

Whats The Big Deal About Jesus?

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[0 : 0 0] verses 1 to 8. Mark chapter 1, let's read verses 1 to 15 also appear on the screen. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, behold I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way. The voice of one crying in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. John appeared baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey, and he preached saying, after me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptized you with water but he will baptize you with the Holy

Spirit. In those days Jesus came from Nazareth to Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan, and when he came up out of the water immediately he saw the heavens opening 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. The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness and he was in the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild animals and the angels were ministering to him. Now after John was arrested Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God and saying the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel. Well I want to begin with a question, what's the big deal about Jesus? Why does Jesus matter?

According to Time magazine Jesus ranks as the most significant figure in history, I wonder who you'd expect to come next, followed by Napoleon and Muhammad. H. G. Wells who's perhaps best known for his science fiction like War of the Worlds said this, I am a historian, not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history. The American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson also said this, the name of Jesus is not so much written as plowed into the history of the world, and one more quote for you, the preacher Charles Spurgeon said Christ is the central fact of world's history. To him everything looks forward or backwards, all lines of history converge on him, all the great purposes of God culminate on him.

And we'll all know the importance of Christianity in our own island, many of you will remember the days when these pews above us in the balcony would have been completely full, when the community revolved even more around the church, and when everyone came to church every Sunday. But as we sit here you might think well those days are now in the past. Does that mean though that Jesus has lost his place at the center of history? Does that mean Jesus is no longer significant? Why does Jesus matter today? What is the big deal about Jesus? Well Jesus isn't just the center of history, he's at the center of Christianity. If you were to ask people what is being a Christian about, what's your view of Christianity, many people would say things like well it's about obeying rules or about going to church or about not watching TV on a Sunday, what are things that they have heard or experienced from being at church or seeing people in the church. Maybe that's what you've thought about Christianity as well all your life. But at the heart of Christianity is a person, Jesus. This past week as we went from household to household all across from Dalbeg to

Tolstoykulis, we handed out a copy of Mark's Gospel, this this copy here of Mark's Gospel. And if you haven't opened it yet we're gonna help you do that because this morning we're gonna open it up and we're gonna look at the first few verses so then you can it's easy for you to keep reading I hope. This is a biography of Jesus. Mark's Gospel was written in about AD 65 about 30 years after Jesus' death probably from the eyewitness accounts of Jesus by the Apostle Peter, one of Jesus's closest friends. And in the first sentence of Mark's Gospel he tells us that Christianity is all about Jesus. He says the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. That if you like is Mark's title. This is a book all about Jesus. This is about Jesus' identity. This is about who he is. This is about everything Jesus did, his mission. And this is about how people should respond to him. But notice that

[5 : 16] Mark doesn't just say he's writing all about Jesus. He's writing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Now you may already know this but the word Gospel means good news. It's the kind of good news that makes you jump for joy when you hear it.

When someone tells you over the phone that they're having a baby or the baby's been born or that they're engaged or maybe you see a picture on Instagram and you see their wedding. It's the kind of announcement like the war is over. There'll be some people in our village who'll remember that announcement when World War II was over or maybe remember when the Berlin Wall was pulled down. Significant events that just seem to have changed everything.

The clouds part, the sun comes out. That kind of good news. Mark is writing to tell us that Jesus is a big deal and he takes a whole book to do it but the answer begins in this introduction. As I said we're just gonna look at verses 1 to 8 and then you can keep reading to find out more. Just two points this morning about why Jesus is good news. First Jesus is good news because he's the promised Messiah. He's the promised Messiah. This week when the OM team went door to door one of the questions we gave out a questionnaire. We invited people to take part in a questionnaire and one of the questions we asked was who do you would you say that Jesus is? And while Mark gets straight to the point he doesn't give us a few options to choose from. He tells us straight away this is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now Christ isn't a last name it's a title like Lord or Duke. Christ is the Greek translation of the

Hebrew word Messiah and the Messiah was God's long-promised King who had been he'd been telling his people all through the Old Testament. He's the one who's gonna come to make everything right, to undo all the wrongs. Everything that I was praying about the mess, the brokenness, everything that scrunched us up like 20 pound notes. Well the Messiah was the one who's gonna come and undo all that. When people thought of hope they thought of the Messiah. They thought of everything he was going to do, everything he was going to bring. And so Mark's very first words, the most important thing he wants to tell us if you like, is that Jesus is that Messiah. He is God's long-awaited King.

He's not interested in building up tension if you like reading murder mystery novels so you don't find out the answer straight away. I know some people like flicking to the end. I don't know why they do that but Mark isn't trying to build up tension. He wants us to know straight away who's done it. He wants us to know that Jesus has done it. That this is all about who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. And just so that we know, just so that we know even from the start that Jesus is this long-promised King, Mark gives us a bunch of witness testimonies you could say. It's an introduction. You could say it's a procession that announces the King. If you remember at King Charles's coronation, you might not. You might not have had no interest in watching it but there was a long procession leading up to Westminster Abbey. And you knew the King was coming because you first of all saw the household cavalry with their gleaming breastplates. You saw the military band. You saw the dragoons. You saw all of the various, I don't know, all the various pomp, the various important figures come before him. And when you saw them pass, you knew that the King was coming next. They were all there to announce and to lead the way, to clear the streets for the King. And that's what Mark is giving us here. He's giving us a procession of people that announced the coming of the King. You could say they're like three heralds throughout history that tell us the King is coming. And Mark, you might say, is the TV commentator who's introducing each one as they pass by.

[9 : 12] The first heralds in this procession are the prophets Malachi and Isaiah. You'll notice in verse 2 Mark only mentions Isaiah by name because he was the greater or more well-known of the two prophets. But first, verse 2 is quoting from the book of Malachi. Let me read it again for us.

Behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way. Malachi was the last Old Testament prophet. He wrote about 400 years ago before Jesus arrived. And he prophesied to a people who had fallen into a lot of corruption and injustice, people who despised God. And in Malachi 3 verse 1 where this is taken from, he prophesied that God is going to send a messenger who will prepare the way for God to come to save but also to judge, to make right all the wrong. And we'll come back to that in a bit. Verse 3 though is quoting from Isaiah. Isaiah 40 which we read earlier, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Isaiah was one of the greatest prophets who spoke more than any other prophet about the coming King, the coming Messiah. And you'll have noticed when we read that

Isaiah 40 is a message of comfort, it's a message of hope. Isaiah prophesied over the time of the nation of Israel going into exile. They too had pushed God away, rejected him in their sin. But even as they were about to go into exile and going off into exile, Isaiah promised that that wasn't the end. The people may have pushed God away but God hadn't given up on his people. The exile wasn't the end of the story. And so Isaiah writes, God speaks through Isaiah saying, comfort, comfort my people. Cry to her that her warfare is ended and her sin is pardoned. A voice cries in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. And the good news that Isaiah says is that God is coming to lead his people out of Exodus, out of exile, sorry.

You could say it's a new Exodus. God is rescuing. God is saving his people. The King is coming to save. And so Mark combines Malachi and Isaiah, the first and last prophets, who together announced that the King is coming, coming to judge and to save. They're like the heralds clearing the streets, making room, getting people ready for the King to come. But they don't just announce the Messiah. You'll have noticed they also announced the messenger who's going to come before him, the messenger who's going to introduce him. Do you notice how he's mentioned in verse two? Behold, I'll send my messenger before your face. He's the one in verse three who is crying in the wilderness. In other words, you'll know the King is coming when this final messenger appears. And in verse four, Mark says he has come. John appeared baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and a locust and wild honey. And he preached, saying, after me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. When you see the final messenger, you'll know the King is coming. And Mark wants us to be super sure that John, the Baptist, as he's known, is really that promised messenger so that we can be sure of who

Jesus is. And so do you notice the ways that he matches Isaiah and Malachi's prophecies with John's description? So for example, verse four, we're told that John was in the wilderness. And verse seven, we're told that he's preaching a baptism of repentance. And John himself doesn't say that he is the big deal. He says, after me comes one who is mightier than I. In other words, you're not waiting for me. You're waiting for the one who comes after me. And even John's strange clothes and diet fit in here. You might be wondering, why on earth is he clothed in camel's hair? That's just, that would be scratchy. That would be itchy. Why is he eating locusts and honey? Well, if you had a fancy dress party and the theme was Old Testament prophet, that's what you would all wear. You'd all get hold of some of the closest kind of scratchy garment, kind of camel's hair, something like that. And all the snacks would be roasted locust dipped in honey. That's, that's how you look the part of the prophet. So John looks like a stereotypical

[14 : 14] Old Testament prophet. I can show you some of the verses from the Old Testament where we get this afterwards if you like. But Mark's point is simple. John, the messenger has arrived, which means the king is just around the corner. Now, you might wonder though, why is Mark telling us about all these messengers? If Christianity is all about Jesus, then why didn't he just cut to the chase and get to Jesus? Why on earth all this bump until we get to him? Well, let me give you two reasons. First, Mark wants us to see that Jesus doesn't randomly appear on the timeline of history. He is part of God's long-established plan to rescue his people. Jesus is coming, isn't a last-minute decision, it isn't plan B. The whole Bible has been building up to this moment. Quoting Isaiah and Malachi as the first and last prophets is like Mark's way of saying all the prophets point to Jesus. Jesus himself will say to some of his disciples at the end of Luke's Gospel, he'll speak of how all of the Old Testament points to him. All of the Old Testament finds its fulfillment in him. In other words, all of the Bible, we have to read all of the Bible, all of the Old Testament especially, as about

Jesus. When we read, if you think of a random book in the Old Testament, that is about Jesus because it points forward, it looks forward and it longs for Jesus as its fulfillment. That should affect the way we read the Bible.

Jesus isn't an afterthought, he is the thought. If you read through the Old Testament and aren't pointed towards Jesus and don't go to Jesus from there, well then you're missing the point. That's why the Jews around Jesus who spoke to him but who rejected him as the king, they had missed the point of the Old Testament that they so cherished and loved. Jesus was the fulfillment of all of the promises that they were looking at. He wasn't coming against them. Jesus, all of the Bible points to him and that leads to Mark's second reason. Mark includes all of these messages because he wants us to see that Jesus really is the climax. Like some of us, Mark's original readers, some of Mark's original readers wouldn't have been that familiar with the Old Testament. Jews at Jesus' time would have read all of these prophecies.

They would have felt the momentum, the excitement, the expectation of the Messiah coming. A lot of us don't necessarily feel that. We've maybe heard about Jesus or we haven't but most of us don't necessarily have that same longing and expectation that the Messiah needs to come. So Mark is giving us snapshots of these prophecies to show us just how Jesus is the, how all the excitement leads to him. You need to imagine these prophets and John the Baptist like horsemen galloping through shouting that the king is coming behind, announcing the coming of the king. Get excited, get ready. That leads us to our second point because Jesus is not just good news because he is the promised Messiah but also as we come down through these verses we see that he is the one who will give the Spirit. He's the Spirit-giver. Just grab a drink.

The coming of the Messiah was, you could say, the most hotly anticipated event for the Jewish people. It was bigger than hosting the Olympics or the World Cup or the Coronation. I was looking at some of the figures for how many people it took to prepare for the Paris Olympics. There were two permanent stadiums made, many temporary arenas, but it took 9,000 workers, a total of, who clocked in a total of 45 million hours to prepare for that. So that's the same as one person working for about 5,000 years or for if you have, if you work normal time and not overtime, that's 9,000 workers working non-stop for two years. There was a lot of work to get ready for the Olympics.

[18:30] The Coronation also involved a lot of people getting ready. 4,000 members of the armed forces from the UK and across the Commonwealth, 19 bands and flag bearers, and they drilled and practiced for weeks all for that one day. I mean, not even a whole full day, all for that coronation. The coming of the Messiah is no different. I don't know whether you noticed that repeated phrase, prepare the way. Both Isaiah and Malachi include that, the messenger who will prepare the way of the Lord. Verse 3, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Mark 1 says to not just get excited for the coming of God's King, but also to get ready. That's John the Baptist's role. He preaches that the Messiah is coming, but he also gets people ready for the King. He does that by baptizing them in the River Jordan. I imagine if you were one of those 2,000 guests who were going to the Coronation, if you wanted to go, of course, and get that invitation, you'd make some effort to get ready. You'd probably get a new suit or a dress, you might get a new haircut, you'd at least have a shower and make yourself presentable in some way to go to the Coronation. But when John the Baptist is baptizing people to prepare them for the King, this isn't about cosmetics or hygiene. We're told that this is a baptism of repentance. Verse 4 and verse 5, people came baptizing and they were being baptized in the river confessing their sin. This ritual washing was all about repentance and forgiveness of sin. And as I said to the kids, sin is the word the Bible uses to describe all the wrong things we do. All the ways we push God away is King. You might say that if sin is getting rid of the King, sin is getting rid of the King, not getting ready for the King. And John wants people to be turning away from sin and instead getting ready. And we need to get ready because as we saw in that

Malachi quote, when Jesus the Messiah is coming, he's going to come whether we like it or not. Or he has come for Mark's readers, whether they liked it or not. It wasn't a choice. The King was coming and so therefore we had to get ready. And he'll come to save his people. That's Mark's message. But also Jesus came in judgment against those who will reject him as King. And so John says repent, turn away from sin and be baptized as a symbol of having your sins washed away. I think one thing that really struck me reading this passage this time was that everyone needed it. Do you notice that? Verse 5, all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and being baptized in the river. A lot of people think that a person can be right with God or friends with God or back in relationship with God by doing good things, living a good life. And some people thought that way in Jesus' day too. Well part of the way John prepares the way for Jesus is to get rid of that idea. That there's no one who's good enough for the King. There's no one who can just waltz up to the party and say here I am. No one is good enough for God on their own. Everyone, sin isn't just a problem for thieves and murderers and corrupt politicians and whoever else you want to throw in the mix. John preaches to everyone and he calls everyone to be baptized because everyone has a sin problem. The Bible tells us that every one of us has broken God's law. I think sometimes people can think well if I go through the Ten Commands, I haven't broken all of them, I haven't committed murder and we might list all the things that we haven't done. But the Bible tells us actually if we look at our hearts all of us have fallen short. None of us can go a day. None of us can even go an hour without breaking God's law.

Jesus summarizes God's law as love the Lord your God with all your hearts, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. None of us can do that perfectly. God is the great king of the world but everyone, every one of us by nature have rejected him. In our thoughts, in our words, our deeds, none of us can keep his commands even for a day and the self-rule of sin that actually we turn to instead, it causes damage to us and to our people all around us. We witness the fracturing of relationships, we witness the hurt and the mess that it causes and you might recognize many of the problems of sin in your own life.

The thing is with sin, it's sin is much easier to spot than it is to scrub because even if we recognize our sin, even if we have remorse, even if we wish it wasn't there, we can't undo things that we've done. Even if we tell someone that we're sorry for what we've done, that doesn't stop it. They can't take that away, we can't scrub away things that we have done. We can't wash ourselves clean with ritual washing, we can't balance out the bad with the good. Sin is a stain that won't come out and so while John was preparing people for the Messiah to come, we also need to get ready because Jesus not only has come but the Bible tells us that Jesus will return again and that we all need to be ready to meet Jesus when we come to stand before Him when we die or when Christ comes again one day and so Mark's message is not just that we need to be excited for the King but we also need to be ready for Him. The message so far you might summarize as this, the King is coming, the King was coming for Mark's readers, the King is coming, Jesus Christ is coming again, we need to get ready to meet the King but the problem is we have a sin problem and we can't scrub up on our own. John's baptism shows us the problem of sin but it was a problem that we can never deal with on our own because the source is in our hearts but

John says that someone is coming who can. Do you notice John the Baptist says, after me is coming he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. I baptize you with water but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. John sees himself as lower in status, lower as like the lowest slave compared to this Messiah, compared to Jesus. His baptism is just a symbol but Jesus will bring the real deal. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Now just briefly what does that mean? Well if sin as its source is a heart problem then we need a heart solution and 600 years before Jesus arrived God prophesied and told and spoke about that heart solution he would bring through the prophet Ezekiel. He said this, and I'll give you a new heart and a new spirit I'll put within you and I'll remove the heart of stone from your flesh and I'll give you a heart of flesh and I'll put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. Serious problems require serious solutions. About a year ago a friend of mine went to the doctor and they found that he had an aortic aneurysm right close to the heart and that meant that he had to go undergo about a four hour operation where his chest was cut open, his ribs were leave it apart all to get at that aneurysm. Well to solve our sin problem we need you might say a heart transplant. We need the injection of God's spirit into our lives to wash away sin and as we heard from that Ezekiel quote only God can do that and John says the Messiah has come to do that. You'll have to read through further through Mark's Gospel to see how that happens but I will give the spoiler here if you don't know it already.

[26 : 47] Serious problems require serious solutions and that took Jesus to not just come to this earth and to live a perfect life but also to die. Jesus wasn't just a good teacher, a miracle worker, a great leader. He was all those things but the reason that Jesus is the Savior is because he went to the cross and he lay down his life and on the cross he took the punishment for your sin and mine if we're trusting in Jesus so that instead that we might that he took our rotten hearts you might say so that we might have his perfection so that we might have his goodness his righteousness so that we might be forgiven so that we can not just meet the King but become part of his family. We can't do that ourselves. Jesus did it all and as you read through Mark's Gospel you'll read see just how significant just how amazing that is. How do we get ready for

Jesus then? Well verse 5 tells us the best and the only preparation we can do for meeting the King is to confess our sins, is to recognize our sin and confess it. That's true whether that's whether we're hearing this good news for the first time. The only way that you can meet God, the only way that you can become right with God and you can know Jesus through confessing your sin and believing in him but that's also the pattern of the Christian life. We only see our need for Jesus. We only see the beauty of the Gospel when we recognize our sin and see our ongoing need for Jesus and so see the ongoing beauty of what he has done. The coming of Jesus is good news 2,000 years ago and today because he was God's promised King and he is God's promised King. He rose again.

He reigns. He's the Messiah who has come to wash people clean.