

The King's Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Emile Calliette grew up in a small village in France and went on to become professor of philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary in the middle of last century, around the 20th century.

During his college days, Emile was not a believer and wasn't sure that God existed at all. He loved his books, he loved his philosophy, but he had never picked up a Bible.

He went on to serve in the French Army during World War I, and of that time he wrote, The inadequacy of my views on the human situation overwhelmed me.

What use the philosophical banter of the seminar when your buddy, at the time speaking to you of his mother, dies standing in front of you with a bullet to his chest?

One night, a bullet got Emile too. His life was saved and he returned to his books. He read, reading literature and philosophy, and he found himself searching for meaning.

[1 : 16] He wrote, during long night watches in the foxholes. I had in a strange way been longing, I must say it, however strange it may sound, for a book that would understand me.

And since he knew of no such book, he decided to prepare his own one for private use. He read widely and he would file away passages that, as he wrote, spoke to his condition.

And the day came when Emile put the finishing touches on what he referred to as the book that would understand me. And he hoped that this collection of words and sentences would help him through life.

And it was a beautiful day. It was a sunny day. And Emile went out, sat under a tree. He opened his book and he was disappointed. In his own words, In that moment, in his disappointment, Emile's wife walked into the garden and she had with her a Bible in the French language from a pastor that she had just walked by in her morning walk.

And as she stood in front of him, Emile literally grabbed the Bible out of her hands, rushed into his study, and he opened it at the Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel.

[3 : 01] And he read, and he read, and he read with what he described as an indescribable warmth surging inside.

These are his words. I could not find words to express my awe and my wonder. And suddenly, the realization dawned upon me.

This was the book that would understand me. I continued to read deeply into the night, mostly from the Gospels. And lo and behold, as I looked through them, the one of whom they spoke, the one who spoke and acted in them, came alive to me.

The providential circumstances amid which this book had found me now made it clear that while it seemed absurd to speak of a book understanding a man, this could be said of the Bible.

It's pages were animated by the presence of the living God and the power of his mighty acts. And to this God, I prayed that night.

[4 : 18] And the God who answered was the same God of whom it was spoken in the book. That happened to me 25 years ago.

The Bible came alive in a way that it is hard to describe. And more specifically, Jesus came alive to me in a way that it's hard to explain.

For the first time, having read through the Bible at least three to four times prior to that, and known of Jesus for the very first time, Jesus became alive to me.

Real. Real. Not just someone to know about, but someone who was calling me to follow him and adore him and worship him and obey him and love him.

Next 13 weeks, we are working our way through Mark's gospel. And my hope, my dream, and my prayer is that many will have the experience that I've had and the experience that Emil Caliat has

had and experience that many have had and that Jesus will come alive to us even as we look to who Jesus is.

[5 : 48] You see, my concern in this gospel is that we have access to the real Jesus. The Jesus who is unpredictable and yet reliable.

The Jesus who is gentle yet powerful. Authoritative and yet humble. Human and yet divine. Access to the real Jesus is something that every generation and language and people are in desperate need of today.

That's because Mark's gospel conveys something very important about Jesus. Jesus is not merely a historical figure.

He is a living reality. You see, Mark's gospel declares that Jesus is God. Our creator God who rules everything and speaks to us today.

And he says as such in the very beginning sentence, the very first sentence, Mark tells us that the God who started history is the God who has broken into history.

[7 : 02] The beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. And Mark here communicates his style is a sense of crisis.

The status quo has been ruptured. God, sorry, Mark wants us to see that this Jesus is still disrupting the status quo and he's still calling for decisive action in our lives now.

So have a look at it with me. Mark 1. He wastes no time in establishing the identity of Jesus. He abruptly and bluntly asserts that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

And the title Christ means an anointed royal figure. It's another way of referring to the Messiah. The Messiah was the one who would come and administer God's rule over on the earth and rescue Israel from all its oppressors and all of its troubles.

But Mark goes further than just calling Jesus the Christ, the fulfillment of all of Israel's hope. He calls him the Son of God. It's an astonishing term.

[8 : 24] It is a claim of outright divinity. He expands on it when he quotes here the prophet Isaiah and asserts that John the Baptist is the voice that Isaiah referred to who is calling out in the desert.

So Mark equates John with the one who was to prepare the way of the Lord. So the clear inference is that Mark is equating Jesus with the Lord, with God Almighty himself.

And so Mark connects Jesus in the deepest way to the ancient religion of Israel.

Jesus is the one who has come to rule and renew the entire universe.

But more of Jesus' identity is revealed. Striking scene of verses 9 to 11, if you cast your eyes down there.

[9 : 43] It says, Now this is a familiar scene.

But at first glance, we don't often know what it is specifically that we are looking at here. The Spirit of God is described as a dove.

And it's a description that many Christians are familiar with. You go to Kurong and you'll see stickers of doves that are meant to represent the Holy Spirit.

It was, however, very rare when Mark was writing. In all of the ancient writings of Judaism, there is only one place where the Spirit of God is likened to a dove.

And it's in the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible, which was the Bible that the Jews of Jesus' time, and Mark's time, read.

[11 : 09] And the one place is the creation account of Genesis 1 verse 2, where it says that the Spirit hovered over the face of the waters.

And the Hebrew word for hovering is fluttering. The Spirit fluttered over the face of the waters.

And to capture the vivid image of the Holy Spirit in that moment, the rabbis translated this passage like this. The earth was without form and empty.

And darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God fluttered above the face of the waters like a dove. And God spoke, let there be light.

There are three parties active in the creation of the world. God, God's Spirit, and God's Word through which He creates.

[12 : 15] And notice that the same three are present at Jesus' baptism. The Father who affirms love for the Son. The Son who is the Word. And the Spirit fluttering like a dove over the Son.

And Mark is deliberately the beginning of his gospel. The beginning of the good news is pointing us back to the beginning of history.

Just as the creation of the world is the work of the triune God, so is the rescue and the renewal of it. The Christian teaching of the Trinity is mysterious and intellectually challenging.

The Bible teaches that God is one God eternally existent in three persons. It isn't tritheism with three gods who work together in harmony.

And it isn't unipersonalism, which is the idea that God takes one form and sometimes He takes another form. But He can't only be one form at any one time.

[13:26] Another name for unipersonalism is modalism. Both. It's a heresy. Trinitarianism holds that there is one God in three persons who know and love one another.

God is not more fundamentally one than He is three. And He's not more fundamentally three than He is one. Told you it's challenging.

And many have, over time, have tried to use all kinds of illustrations to try and get a picture of just how wonderful and beautiful and majestic God is to try and capture it.

He is truly mysterious. And all illustrations in one way or another fail. And the best I could do to illustrate it is to draw a circle in red pen.

And then to perfectly, absolutely perfectly, go over the red circle with a blue pen.

[14:38] And then to absolutely perfectly, go over the blue pen with a green pen. So when you looked at it, you looked at one circle.

But the red line's not the blue line and the blue line's not the green line. That's the best you can come up with. Best I can come up with. Three separate lines making one perfect circle.

When Jesus comes up from the water, the Father envelops Him and covers Him with love. Verse 11. You are my Son whom I love.

With you I am well pleased. And the Spirit covers Him with power and sends Him out. In verse 12. What we have here in the baptism of Jesus is just a glimpse.

And obviously you need to read the rest of the Bible to get a fuller picture. But a glimpse into the interior life of the Trinity that has been for all of eternity.

[15:46] Mark is giving us a glimpse into the very heart of reality. The meaning of life. The essence of the universe. And C.S. Lewis describes the essence of the universe like this.

In Christianity, God is not a static thing. But a dynamic, pulsating activity. A life.

Almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me, irreverent. A kind of dance.

Let me try and explain why Lewis called it a dance. That the heart of who God is, a dance. We glorify something when we find it beautiful for what it is in itself.

We don't glorify it for what we get from it. We glorify it for what it is. When it's a person that you find beautiful and magnificent in that way, what you do is you serve them unconditionally.

[17:03] On the other hand, when we say, I'll serve you so long as I get benefits from you, it's not glorifying.

It's not actually serving. It's serving ourselves through them. We serve ourselves by serving them. That's the goal. You see, that's not circling them. It's not orbiting your life around them.

It's using them in order to get them to orbit around you. No. That's what happens. Now, of course, there are many of us who look unselfish and dutiful in our serving, busy in our serving, simply because we cannot say no.

In that case, we are serving out of our own need. And it is a million miles from glorifying.

[18:12] To glorify others is to unconditionally serve them, not because we are getting anything out of it, but because of our love and appreciation for who they truly are.

And so, and let me be honest, there are rare glimpses of that at all in our world. And yet the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are each centering their lives on the others and adoring the others and serving the others.

There is no self-orientation in the Godhead at all. And so God is therefore infinitely and profoundly happy.

And that is what God has enjoyed for all of eternity. It is the essence of reality. That relationship.

Theologian Cornelius Plantinga puts it like this. The persons within God exalt each other, commune with each other, and defer to each other.

[19:37] Each defined person harbors the others at the center of his being. In constant movement of overture and acceptance, each person envelops and encircles the others.

God's interior life overflows with regard for others. And so the Father, the Son, and the Spirit for all of eternity have been pouring love and joy and adoration into each other.

They are infinitely seeking one another's glory. And so God is infinitely happy. And this is the God who created the world. And that's why C.S. Lewis refers to ultimate reality as a dance.

But he goes on to suggest that a self-centered life is a static life. It's a stationary life. A self-centered person wants to be the center of the universe and for everyone and everything to orbit around them. [21 : 00] We might even help people. We might even have friends. We might even fall in love. So long as there's no compromise in my individuality, my individual interests and whatever needs I need.

Whatever meets my needs. I might even give to the poor. So long as it makes me feel good about myself and doesn't hinder my lifestyle at all.

Self-centeredness makes everything and everyone a means to an end. And that end is the self. What happens when everyone declares in their hearts, no, no, you orbit around me. Imagine we stop Kids Church right now, brought all the kids in and said, we've got to play on right now and you all are the number one star player and the star player stands here.

What do you think would happen? This would happen. I'm not moving. Everything becomes static. [22 : 21] Nobody gets anywhere. The dance becomes impossible. It's a static life. But ultimate reality, the Father, the Son and the Spirit are characterised in the very essence of mutual, self-giving love as they circle each other consistently, pouring love and joy and adoration into the other.

Each one voluntarily orbits around the other. And yet, there is also headship and submission in ultimate reality.

This is a truth that explodes with life-shaping, glorious implications for us. If this is the God who made the world, then relationships of love are at the centre of what life is all about.

Also, if this is the God who made the world, then you've got to ask yourself, why on earth did he make the world? Why did he create it? Why create humanity at all?

It's not like he's lonely. It's not like he's looking for more friends. He doesn't need anyone to serve him. That's what they've been doing for eternity.

[23 : 49] He didn't create us in order to get joy from us. He must have created us in order to give us joy. He must have created us to invite us into the dance of infinite happiness.

And if we centre our lives around him, if we glorify him, if we find him beautiful for who he is, then we step into the dance for which we were made.

We weren't made by God just to believe in him or to be spiritual in some kind of sense. We weren't even made him to pray to him or to get some help from him in times of trouble.

We were made by God to centre everything in our lives on him. We were made to serve him unconditionally because that is where we find ultimate joy.

And so every single human being needs more than anything else. Anything else they need is to be in this divine dance with God where everything orbits around him.

[25 : 04] And that, my friends, is where the battle rages for us in verses 12 to 13. All of humanity is born outside of this dance, outside of this relationship with God.

In Genesis, the spirit moves over the face of the waters. God speaks the world into being. Humanity is created. History is launched. And what happens next?

Satan tempts the first human beings, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden to make them themselves, take care of yourself, make you the centre of the world, make God orbit around you.

Ignore God. God's holding something back from you here. You look after yourself. If you want what's best for you, you look after yourself. And Adam and Eve failed that test.

And every human being since except Jesus. See, Jesus was tempted in the same way to make it about him, to not trust God, his goodness, his word.

[26 : 18] And so what happens to Jesus immediately after baptism? He finds himself away from the Father and the Son, in the wilderness. Take a look at verses 12 and 13.

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness and he was in the wilderness 40 days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals and the angels attended him.

You see, Mark treats Satan as a reality, not a myth. The Bible asserts that he's real and he tempts us away consistently on centering our lives around God.

And throughout the remainder of his life, Jesus is consistently assaulted by Satan again and again and again. And the climax of the assault is in another garden.

the garden of Gethsemane. It was the night of his great anguish over God's plan just before he's rescued and just before his execution and he knows he's heading to the cross.

[27 : 28] And God says to Jesus, you obey me, Jesus. Obey me about the tree. Adam and Eve didn't, but you obey me about the tree.

Only this time the tree was a wooden cross. Obey me about the tree meant for Adam that he would live forever in infinite joy. But Jesus, obey me about the tree would result in rejection by his father with whom he had experienced infinite joy and he would die.

And so Jesus went into the battle with Satan for us in order to draw us back into the dance. What he has enjoyed for all eternity with the Father and the Spirit he came to offer us.

He steps out of it to offer it to us. Jesus offers us a relationship of unconditional love with God the only source of infinite joy.

And he calls us at the end of this passage to come. He calls us into this relationship in verses 14 and 15.

[28 : 56] We have all failed like Adam and Eve before us and we have all attempted to make everything, everyone, all but around us. And the very first words that you hear from Jesus in Mark's Gospel is the call that he still calls on every life today in 2018 around this world and ever since he first uttered it repent and believe the good news.

The word repent here means reverse course or to turn away turn away from having the world orbit around you. In the Bible it means to specifically turn away from the things that Jesus hates and towards the things that he loves.

And the good news is another way of saying gospel. The word gospel literally means news that brings joy. And at the time of Mark they used the word it meant history making life shaping history altering as opposed to the nightly news bulletin about some cat stuck up a tree.

the gospel was news of some event that changed things in a meaningful way for everyone in the Roman Empire.

The words good news can you can see the difference between Christianity and every other religion in those words good news including may I add the religion of no religion.

[30 : 39] the essence of other religions is advice. Christianity is essentially news good news.

Other religions say this is what you need to do in order to connect with God forever. The Christian gospel says this is what has been done in history this is how Jesus lived this is how he died to earn the way for you to God and therefore Christianity is joyful news.

The call from Jesus is to turn away from the lies of Satan and to trust God turn away from being king of your own life and surrender to the true king turn away from the life of self-centeredness of self-centeredness destroys every relationship around you.

Nothing makes us more miserable than self-absorption because self-absorption leaves us static. Wars class struggles racism family breakdown they all have the root their root in the darkness of self-centeredness.

When we decide to be our own center our own king everything falls apart physically socially spiritually psychologically everything falls apart.

[32 : 07] We have left the dance a mutual love relationship with God and yet our longing in every human heart is to be there.

The good news the history altering news of Christianity is that Jesus has come back to bring us in and the call of Jesus repent and believe the good news.

They are the very first words of Jesus in Mark's gospel. Have you heard him calling you today? 2,000 years later have you heard like Emil Caliet sitting in that garden have you heard him calling you today? Do you have any sense of a warmth in there?

I want to give you an opportunity to respond to Jesus today. To simply respond to his call on your life and on the back of your service sheet there is a prayer.

[33 : 11] It's a very simple prayer but it is a life altering prayer. It's down the bottom. It's a prayer similar to what Emil Caliet would have prayed nearly a century ago.

It's a prayer that I have prayed and many of you have prayed. The Jesus who was alive who is ruling and calling then is doing exactly the same now.

He calls you to repent, to believe and to have your life orbit around God and find infinite everlasting joy in him.

God's call on your life. Pray it and join the dance with God.

If that is your prayer, I'm going to be down the front with a couple of others after this service. But I want to urge you strongly to pray that prayer and rejoin that dance with God today.
[34 : 17] Amen.