

# THE TIME HAS COME

MARK 1:1-45

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The Gospel According to Mark is an account of the life and ministry of Jesus the Messiah (the Christ). It is a fast-paced account originally written to Christians living within the Roman Empire who were experiencing persecution under the Roman Emperor. Writing mainly to a non-Jewish audience, Mark somewhat forces his readers to get rid of their preconceived ideas about what God is like and how God operates. Mark zeros in on the person of Jesus and focuses on his royal nature as the true *Son of God* and his redemptive mission as the *Suffering Servant*. Mark wastes no time getting straight to the point of what he believes about Jesus as he introduces his account with this immediate declaration in verse one:

The is beginning of the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

**According to Mark, Jesus is the true Son of God<sup>1</sup> and the promised new King of Israel (the Messiah) who had come to defeat evil and restore God’s rule over the world.**

And as we read through the rest of chapter one of Mark’s account, we see Mark introducing us to Jesus by highlighting his majesty, his message and his ministry.

## His Majesty

From the start, Mark makes his great declaration that Jesus is the Messiah<sup>2</sup> of Israel, and he backs that declaration up by referencing some key passages from Israel’s ancient prophets. In referencing these Old Testament (OT) passages, Mark reveals a first-century prophet in Israel named John the Baptist to be the God-ordained messenger who was commissioned to prepare God’s people for the return of *Yahweh*<sup>3</sup> himself.

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<sup>1</sup> The title “Son of God” begins to take on a whole new meaning when we understand that this was also a title given to the Roman Emperor, Augustus Caesar, who ruled during the time of Jesus’ birth. He was common referred to as the “son of a god”.

<sup>2</sup> Messiah means “anointed one” and can refer to a prophet, priest or king. It was most recognized as the title associated with the coming king from David’s lineage through whom Yahweh would rescue Israel from exile.

<sup>3</sup> Yahweh, also YHWH, is the ancient Israelite name for God. It is most often translated as LORD (all caps) in our English translations.

There was a long-standing hope that one day God (*Yahweh*) would return to Israel to rescue his people and to restore his rule and presence with them.<sup>4</sup> Mark identifies John the Baptist as the prophet in Israel who was announcing that this day had finally come. John was trying to get everyone ready for what was getting ready to take place. N.T. Wright puts it this way:

John was like the messenger going ahead of royalty, getting everywhere ready for the 'stronger one' who was coming after him. Israel as a whole needed smartening up. Each individual within Israel needed to smarten up. Someone was coming who would put even John in the shade.<sup>5</sup>

So Mark's purpose in mentioning John the Baptist is primarily to focus our attention on the one whom John was preparing the people for – the coming Messiah – the promised new King of Israel who had come to defeat evil and restore God's rule over the entire world. In doing this, Mark is making it clear that the Jesus movement is not necessarily something that was entirely brand new; it was the culmination of the story of ancient Israel revealed in the Old Testament, and it was the continuation of God's unfolding plan for all of creation.

Mark goes on to hammer this idea home even further in the details described surrounding Jesus' baptism and immediate temptation in the wilderness. In 1:10-11, Mark writes:

And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

This particular scene at the baptism of Jesus seems to draw our attention back to that other familiar point in Biblical history where the Father spoke, the Son acted and the Spirit of God fluttered over the face of the water. Timothy Keller points out how this scene resembles the Genesis account of creation<sup>6</sup> when he writes:

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<sup>4</sup> see Isaiah 40:3

<sup>5</sup> N.T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge: 2004), 2

<sup>6</sup> see Genesis 1:1-2 & John 1:1-3

Just as the original creation of the world was a project of the triune God, Mark says, so the redemption of the world, the rescue and renewal of all things that is beginning now with the arrival of the King, is also a project of the triune God.<sup>7</sup>

The baptism of Jesus was a landmark event that signified the confirmation of his identity as the anointed one (the Messiah), and it also signified the commencement of his redemptive mission. And then, just as the redemption plan had been initiated, we read that, “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness... to be tested by the satan.” All of this is meant to get our attention and to remind us of images from the Old Testament story.

Just as the creation sprang from the waters and immediately experienced the testing of the serpent, Jesus springs from the waters and into the presence of the satan’s lies and subtle schemes. Just as the people of Israel’s exodus from Egypt came out of the parted waters and immediately into the wilderness of trials and temptation, Jesus comes out of the water and into the wilderness to be tested and tempted as well. But where Israel failed to pass the test, Jesus succeeded; and where Adam had served himself, Jesus served God.

Therefore, Mark is telling us that a new human greater than Adam has come onto the scene. And that the hope of ancient Israel has now been reduced to One. The time has come for a new creation and a new exodus.

## **His Message**

The Son of God has come to his people, and Mark sums up his main message in this one simple declaration (1:15):

“The time has come, and the kingdom of God has arrived; turn back to God and believe the gospel.”

To understand Jesus’ message, we need a clear understanding of the word *gospel*. The word *gospel* means *good news* but in a magnified sense. Historically, the word *gospel* is used most often to refer to important events regarding world rulers and their kingdoms.

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy Keller, *King’s Cross*, (Redeemer CityNet: 2011), 5

Therefore, the word *gospel* refers to a royal announcement that has life-altering implications for those who hear it. Timothy Keller describes it this way when he writes:

A gospel is an announcement of something that has happened in history, something that's been done for you that changes your status forever.<sup>8</sup>

And it is precisely this that sets the Jesus movement apart from every other belief system and major world religion. Whereas a religion focuses on advice and instruction, Christianity is based simply on good news. This is fundamental to the Christian faith, and it presents questions that must be asked of those who claim to be Christians: Do you view the Bible as a message of instruction or as a proclamation of good news? Do you view the Bible as a *'How To'* or a *'Look What'*? The Bible is not a religious manual; it's the revelation of good news.

So if the Jesus movement is based on God's good news, what is the obligation of the person who wishes to be a follower of Jesus?

Jesus says, "Repent and believe the good news."

The message was the announcement that the time had come for the great moment where God was going to rescue his people and restore his rule as the King over the entire world. A new exodus was taking place, and so it was time to wake up to what God was doing.

This is still the message for us today. To repent means to turn around and head in the right direction. Whatever it is that we feel gives us our main reason for living, we have to turn away from that and turn to Jesus as our reason for living today and our hope for the future. The good news of Jesus the Messiah is that he has defeated the evil that was holding his world captive and he has restored God's rule as the unrivaled King over all creation. Therefore, we must respond to this royal announcement by turning away from living our lives according to our own definitions of good and evil and swear our allegiance to God by living a new way of life based on the life and teachings of Jesus.

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<sup>8</sup> Keller, 15

## His Ministry

As the rest of the first chapter unfolds, we begin to see two prominent themes that will be revisited throughout Mark's account. First, Jesus' unprecedented authority – most notably in the way that he taught and the way that he exercised power over illnesses and forces of evil. And then second, we begin to notice that in the kingdom of God – the realm or domain over which God's rule and authority is realized – those who would be viewed as *outsiders* are brought on the inside and those seen as *insiders* seem to be left on the outside.

As we will see, the ministry of Jesus is full of the unanticipated and the unexpected. This is clearly no ordinary man. This is the Son of God and the Savior-King who's inaugurating the kingdom of God that is unlike anything else this world has ever seen.

A new world order has been launched by Jesus, and we see this unfolding as we observe the shocking events described throughout the rest of this first chapter:

Some Galilean fishermen immediately left the family business to follow Jesus. People were astonished at the way Jesus was teaching. They claimed that he was teaching with a level of authority unlike anything they had ever seen or heard before. Forces of evil were speaking through possessed people and yelling at Jesus saying, "We know who you are – the Anointed One of God." Jesus demonstrated power over these evil forces and people were amazed that he could tell evil spirits what to do and they would do it.

Mark states that immediately Jesus' fame spread everywhere throughout the surrounding region. People were so amazed by Jesus' power over illnesses and forces of evil that they kept bringing more and more people to him who were sick or oppressed by evil. The whole city would gather outside the house where Jesus was staying to see him heal people.

Jesus had to wake up very early in the morning while it was still dark in order to have some peace and quiet to pray. Even then, he would be interrupted by people who were asking for him or looking for him. One time, a man with leprosy did the unthinkable (and unlawful) and got close to Jesus, and then Jesus did the unimaginable and touched the man! Shockingly, Jesus wasn't infected by touching the leper; the leper was healed by the touch of Jesus.

Mark ends this first chapter by pointing out that news of what Jesus was doing began to spread so fast that he could no longer openly enter a town publicly. He had to stay outside of town in desolate places, but people still kept coming to him from all over the region.

Imagine what this scene might look like today. Breaking news headlines on every channel, reporters and camera crews everywhere, eyewitnesses to miracles being interviewed, social media blowing up, iPhones recording all the action. The region of Galilee is all of a sudden the place to be in the first-century. The kingdom of God is near, and the King is here; but as we'll see, Jesus' real identity and redemptive mission is still far from being truly understood.