

# God's Message to Us in Mark

*Halifax, NS*

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## **Introduction**

Today in our sermon series through the Bible we have come to the second book in the New Testament... the Gospel According to Mark.

- In this sermon series, I am preaching one, or occasionally two, sermons on each book of the Bible.
- Last week, we did the Gospel According to Matthew, and I mentioned to you that the first four books of the New Testament are all what we call Gospels.
  - The four gospels of the New Testament are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
    - The word translated *gospel* means good news—it was used, for example, when a war was won and the news (or the gospel) was proclaimed.
  - All four gospels are about the good news of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world who came into the world to reconcile sinners to God.
    - They are not biographies, but testimonies of the ministry of Jesus Christ with a particular focus on His saving work.
    - That saving work reaches its climax in His death on the cross to atone for our sins, and in His resurrection showing the acceptance of His work.
      - The church is to declare this good news to all people in all nations, and whoever believes that Jesus is the Son of God and trusts in Him for forgiveness and deliverance is reconciled to God.
- As I mentioned last week, the four gospels, especially Matthew, Mark, Luke cover pretty much the same ground,
  - But each does it in a slightly different way.
    - In this way, we are able to gain more insight into the fullness of His person and work so that we might trust Him and worship Him all the more.
    - It is a situation where you have four witnesses, each with their own personality, writing about our Saviour by divine inspiration (so that they make no errors), each from their own perspective, and each with a different audience in mind.
- As we go through the gospels in this sermon series, I want to bring out the unique emphasis of each gospel.
  - Last week with Matthew, we noted that he wrote his gospel especially to the covenant people of God, who were the Jews.
    - We saw how he therefore emphasises how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament about the Messiah and gave evidence that Jesus was the Son of God who came to save His people from their sins.
    - We also saw how Matthew points out to the Jews that though they are the people God preserved as His people through whom the Saviour of the world would come, they need His saving work too.
      - Matthew drew attention to the sin of the covenant people who officially rejected Jesus and delivered Him up to be crucified, yet declared that all who received Him were made righteous by His saving work.
    - And in connection with this, Matthew also shows that the Gentiles (nations outside Israel) often had stronger faith than the Jews.

- I explained to you that Matthew is especially helpful for those who are in the church today because it reminds us that it is not enough to just be in the church...
  - We must also repent and believe on the Lord Jesus even though many of the mainline churches reject Him.
  - It is no different today than it was in Matthew's day.
    - Often, those who come into the church from outside are more zealous for the Lord than we are—and we need to be stirred up by this to serve the Lord the way we should.

Today, with Mark, we will look at how he presents Jesus.

- We understand that this Mark is the one who is called John-Mark, and whose mother owned one of the houses that the church in Jerusalem met in.
  - He is the one who went on the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, but abandoned them, bringing Paul's disfavour upon him.
  - However, later on, Paul speaks highly of him and refers to him as a faithful servant in the ministry.
- From what we know in history, it is believed that Mark ended up in Rome with Peter and that he wrote his gospel through hearing Peter's preaching.
  - As his target was the church at Rome, he presents Christ to them in ways that would be especially beneficial for them and for their way of thinking as Romans.
    - Romans were men of action—they valued action more than philosophy or speculation.
      - And so in Mark we learn of Christ more by what He does and by how people respond to Him rather than by what He says or by what is said about Him.
      - In other words, He is described in Mark by His actions.
        - Mark has a way of bringing us into the story, describing things in such a way that, more than in the other gospels, you feel as if you are there looking on.
    - As the dominant world power of their day, the Romans also prided themselves in authority and government—rule—order—power.
      - They wanted to establish their glorious government all over the world.
      - There is an emphasis in Mark on Christ as the ruler of all who rules in the way that rulers ought to rule—but His way is not like the way of the Romans.
      - His way is to be the greatest servant who sacrifices Himself to save His people.
        - In Mark 10:45, He says of Himself: **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”**
    - This was shocking to any Roman!
      - Here is the Son of Man, the one with all authority who is Lord of all, bearing shame to save His people!
        - A Roman ruler would sooner take his life than bear any shame.
        - He was not there to serve, but to be served.
  - Mark makes a point of showing how the crowds who gathered around Christ also marvelled...
    - At the incredible authority and power Jesus had...
    - And at the way He used His power to save and to serve.

- What a helpful message this is for us also.
  - That we might know our precious Saviour better, that we might worship Him better, that we might trust Him better, and that we might imitate Him better.

Let's take some time to unpack the glorious portrait in Mark of the supreme Lord who did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

## **I. Mark presents Him as the One who has supreme authority.**

A. Mark gets straight the point of Jesus' authority from the first verse.

- Roman people like to know who is officially in charge, so Mark declares it.
1. His opening words are: **The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**
    - a. Here is the person who *is* the gospel—the good news!
      - Mark says nothing about His birth or His origins as the other gospels do... he simply asserts that He is the good news.
    - b. He calls Him “Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”
      - *Jesus* means “Jehovah is salvation” and points to Him as the one who saves us from our sins.
      - *Christ* means “Messiah” or “Anointed One” and shows that He is the One who is anointed with the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's calling.
      - And *the Son of God* presents Him as the second person of the trinity, equal with God, yet the second person in the Divine nature.
  2. Mark shows us His herald...*John the baptiser*...who was preaching in the wilderness... *a voice crying in the wilderness* as prophesied.
    - a. The herald prepares the way by a baptism of repentance.
      - It is the baptism by sprinkling with water promised by God in Ezekiel... a baptism of cleansing from the guilt and defilement of sin that signifies the true forgiveness of sin and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.
    - b. John the herald declares in verse 7 that he is not worthy to loose His sandal strap—a task considered so demeaning that no a Hebrew slave could be required to do it.
      - John, the greatest of the prophets, declares that he is not even worthy to do this. This is a claim of Christ's supremacy and deity.
    - c. John the herald declares in verse 8 that while he baptises with water, Christ will baptise with the Holy Spirit.
      - John can only do symbolic cleansing, but Christ is the One who actually cleanses sinners.
      - Good news indeed! Authority far beyond all human authority.
  3. Jesus' supreme position is then shown by the witness of heaven itself.
    - Again, in the Roman way, Mark goes straight to His official anointing as the Messiah. See Mark 1:9-11.
      - He is baptised and the heavens are opened so that we see the official action of God the Holy Spirit and of God the Father from heaven:
    - a. The Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove.
      - This shows that He is the One who is not anointed with oil, as was always done, but directly with the Holy Spirit... He is THE Anointed One.

- b. God the Father declares that He is His Son in whom He is well pleased.
    - Here is the formal, official proclamation that He is truly God's Son and that God approves of Him and sanctions His Messiahship.
  - 4. Then Jesus Himself comes forth preaching—showing how all ought to respond to Him as the One through whom God's kingdom comes.
    - a. He proclaims that with Him, the kingdom of God has come.
      - He is the anointed King who brings salvation to those who repent and believe the gospel.
        - Look at verses 14-15: **Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."**
      - Right away (verses 16-20), He calls four fishermen to join Him who will help Him proclaim this message of repentance and faith.
        - They will be fishers of men who will bring people into His kingdom by calling them to repent and believe.
          - They must leave their nets to devote themselves to this great work.
    - b. This call to repent and believe demands a response from all people—including you today.
      - Mark is going to show us how people respond to Christ as His authority is displayed.
        - Mark is very interested in the responses of people.
      - 1) Again and again, we will see the multitudes, who are more of an impediment than anything—clamouring around Him... marvelling at His authority; but never repenting and actually committing to Him.
      - 2) And we will see opposition arising from the religious leaders.
        - They are self-righteous and do not like to think of themselves as needing to repent—nor do they like to think of anyone on earth having more authority than they do—so they increasingly oppose Him.
      - 3) And then you have those who do repent and believe. They come to confess Him as Christ and they follow Him.
        - They do not stand and gaze, but they enter His kingdom and serve Him all their lives, bringing forth more and more fruit.
        - This is the only proper way to respond to the Son of God who came into the world to establish a kingdom for God in righteousness.
          - We must enter it.
- B. Mark goes on to display the authority of Christ by His actions.
- Again and again, He shows us by His actions that He is supreme Lord; and again and again He shows us the responses of the three groups—
    - the marvelling multitudes that never really commit...
    - the religious leaders who oppose Him at every step...
    - And the few who truly do receive Him as Lord.
  - 1. Mark shows Him preaching with authority in the synagogue at Capernaum in Mark 1:21-22 and describes the people as astonished at the authority displayed.

- He shows Him casting out demons in the same meeting and describes the people's reaction: v. 27-28: **Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."** <sup>28</sup> **And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee.**
2. He meets His first official opposition in chapter 2 when He pronounces His forgiveness of the paralytic who is let down to Him through the roof.
    - The scribes accuse Him of blasphemy since only God can forgive sins—
      - but He asserts that if the Son of Man has authority to tell the man to rise up and walk, He has authority to forgive the man's sins.
    - The crowd is again greatly impressed, but nothing more.
  3. Mark goes on showing more and more of His actions that confirm that He is the supreme Lord who brings the kingdom of God to men.
    - a. He shows Him forgiving sins and even by effectively calling tax collectors to repent and serve Him...then correcting the misuse of fasting and the abuse of the Sabbath.
      - This greatly infuriates the religious leaders with this result...
        - Mark 3:6: **Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.**
    - b. In chapter 4, Mark shows Jesus proclaiming parables—
      - The parable of *the sower* and of *the light under the bushel* both expose the problem of inadequate response to His gospel call...
      - And the parable of *the growing seed* and of *the mustard seed* both describe the tremendous, but gradual and almost imperceptible, growth of His kingdom.
    - c. Mark then shows Him calming wind and wave by a word of command.
      - Look at this example and note how vivid Mark is... makes you feel as if you were there: Mark 4:37: **And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling.** <sup>38</sup> **But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"** <sup>39</sup> **Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.** <sup>40</sup> **But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"** <sup>41</sup> **And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"**
        - This is the response of His true disciples, which will soon grow to maturity.
    - d. After this, Mark shows Him casting out a demon named Legion, then raising the daughter of Jairus from the dead and stopping a woman's flow of blood.
    - e. He shows Him feeding the five thousand and then the four thousand, as a sign to signify that He is the bread that came down...
    - f. He shows Him healing a deaf mute and then a blind man...

TRANS> Clearly Christ is the supreme Lord of all.

- The Romans are impressed with official authority—
  - Here is the One who has far more authority than their emperor.

- Here is the One all must bow before as Lord and sovereign.
- But now there is a turning point in Mark's revelation of Christ.
  - In chapter 8:27-30, we have Mark's simple version of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ.
    - Verse 29 says: **He [Jesus] said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."**
  - Peter and His fellow disciples have come to see that He is the Messiah and they expect that He will soon rise to His throne.
    - This is what any Roman would have expected the one with such authority to do as well.
    - But instead, Jesus from this point on begins to tell them that He will be raised up on a cross!

## II. Mark shows us that His intent is not to be served but to serve by going to the cross.

- This is unheard of—people with such authority do not do such things!
  - Three times Jesus tells His disciples that He will suffer and each time His disciples don't get it and have to be rebuked for wrong attitudes about service.
- A. The first time (8:31-38) occurs just after the disciples' confession that He is the Christ (or the Messiah).
  - Keep in mind that the view of the Jews was that the Messiah would not die.
    1. Jesus declares that He will die: Mark 8:31: **"And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."**
    2. Peter rebukes Him: Mark 8:32: **He spoke this word openly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.**
    3. Then *He* rebukes Peter: Mark 8:33: **But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."**
      - In other words, the disciples, though knowing that He is the Christ, truly do not get it yet.
        - They cannot conceive that the Messiah would be crucified...
          - No! He is the Son of David who reigns forever with all authority.
      - One with such authority cannot die.
        - Mark's Roman audience would totally concur.
    4. And then to drive the point home further, Jesus explains that following Him means losing your life for Him.
      - He speaks of this in 8:34-38: **When He had called the people to *Himself*, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful**

**generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”**

TRANS> This does not compute.

- That He came to serve by giving His life is repeated two more times, and two more times they don't get it.

B. The second time is in chapter 9:30-32.

- This comes after His transfiguration and His casting out a demon that none of His disciples could cast out—reinforcing that He is indeed the Lord of all...

1. But then that mysterious pronouncement comes again... in 9:31: **For He taught His disciples and said to them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.”**

2. Verse 32 tells us that they did not understand this saying and were afraid to ask Him, and then we see in the next paragraph the fruit of their misunderstanding.

- In verse 33 (9:33) and following, Jesus confronts them for disputing about which of them would be the greatest...

- He tells them that the greatest one is the one who serves all.

- He spends the rest of the chapter explaining to them that as leaders in His kingdom, they are to care for children, to look after the needs of the lowly ones and to never act so as to cause them to stumble.

- He has not come to gather impressive people into His kingdom.

- He has come to give His life for the weak and lowly.

- You might say that He is so great that no one impresses Him—He has come to save our ruined human race, not to draw around Him those who think they are great in order to advance His honour.

- That is what the great men of the world do... not seeing that they themselves are just as needy of His salvation as the lowly are.

3. This point is driven home by what follows in chapter 10...

- Mark tells of how Jesus teaches that husbands should love their wives and not destroy the bond of marriage, and then of how Jesus blesses the little children...

- showing His care for those who were dependant on others and who are to be cared for in His kingdom.

- It is those who pretend to be great that have no place with Him... they need to repent and believe in Him instead of believing in themselves.

- That is the false doctrine you hear today—that everyone ought to believe in themselves. The gospel is the opposite—you are to believe in Jesus.

- Only He can save you.

- Mark describes a rich young ruler, a very honourable man, who comes to Jesus as one who believes in himself—and who has more reason to do so than most people.

- He is moral, he is a ruler though young, he has great riches... he is the kind of man any great king of the world would want to have...

- but Jesus rejects him and explains that it is impossible for men like this to enter His kingdom.

- They have no need of repentance or of trusting in Him for salvation.
- Only the Son of Man can save them.

TRANS> So again, you have this teaching of the cross—Jesus has come not to be served but to serve man in his need by dying on the cross.

- The disciples still don't really get it, so He brings forth this teaching a third time.

C. The third time is in Mark 10:32-45.

1. In verses 32-34, Jesus tells them again what will happen to Him.
  - The setting is that the disciples are amazed and afraid when they see Him going up to Jerusalem because they know that the leaders are out to get Him.
    - Jesus basically tells them that the leaders *will* get Him... this is the plan.
  - Mark 10:32-34 says: **Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: <sup>33</sup> "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; <sup>34</sup> and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."**
- What follows immediately shows how His disciples totally don't get it...
2. James and John come asking for exalted positions in His kingdom!
  - Jesus tells them that the exalted position is being baptised with the baptism that He is to be baptised with—by this He means going to the cross to cleanse His kingdom.
3. Jesus teaches them that in His kingdom, authority is exercised by serving the unworthy, not by being served.
  - He concludes this speech with those wonderful words that sum up this whole doctrine in Mark 10:45:
    - **Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."**

TRANS> And then in the rest of Mark's gospel we have Jesus going through with what He says He came to do...

### **III. Jesus the Son of Man, the supreme ruler of all, actually goes up to Jerusalem to be crucified, and He is crucified.**

A. He comes into Jerusalem with great authority—showing that He is Lord.

1. He enters into the city on a donkey (as a king of peace)—the triumphal entry where the multitudes cry (11:9) **"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!"**
  - thereby affirming that He has come to save.
2. He then cleanses the temple (11:15-19), driving out those buying and selling there and declaring that it is to be a house of prayer for all nations.
  - He shows that He is LORD and that He is against the corrupt leaders and the way they are running things.



- This is all powerfully illustrated by the cursing of the fig tree that has leaves without fruit—a symbol of Israel at this time.
3. In chapter 12, Jesus confronts the wickedness of the leaders with the parable of the wicked vinedressers.
    - In this parable He shows how the rulers in Israel rejected all the servants that God sent to them, and at last even reject His Son when He comes.
    - This results in questions about His authority in which He ably defends His authority and in turn leaves them with a question about it that that they cannot answer.
  4. In chapter 13, He pronounces the coming judgment against Jerusalem including the destruction of the temple, because of their official rejection of Him...
    - He identifies Himself as the Son of Man who comes in the clouds with great power and glory to establish His kingdom and judge those who oppose Him.

TRANS> But then the pattern recurs... the supreme Lord of all goes to be crucified.

B. First, He prepares Himself and His disciples for His death...

1. In Mark 14:1-9, He declares that the anointing of His feet with the expensive oil (that was worth a year's wages) is an anointing of His body for burial.
2. In 14:12-31, He has the Passover with His disciples and institutes the Lord's Supper in which He shows that His body broken and His blood shed is for the remission of sins.
  - He also prophecies that when this happens, they will all forsake Him.
3. Then in 14:32-42, He goes to Gethsemane to prepare by prayer, resigning His will to that of the Father, and urging His disciples to also pray—but they sleep.

C. Next, He allows Himself be taken, tried, and crucified.

1. He goes willingly with those who come to arrest Him in 14:43-52, pointing out the nefarious nature of their action by coming in the night with swords and clubs when He has been in the temple daily without a militia.
2. He submits to their trial (14:53-65), in which they desperately look for a way to accuse Him until He at last is asked a legitimate question in v. 61 **“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”**
  - He not only answers this question, but also asserts His authority as the Son of Man who will come in the full display of His deity to judge: **Mark 14:62: Jesus said, “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”**
    - To speak of coming in the clouds of heaven to judge is clearly an assertion of deity, which the chief priest does not miss...all of them agreeing that He should be crucified.
3. Mark lays out His trial before weak Pilate, who finds no fault in Him, but agrees to let Him be crucified...
  - And He then undergoes mocking, scourging, and ultimately the crucifixion itself...and cries out **“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”** and then yields up His life so that the Centurion says (15:39), **“Truly this Man was the Son of God.”**

- This is the suffering and indignity that He bore.
  - He took the shame and curse that belongs to His people as an act of service to them... just as He said He would in Mark 10:45: **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”**
  - Note, “*even* the Son of Man,” the same “Son of Man” who said He would come in the clouds of heaven—crucified.

TRANS> This is such service as was unheard of among the Romans.

D. It results in Him coming forth from the grave with baptism for the nations.

1. Mark testifies to His resurrection in chapter 16.
  - There is the empty tomb there are His appearances to the women and others...
  - And eventually to all eleven of them while they are at the table.
  - He rebukes them for their unbelief at the reports of His resurrection...
    - He had told them all along that He would rise on the third day...
2. And then there is His great commission in which, on the basis of what He has just done on the cross, He says to His disciples (Mark 16:15-16): **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. <sup>16</sup> He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”**
  - Mark began his gospel with the good news of cleansing by the Son of God—of repentance and baptism in hope of the true baptism that He would give.
  - And now He ends His gospel with Christ’s servants going out to the nations to proclaim cleansing by the One who did not come to be served but to serve.
    - They are to proclaim Him who came to give His life a ransom for many.
3. The results of Christ, the supreme Lord, giving His life results in Him ascending to heaven and in His servants being fishers of men.
  - **Mark 16:19-20: So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. <sup>20</sup> And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.**
  - Amen indeed!
    - That is the marvellous outcome of the supreme Lord of all making Himself the servant of all.
    - May His kingdom come!