holds over people.

And the first thing that happens, happens in church, in a synagogue. Very respectable place. Not the kind of place you'd expect Jesus to begin the war against Satan, perhaps.

Although if you've been in church for a while, maybe you can believe that. No sooner does Jesus start teaching in the synagogue when a man with an unclean spirit screams out violently against him.

Because Satan and his minions, they hate the teaching of Jesus. They hate the pure word of God, the pure truth that is in his word, because they love lies.

[13:46] And every word of God and every word of Jesus is an assault on the God of this world and his enslaving lives. That is why every time we hear the pure word of God taught, there's an element alarming and shocking about it.

And this man doesn't have epilepsy. He's not mad. Mark and the Gospel writers know the difference. Mostly in Mark's Gospel, the demons are called unclean spirits, and they're unclean because of their association with death.

And as Jesus deals with the demons, his focus is on the victim, the poor man who's been possessed. And he delivers the man by the power of his word as he does every time the Gospel is preached.

It can happen this morning. It's the authority of Jesus' teaching that provokes the demon in this man. I have had people scream out in church, but they've never screamed out about Jesus.

As Jesus teaches the truth, the demon can't bear it. He screams 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.

[14:58] It's completely hostile to Jesus, and the demon draws the line in the sand, and he tries to take power over Jesus by naming him. Notice what Jesus does.

There's no magic ceremony. There's no spells or incantations. He doesn't wave his hands or a magic wand. What does he do? He simply speaks a word. He rebukes the spirit.

He commands him to come out, and he does. The spirit does, making one more spectacular attempt, literally, to tear the man in two.

It would make a very dramatic children's focus. But the thing we're meant to see here is that it's a no contest. The sheer cosmic authority and control of Jesus, even in church, to change someone's life forever, and it sends shivers and shockwaves all over hell.

And twice Mark draws our attention to the response of the people who are there. In verse 22, if you notice, they're astonished at the authority of his teaching.

[16:02] And then in verse 27, they see the exorcism as just one aspect of the authority of his teaching. He's done it all by his word. And we take a breath and we go, this is the same voice that called the four disciples.

This is the same voice that begins the conquest over evil in humanity, delivering those who are captive. It's the same voice that we're reading today. Jesus' chief weapon is his teaching.

And if he can do it then, he has all the cosmic authority and power of God to continue to speak his word and drive evil away, even evil that it's got its long claws inside of a person.

And we ask ourselves, but does he really want to do that for us? And so Mark says, let's hold this story very closely to the next one. Verse 29, immediately he left the synagogue.

He goes into the house of Simon and Andrew and James and John and Simon's mother-in-law is lying ill with a fever. So we move from the public world of cosmic demons to the private world, the domestic world of need.

[17:12] And I just point out, fever was regarded as the bringer of death in those days. No medicine, no public hospitals. The fact that she is lying down is not an incidental detail.

It means that she's moving toward the grave. And this would be something devastating to Peter's family. Now, Peter, Jesus has performed no healing miracles yet.

The disciples have never seen him heal anyone. And they don't ask him to heal her. They just inform him. And it's here we see the wonderful compassion of Jesus powerfully at work.

He goes straight to this poor woman. And instead of keeping a safe distance from her contagion, he gently takes her by the hand and raises her, which is the resurrection word.

And the force of death leaves her body. And in a lovely touch, she begins to serve them, Mark tells us. Completely unpretentious.

[18:13] As Jesus has served her, she now wants to serve other people. Come to count me in. The focus is not the cosmic power of Jesus here.

It's his sheer kindness. There's no mention of faith on behalf of the woman or the disciples. There's no request to heal. It's just a plain compassion and plain willingness.

That's why Mark tells us both these events together. One shows Jesus matchless power and authority. And the other shows that his heart is bigger than we can imagine.

Kind enough and strong enough to bring us every blessing from God. He can and he will save you if you repent and trust in him.

And that brings us very quickly to our third point. You might ask then, well, why doesn't he heal everyone? I mean, why doesn't he just fix all our problems now and get it over with?

[19:15] Well, point three, I've called prayer and the priority of preaching. And that's verses 32 to 39. Again, these are two closely tied events in Mark's mind.

We come to the evening of this action-packed Sabbath. And word of Jesus' power to heal has got out very fast. And everyone in Capernaum, which was quite large at the time, who is sick or who has family who is sick or demon-possessed or incurable or injured or any other difficulty, they make a straight line to the door of this house where Jesus is to bring them to be healed by Jesus.

The whole city gathers at the door and Jesus heals them all. It's quite unimaginable, really. I mean, tomorrow there'll be a large crowd to honour the Queen.

This is something different. Can you imagine having someone like Jesus amongst us with the power of God and the compassion of God? And in the space of a few short hours, every person in Capernaum who has had any injury or sickness is healed and in their right mind.

And if that is astonishing, what happens next is even more astonishing. Because just before dawn, Jesus slips away. And the disciples hunt him down and the word is a real hunting word, a hounding word.

[20:59] And they say to him, isn't your priority obvious? Come back to Capernaum and continue this ministry. I mean, what could be better? How could we help more people? Isn't that the point of this, Jesus?

Jesus says to them, no. I'm setting out a journey through Galilee to preach. That's why I've come out. And then we read, he continues to heal.

He continues to drive out demons as he goes. But the priority of Jesus is to preach the good news of the kingdom. Because physical healing is wonderful for a time.

But it's only by hearing and responding to the word of the gospel that we are saved for eternity. And the priority of preaching the word of God is completely hateful to Satan and all his enemies.

The constant pressure on Jesus and on us is to make something else a priority all the time. You know, Mark only records Jesus going out alone to pray three times.

[22 : 07] And each of those times he's under pressure to depart from the path that God has called him. Once here, once after he's fed the 5,000, once in Gethsemane.

And each time the temptation is to go with something that looks good but won't bring about the kingdom and our eternal salvation. And the little detail here of this desolate place, Jesus goes into the wilderness which is where he was last week doing battle with Satan for 40 days.

It is astonishing, isn't it? And it must mean that our need is deeper and more terrifying than any injury or any sickness or any oppression.

That underneath is the deepest issue and that is our alienation from God. That we do this, we create distance between us and God.

We trust our feelings more than we trust his word. And we divide our allegiances between what we like, we give what's left over to God. Now can I ask you this morning as we finish, do you know the power and compassion of Jesus personally?

[23 : 22] I mean, do you have this sense on your heart of the reality of Christ's deliverance and how he is toward you? And is your repentance and faith growing daily deeper?

And is the word of the Lord being read, marked, learned and inwardly digested by you? I urge you to it because as we do those things, we enter the kingdom of God.

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

Please. Amen. ■■