Who Is He?

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Preacher: Sam Low

[0:00] Let me add my welcome to you. My name is Sam and I'm one of the pastors here. If I haven't met you yet, hopefully I'll get the chance to over the course of tonight's service or afterwards. And if you are our guest tonight or if you are here for the first time, you've timed your run well.

We're starting a new series tonight. So you're on the same page as everyone else. So I'm going to pray for us and then we're going to open that passage from Mark that Ali read out. Father God, we thank you for bringing us here tonight.
We thank you for this word that you have given to us. And we ask that as we look at it now, that it would not be my words that are spoken, but it would be you who speaks and you give us ears to hear.
We pray that the result of tonight would not be that we know more information, but that we see you more clearly and love you as you deserve. Amen. I have reached a really exciting milestone in terms of parenting over the last couple of weeks.
Those of you who know my son know he's very enthusiastic and he's very energetic, but he's added to that repertoire the ability to say a few words. So this week he welcomed me home with, hey, buddy, when I walked through the door.
[1:13] That wasn't the milestone that I was aiming for, but it was kind of exciting just the same. But the milestone in particular, which for me was a really significant moment, was when I was, I think I was putting him in the car.

And I make a habit of telling him this as often as I can to the point where it will annoy him, but it will be imprinted on his brain. And I did up his seatbelt, I tickled his leg, and I said, love you. And as I'm backing out of the car to close the door, I heard this, love you!
And I can't tell you how much it warmed my heart. He still hasn't quite got the ver down, but the sentiment is really significant that he, even as a not quite two-year-old, could express that emotion towards me was something that was quite warming.
But I noticed that just in passing, every time he says it now, I get very excited, and I give him a big hug, and let him know how fantastic it is. But my wife tells me that she loves me all the time.
And I've noticed that I don't give her the same amount of excitement that I do when my son says it. And I was reflecting that her love for me is just as significant, if not more.
[2:20] She's the one who has to look after me, whereas Bailey, of course, is going to love me. All I do is feed the kid and play with him and do fun things. But it's amazing how when we get familiar with something, we can empty it of its meaning.

My wife still means, I love you. I want to be with you. I want to serve you. I'm excited about our family. I'm excited about our future. She still means all those things when she says it, just as much as Bailey means that he loves me when he says it.
But for some reason, I've heard it so many times that there's this desensitization for me. Today, we're going to open up the Gospel of Mark, potentially a Gospel that we've heard before, potentially words that we're familiar with, stories that we've heard before.
And I wonder if we are in danger, if we're running the risk of being over-familiar with the things that we're about to read. This Gospel begins with a very basic but very significant sentence.
Mark 1.1 says, The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Now, it is really easy to read that and to move on, to wait and see what comes afterwards.
[3:32] But you've got to actually sit here and imagine what it would have been like to read this when it was first written. Imagine what it would have been like for the author as he wrote these words and the weight and force and importance and gravity that were wrapped up in these words.

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These words were written somewhere around 60 AD. And at the point where Mark was writing, the Christian church was under fierce persecution. The Emperor Nero was known for basically skewering Christians on poles and setting them on fire as torches for his garden parties.
He set Rome on fire and then blamed the Christians for it so that he had an excuse to basically wholesale murder Christians left, right and centre. And into that context where the church and Christians fear for their life, Mark pens this message and begins it with the words, The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
He calls this message in a time where he has seen the great missionaries and the Apostle Peter and the missionary Paul die. He calls his message, he begins his message with the good news, it's what Gospel means, the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
Can you imagine the urgency with which he wrote this message? Having watched his mentors die, probably fearing for his own life, the pressure is on, people need to know what he knows, Mark has an agenda.
[5:05] He's a desperate man who wants to share the good news that have changed his life to the point where he will willingly die for this man, Jesus Christ. So hear the words again.

With that weight, with that context, the beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark begins this Gospel at a rapid pace.
We jump in, we read through just chapter one and already we've seen a stack of stuff happen. So begin with a prophecy from the Old Testament and then John shows up to prepare us for Jesus and then Jesus shows up and is baptised and then Jesus is tempted and then all of a sudden Jesus is preaching and then he's driving out an evil spirit, then he's healing people, then he's praying, then he's healing more people.
It is just rapid fire and there is hundreds of kilometres covered in just these 28 verses. Jesus is journeying all over the Middle East to do his ministry and so you've got to ask the question, why is Mark in such a rush?
He keeps using words like, immediately this happened and then this happened and he's skipping us through all these really significant stories and you've got to ask yourself the question, what's his agenda?
[6:15] Where's he trying to take us in such a rush as we jump through all these different events? And I want to take you to the clue which I think is found in Jesus' baptism. This week on Wednesday I'll have the privilege of officiating a wedding for two friends of mine.

These are friends who don't come to church, who aren't Christians, but who because of my job invited me to be a part of their special day. And if you've ever been to a wedding, you'll know that the most important words, and they're not, you may kiss the bride, just to clarify, the most important words that I say in a wedding ceremony are, I declare them to be husband and wife.
That's the official point where we have crossed a line and there is a new family now standing at the front of the building. But just because that is the important bit, just because that's the climax, just because that's what everything else is leading up to, doesn't mean that all the things before that are unimportant.
For me to say that, we need the context of having talked about what marriage is at the beginning. We need the context of a husband and a wife making promises to each other so that when I announce it, we know what we're announcing.
I'm not just saying some empty words. And so even though Mark is obviously in a hurry to get somewhere, we do actually need to look at some of the details in these stories if we're going to understand where it is that he's taking us.
[7:34] So look with me at the baptism of Jesus. So let's start, before we get to the baptism of Jesus, by looking at John in verse 4. So John came, baptising in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him confessing their sins. They were baptised in the Jordan River. Jesus' baptism in this passage, it happens so quickly that you could miss it, but Jesus' baptism is a response to the ministry that John is doing.
You've got to understand before John comes, baptism is a foreign idea. It's not something that people had been doing and then Jesus just jumps in. John shows up and is the one who introduces baptism.
But did you see what his baptism is about? It's not just about splashing water. John's baptism is, verse 4, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

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And the people come to him, confess their sins, and are baptised. John's baptism, while it's an invitation to come back to God, an invitation for forgiveness, his ministry has to have started by telling people that they needed to be forgiven.
[8:53] John's message was, God is not happy. You do not deserve the love that God has shown you. You are not entitled to God's goodness and God's promises.

You need to come back. You need to confess. You need to apologise. John's message was a message of judgement. And the people who heard his message knew that he was right on the mark, and so they came out in their droves to be baptised and seeking forgiveness.
Jesus doesn't need a baptism for forgiveness of sins. So you've got to stop in these stories, even though Mark skips through them. It doesn't make sense that Jesus, who is perfect, needs to be baptised for forgiveness.
That's why we get a clue here as to where Mark is taking us in this gospel. If you look in Matthew's account of the same thing, John gets really uncomfortable when Jesus shows up to be baptised. John's kind of, you know, standing on the spot when Jesus comes to the front of the queue and is ready to be dipped. John's like, um, I think you're supposed to baptise me. I think that's how it works.
[10:00] I was just for a little while, now Jesus, it's up to you. But Jesus insists that he be baptised by John. And the reason is, Jesus wants to identify with sinful people.

Jesus wants to take on the identity and the place of people like you and me who have spent our lives treating God like he doesn't matter. Jesus doesn't need to be baptised for his own sin.
But what he does in choosing to be baptised even when he doesn't need to, is shows that his agenda is not to be some person out there who is just distant from us and perfect and beyond approach, but to be the one who comes down and understands our struggle.
To be the one who takes on the judgement that we deserve and stands before God in our place. Mark is showing us right from the very beginning of this gospel that Jesus' life and Jesus' ministry and everything that he will do is directly connected to the hope that they had all through the Old Testament that one day God would provide a means for forgiveness.
Permanent forgiveness. Not the kind of forgiveness where you come back every week with a new apology and a new sacrifice because you've done more things wrong. All through that history they were hoping that one day God would give them a way to be completely clean, completely forgiven, forever forgiven.
[11:28] they hoped that one day God would provide a substitute to take the judgement that they deserved. Right here in chapter 1 of Mark's gospel Mark is pointing us to the cross.

This is the beginning even from verse 1 his agenda is for us to be looking to the end to the climax to the finish. Mark is rushing us through his gospel to Jesus' destination which is the cross where he will give up his life.
Mark is telling us these first bits of the gospel and all the bits that we're going to cover for the next few weeks he's telling us these bits with the cross in view. And so we need to look at all these little stories that Ali just read out for us all these little episodes from Jesus' life and ministry conscious that the cross casts a shadow over all of it.
That that's always the agenda. that Jesus turned up to offer forgiveness. This gospel is a proclamation. Gospel is good news.
The word gospel isn't necessarily a Bible word it's just a word to describe an exciting announcement a significant announcement something that you need to share and pass on and so right from the beginning Mark says this is important and this is good news.
[12:52] But there's a bit of a tension I don't know if you picked it up as we were reading through there you've got this emphasis on focus on Jesus Jesus is important from the first verse Jesus is the Christ we go to Old Testament telling us about Jesus being the Lord we've got this amazing scene in the baptism but there's this tension going on I mean four times we get an announcement about Jesus in verse one Mark the author says Jesus is the Christ and then immediately following that in verse two we have a quote from two Old Testament prophets explaining that Jesus is the Lord who was promised Jesus is the one who they've been waiting for who will come and he will bring judgment but he will also bring grace then we get an announcement from John in verse eight sorry in verse seven this was his message after me will come one more powerful than I the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie I baptize you with water but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit so Mark says Jesus is significant

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Isaiah says Jesus is significant John says Jesus is more significant than he is and then perhaps the most significant voice in verse eleven as Jesus is baptized the heavens open and the voice of God in heaven speaks you are my son whom I love with you I am well pleased this is all in the first eleven verses of this gospel Jesus matters Jesus is important Jesus is significant Jesus is divine Jesus is from heaven but then at the same time three times in this chapter Jesus tells people who know who he is to be quiet did you see that verse twenty five Jesus is doing ministry he cast the demon out of someone and the demon says in verse twenty four sorry what do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth have you come to destroy us I know who you are the holy one of God be quiet Jesus said sternly and he wouldn't allow this demon to proclaim or announce who he was verse thirty four again he is casting out demons but he will not let them speak because they know who he is verse forty four he heals a man with leprosy and he says this 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 to them four announcements and three commands to silence what's Mark trying to do announce Jesus or keep a secret or at least why is Jesus not happy for everybody to stand on the rooftops and shout out who he is if that's Mark's agenda why wasn't it Jesus' agenda as well I remember a couple of years ago the first time I met Steve our senior minister was when I had the chance to be a part of a committee that organises a youth convention it's a fairly significant convention it's about six thousand teenagers we'll be taking our youth ministry there in a couple of weeks time and I'm walking into this room with these people and being really excited that I had the opportunity to be a part of this

I was maybe twenty-one twenty-two and so I thought you know I've got something to offer I'll be the most significant member of this team but it was really quick that I noticed in the room that there was a pecking order Steve was the chairman as you might guess when Steve's in a room Steve's the boss that's because that's how Steve works and because he was given that title as well of course but as well as Steve being the chairman there was somebody allocated as the vice chair which I found a little bit comical because I figured it was Steve and the rest of us but in order to ensure my position on the team I appointed myself as the vice vice chair it was a self-appointment and it remained a self-appointment for the amount of time that I served on that committee it was light-hearted most of the time but every now and then I would pull rank and go hey I'm the vice vice chair but the funny thing is when you give a vague title like vice vice chair or even vice chair or even chairman for that matter what we do is we import our definition of what that means and so for me vice vice chair meant that I didn't have to do any extra work

I could basically put the kibosh on anyone else's idea and I got all the perks of being on the committee like not having to put chairs out anymore or getting to the front of the morning tea line those sorts of things vice vice chair was an important task and I set out to make it very beneficial for myself when you have a vague title you just import and you add things to it and there is this risk for us as we read this gospel and there was this risk for people as they met Jesus in his ministry that they would hear his title they would hear that he was the Christ the saviour they would hear that he was the Lord they would hear that he was the son of God and they would begin to shape their own picture of what that meant they would begin to join the dots for themselves and decide what they thought the Christ should be in fact that's exactly what happens and that's exactly what happens even now so often you talk to people and they have their version of what Jesus should be if Jesus is the son of God he should love everyone

[18:18] I have spent time in a previous church sitting with someone who I consider to be a close friend and basically wrestling with this issue they deeply struggle with the possibility that God would condemn someone who struggles with something like homosexuality they have a family member who is a practicing homosexual and so for them they've adjusted their picture of Jesus to suit themselves they hear certain bits of the title Christ or the title saviour or the title lord and they adjust it to be the kind of saviour they want the kind of lord they want the kind of king they want and so when they come to bits in the bible where Jesus might say certain things are wrong or certain things are unhelpful what they do is they just adjust their picture of Jesus so they don't have to include that but before we point the finger too much we all do it when we are called to sacrifice and treasure

Jesus above all else above things that matter in our life how quickly we adjust our version of Jesus he doesn't want me to sacrifice that area because it's harmless he doesn't want me to give up that hobby that I've got which takes me away from time with important relationships takes me away from ministry takes me away from spending time in the word because it's harmless but actually Jesus

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demands everything demands our whole life there is a tension in this beginning of Mark's gospel because Mark wants us to know Jesus he wants us to know who he is but he is protecting us from making up our own version of the truth see when we make Jesus who we want him to be we reduce him at best he becomes a better version of us our goodness plus some our love plus some our forgiveness plus some our servant heart plus some but when you see him for who he is when you see him as he is revealed in his word in the gospel his majesty his goodness his holiness his justice his love and his authority far exceed even your wildest imagination or dreaming when it comes to Jesus the truth is better than your inventions and Mark is trying to spare us even at the beginning false dreams and false ideas about who Jesus is he wants us to have the blessing of seeing him in his fullness and his fullness is seen in the cross that's why even from verse 1 chapter 1 Mark wants us to see the cross we need the cross to understand what Jesus is doing we need the cross to understand what it means for him to be Christ we need the cross to understand what it means for him to be Lord that's why this opens up in verse 1 this is the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ there's more for us to know but we need to use the cross as our starting point you'll find in a couple of weeks when we look at chapter 8 of Mark's gospel that even when Jesus gets explicit and says to his disciples me being Christ me being saviour means I have to die the first thing his disciples do are

Jesus I think you've got it a bit wrong if you don't talk like that it's probably going to make more people want to follow you Jesus if you're going to be Christ if you're going to be saviour you win you don't die you win and Jesus response is the scary rebuke to Peter get behind me Satan even as Jesus says to Peter I must die to be your saviour Peter has his own vision of what a saviour will do for him even as we get to the end of Mark's gospel the disciple Peter still doesn't get it and as Jesus is arrested Peter denies that he even follows him we need the cross to make sense of what Jesus is doing in his life we need the cross to understand his preaching when he says the time has come the kingdom of God is near repent and believe the good news the good news is that in the cross we can be welcomed into the kingdom of God this gospel this message of Jesus is the proof that it was the cross the death and resurrection of Jesus that enabled

Peter to understand everything that he had experienced while spending time with Jesus this gospel is written by Mark but Mark probably was writing what Peter told him writing what Peter experienced as he spent time with Jesus doing ministry with him and it appears that Peter goes from telling Jesus to rethink his idea of what it means to be the saviour Peter goes from denying that he even knows Jesus to rejoicing in him following him serving him preaching about him and dying for him and the difference between the Peter that we read about here and the Peter who told this stuff to Mark is that Jesus had died and Jesus had risen we need the cross for us as we read Mark's gospel the cross is a past reality Jesus is risen for Mark's readers as they open this up around 60 AD they would have been alive for some of them when this all happened some of them may have even seen Jesus hanging on that cross for the first time and so now as they read these words there is new meaning as they hear about their saviour new meaning as they hear about the one who claims to be their lord and king this message of Jesus gives hope to Christians facing persecution and death at the hands of the Roman emperor this message of Jesus gives hope to people who are lost and need forgiveness this message of Jesus calls people to trust

[24:56] Jesus so that they can be forgiven hear verse one again the gospel about Jesus Christ the son of God the message of Mark's gospel is that Jesus the Christ our saviour was the divine son of God who came to earth to bear our sin to take our punishment to take our judgment and who has died and risen as our saviour and king this gospel and these words contained here in this book are used by God to bring people to trust him to bring people to have faith in him if you are somebody who is a Christian who follows Jesus then God used this gospel maybe not

Mark's gospel but the message of Jesus contained in Mark's gospel to invite you to trust him and so if you are somebody who like Mark feels the urgency to share this with your family with your friends with your neighbours with your work colleague you don't need to find something fancy or clever or more exciting or modern you need the gospel you need the message of Jesus this is the good news about our saviour Jesus Christ and good news needs to be shared good news is not to be kept to ourselves we're beginning tonight a series in Mark that will take us through our focus time of mission in a few weeks that will take us through Easter and I want to challenge you as you look again at the gospel by which God called you to know him who can you share this gospel with who can you put these words into the hand of maybe it's the person that you've been praying for in your

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one plus one plus one
Chris challenged us this morning that we as individuals could read the entirety of Mark's gospel in an hour it's not huge you could sit down and knock it over without too much trouble but the other thing that means is you could quite easily hand a copy of Mark's gospel to your friend and say just have a go at reading it just scribble questions in it underline things that confuse you or excite you and then let's talk about it because this gospel is what God uses to call people to place their trust in him not your fancy presentation or your amazing stories it's the good news that Jesus has come to earth and died to take your sin and is now risen as king personally I want to ask you are you at risk of being too familiar with the gospel do you read verse one of
Mark's gospel and shrug your shoulders and wait for what's next or do you feel the weight of God's son coming to earth and dying for you because that's what Mark says in verse one Jesus the Christ Jesus your savior let's pray father God we want to thank you that you give us your word we want to thank you that you use Mark to record the life of Jesus so that we could read and see him in his majesty and fullness God we want to ask that you would protect us from painting our own picture of what we think Jesus should be and instead you would exceed our vision exceed our dreams and show us who Jesus really is show him in his majesty and power his power over sickness and demons and nature and sin and death and as we see him may we find the unshakable hope that can only be found in him father if there are people in this room who don't yet know your son Jesus who don't yet know the forgiveness that is found in him
I pray that you would show yourself through these words I pray that you would show them that you can and will forgive them if they would trust you and the work you have done father please use us to share this good news with people who don't know you yet light a fire in us that we would need to share the hope that we have and use us to bring joy and peace to our families and friends amen
you

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