

The King is here

Mark 1:1-20

The biggest Australian gold nugget found was called the “Welcome Stranger”. It weighed 72Kg and would bring \$3,330,000 today. How would you like to find a treasure like that?

In 1851 the Australian gold rushes started. In the next 20 years 1.3 million people came to Australia from UK, Europe, USA, and China such was the excitement. They left home, travelled in sailing ships, lived in tents sometimes in the snow and had to hard work to find a treasure like this. But many people didn’t find much at all.

Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a treasure. But it is more enduring, more valuable, much more secure - worth much more than a lump of gold.

What is God’s kingdom worth to you?

Today we begin looking at Mark’s Gospel to learn about this treasure (today & next year). Are you perhaps unsure what to believe? - look closely with us.

Is the kingdom is a treasure for you? Jesus said, “Where your treasure is there your heart also.” Do you really treasure the kingdom? Is it worth more than everything? Then keep looking - find out more about what it is worth.

Like gold the small grains are on the surface. You need to dig deeper to find real treasure. Keep digging! Mark’s Gospel is like a treasure map. It gives us clues to finding this treasure.

The main clue is the person of Jesus. It is all about Jesus. But who is this character Jesus?

He looked like an ordinary man. They knew born, in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth. They knew his father, mother, brothers and sisters. But who was he really?

He went about doing amazing things and teaching very surprising things. What did it all mean?

Imagine you are on a long car trip for a holiday. The kids in the back begin saying, “Are we there yet?” There is anticipation, excitement about where you are going but frustration at how long it is taking. They are looking forward to a great holiday. “When will we get there?”

We need to understand this sense of anticipation at the time Jesus came. The Old Testament had foretold the coming of a king like King David, one who would rule his people in righteousness and peace. They were expecting this King, the Messiah, to come.

But right now there were ruled by the Romans. Roman soldiers on their streets, interfered with their religion and imposed heavy taxes on them.

They thought the Messiah would come and free them from Romans. That was the treasure they looked forward to, freedom and an earthly political kingdom.

We need to understand this anticipation and frustration.

When would it happen? But we also need to understand the confusion. They expected one thing. But Jesus was not what they expected. They had to work out where Jesus fitted in, and so do we.

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Who is this man? We will see in Mark: the crowds said he is a prophet. He teaches about God. He heals the sick. He is a good moral teacher and example of love.

But Jesus claimed to be the King in God's kingdom. He claimed he could do things only God could do. A prophet wouldn't say that. He can't be just a prophet.

The leaders said he is bad. He speaks blasphemy. He is claiming to be God. We must crucify someone as evil as this.

Do you think he is evil? Does he come across as evil?

His family (his mother and brothers) said he is mad. They tried at one stage to try to stop his ministry. Was he mad, deluded thinking he was divine?

The disciples took a long time to work out who he is. They came to realise he is the King, the Messiah. But he is more than a human king, he is God's Son, God on earth.

We can examine these things as we look at Jesus life. He can't be good teacher. Was he Bad? Mad? or God? These are the only alternatives.

If he is God then his kingdom is greater than an earthy kingdom, and the treasure he offers is much greater than earthly pot of gold. The disciples were prepared to leave everything and follow him. What is your reaction to Jesus?

That is where the whole Gospel takes us. Here in chapter 1 it starts by introducing these ideas. In fact it starts by telling us exactly who Jesus is. *The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.* (1:1)

"Jesus" is his human name, a man from Nazareth in Galilee.

The "Messiah" means the promised King. ("Christ" is the Greek word. It is not his surname). He is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies.

But what sort of king is he? "Son of God" tells us he is more than human king. He is God come as man.

But how did the disciples come to believe this about him?

How did they work it out? Mark goes on to give us the clues we can look at.

1. **Jesus fulfils the Old Testament prophecy**, God's plan. The sign of this is the coming of John the Baptist. ⁶ *John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey* (1:6). What would you think if you saw someone like that? Imagine you are at Westfield and see a man sitting in a scratchy camel hair shirt, a strip of leather knotted around waist and eating cicadas!! You might write him off as some sort of nut!!?

Back in the Old Testament Elijah is described like this: *'He had a garment of hair and had a leather belt round his waist.'* (2 K 1:8) John is just like the prophets in Old Testament times. There had been no prophets for 400 years. God had been silent, and then John appears just like these old messengers of God. He fulfils the predictions of the prophets which foretold that a prophet like Elijah would come to prepare for God's coming. Mark quotes the prophecies: *"I will send my*

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messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way' – ³a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" (1:2-3)

The forerunner had come. God was fulfilling his promises at last. Large crowds went out to John. There was great excitement. It's all happening! They were baptised as a sign of washing away sin.

2. **Jesus is baptised although he has no sin.**

He identifies with sinful people. This is a sign that he will take on himself the sins of mankind.

3. **God then speaks and confirms that Jesus is his Son.**

And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' (1:11)

Probably it was only Jesus who heard these words now, but later when Jesus is transfigured the disciples heard God say again that Jesus is his Son.

4. **Jesus then enters a battle with Satan**

He is tempted. Mark doesn't tell us the details but it shows that this is a spiritual battle, not political.

Have you watched medieval films of war (perhaps the Lord of Rings)? great armies, with deadly weapons, and siege engines, the forces of good conquering evil. The Jews expected this sort of battle. But Jesus' battle is on completely different plane. Jesus' victory and his kingdom will be spiritual. They are all to do with our relationship with God. This battle will be won finally on the cross but it begins here.

5. **He announces that the kingdom is near.**

'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!' (1:15)

Think of the kids in the back seat. "Are we there yet?"

Remember the anticipation and frustration. Now Jesus says, "Yes we are almost there." That is why people got so excited about his coming. They understand at least some of the clues.

6. **Jesus says what they must do to enter God's kingdom:**

repent, believe the gospel, and follow him.

a) **Repent**

What has spoilt this world is not the Romans. It is the selfishness, the hatred, the bitterness, the corruption and greed of people. It is sin.

We must repent, reject self-centred ways of living.

We must turn around and live God's way. There must be a deep change in our hearts.

b) **Believe the gospel**, meaning good news or official news. More than believing facts we must put our trust in Jesus. The gospel is all about him.

c) **Follow Jesus.**

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Jesus walks along the shore of Lake Galilee. Here he calls these four fishermen. They are at their work, casting a net, or repairing them. They are with their families doing their jobs when Jesus calls them to leave it all and come with him.

Straight away they leave their job and family and follow. The first disciples travelled about with Jesus.

They were chosen for a special task, to spread the message and lead the church when Jesus had gone.

We may not have to leave our job or family (although some are called to do this) but to enter the kingdom we must all follow Jesus. We must serve him as our King. This will touch every area of our lives; work, leisure, family, money etc. Jesus didn't just come to get us to heaven but to call us into his kingdom, to serve him as King.

These are the first clues. As we go on we will learn more:

- a) Who Jesus is - what sort of King?
- b) What he has done for us?
- c) How we need to respond to him?