

The King's Call

Mark 1:14-45

9/1/2022 – BPC 5pm Service

I was at a family birthday party a few years ago, and having just arrived I was greeted by my aunty who gave me a big hug then in quite a loud voice, asked me, “Are you still preaching lies?”

My aunty and uncle call themselves Christian and we'd often spoken about differences in our understanding, but I was quite taken back by this fairly public confrontation. The next morning I was here teaching Sunday youth, still processing the event, so I shared it with our year 7-8's.

And in classic youth style, one girl raised her hand and simply asked, “well how do you know you're not?” “How can you be so sure that Christianity is right and the other religions are wrong?” Now it turned out she was processing this exact question with a Buddhist friend at her school.

If you're a Christian, how do you know you've made the right choice, on the right track? And every Christian should ask, and be able to answer this question with confidence. And if you're here tonight and not yet a Christian, it's a great question to ask too, whatever decision you have or haven't made.

This is helpful for Christians to ask because we can get it wrong. We can have the right Jesus but the wrong response. We can start well but then get off track. We can start with clarity, passion, and conviction, only to drift into confusion, apathy, and waywardness.

As we started Mark's Gospel last week, we saw the identity and greatness of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God – and we looked at how easy it is for us to start here but over time twist and taint our view of Jesus, which then influences and shapes our response to him.

But with the identity of Jesus clear from those three scenes in vv.1-13, we now hear the call of the King as he proclaims what his coming means and what response is required.

V.14 begins somewhat ominously as John the Baptist, the promised forerunner we heard about last week, the prophet, a messenger for God and from God, is put in prison. He is literally, *handed over*, his preparing work is done as Jesus now comes to Galilee preaching.

And he *proclaims the Gospel, or good news of God*. As we saw last week, Gospel means the announcement, the heralding of good news, of victory or triumph. And the Gospel is from God. Yes it is about God and his plans and purposes for the world through His Son, but is from him – His Gospel.

God is the source of this good news. What he planned and promised, what God has sent into the world to be proclaimed and heard. The *Gospel of God* is Mark's heading for what Jesus proclaims but the actual content of Jesus' preaching is given in summary form in v.15.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Firstly, Jesus says the *time is fulfilled*, that is, the decisive moment in history for God's plans and purpose to be achieved. The time to set things right, to bring the rescue God promised. All human history has been leading towards this moment because as we heard last week, Jesus and John's coming is what God had promised through his prophets beforehand.

Because *the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near*. The kingdom of God is not a place or location, but a rule. It is the reign of God. Now there is a sense in which God always rules – he is always in charge – he is God after all.

But the Kingdom of God is God's rule being recognised and enjoyed. The OT expectation when God would rule through his appointed King, bringing redemption and salvation, setting things right. And the Kingdom has come because the King has come, King Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God.

But notice that Jesus says the kingdom has *come near* – not meaning that it might appear or come at any moment – but that is here yet still coming. It has come but there is more. The Kingdom is now but not yet. As we'll soon see, Jesus' ministry brings signs of the kingdom but they are just snippets of the bigger reality when the Kingdom comes in its fullness.

And through his preaching, Jesus says he brings the Kingdom, the rule of God. And as the King of the Kingdom he sets the terms, what we must do. The Kingdom of God has come near, *repent and believe the good news*. Now those are some classic Christian jargon words right? But we need to be clear.

To repent is simply to change your mind and direction. It is to flip your life on its head because who's in charge has now changed, Jesus is the King and now rules my life, not me. So notice Jesus doesn't call us to some adjustment or refinement. This isn't tweaking our morals or self-improvement goals.

The message to a driver going the wrong direction on a freeway isn't to make sure they wear a seatbelt, indicate well, and head check before changing lanes. It's you are going the wrong way! You need to stop and turn around! That's repentance.

This is a call to acknowledge you are wrong, your life is going the wrong direction without Jesus as Lord and in charge. *We repent and believe*. To believe or to have faith is one of those classic words that has become skewed in our culture. It usually means something like confidence without evidence.

The leap in the dark, hoping for the best. But that is so far from biblical belief or faith. To believe is to welcome the message, to accept the good news of the King, and to then base your life on it. To rejoice that God does rule and yield or hand over all of our life over to him.

Repent and believe always go together in the bible. We must first acknowledge the crisis, see the need for change, but then accept the God news of what God has done.

Because as Jesus preaches the Gospel of God, he isn't giving advice, He is announcing news! Proclaiming reality that has a claim upon your life, news and reality that demand a response from every person in every place across all time.

Proclaiming good news that you don't have to earn your way to God, Jesus does it all for you – he has brought the kingdom near and is calling you to join it. Not to adopt some moral code or change your worldview, but to follow the King, to heed his call.

And that's exactly what we see as Jesus calls two sets of others, some fishermen in vv.16-20. The scene is fast paced and brief as these four men serve as examples of how to respond to the King's call.

Jesus' is walking along the Sea of Galilee in v.16, he sees Simon and Andrew, brothers, perhaps partners in a fishing business, and calls them to follow.¹⁷ *"Follow me," Jesus told them, "and I will make you fish for people."*¹⁸ *Immediately they left their nets and followed him.* Notice the pattern repeats.

In v.19 he sees James and John, sons of Zebedee, in a boat working on their nets.²⁰ *Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.*

Notice as both sets of brothers hear Jesus' call, their response is both total and immediate. Jesus calls them to follow him and he will make them *fish for people*. Their whole live and identity is changed as they join his mission and now serve his purposes.

And the key word in both responses is *leave*. They *left their nets and followed* v.18. But as the pattern repeats in v.20, it also escalates: The Zebedee boys leave not just their nets, but also their boat and father! But the point is not that they never fished again or saw their father again. We know they did.

But it's a picture of total change in loyalty and priority. To follow Jesus, to be a disciple, is to leave behind possessions, family, career, not in the sense of abandonment or rejection, but they are all given over to Jesus, under his rule to now serve his purposes.

Their response is total and immediate. Notice there is no delay, no discussion, no argument, just instant compliance to the King. Mark is highlighting for us that we should not delay as we hear the King's call to repentance and faith, as we are doing right now through the Gospel.

You are hearing the King's call, his claim on your life, that Kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe. But it raises the question doesn't it, does Jesus have the authority to make this claim on my life and yours? Why is he worth the time, worth hearing out, and not just another loony to dismiss?

I'm sure Zebedee thought that as he watched his sons get out of the boat and just walk off with the guy who said 'follow me'. Can you imagine his shock as his they just left their lucrative fishing business, leaving behind family heritage, income, and security?

And that same shock has been shared by many family members since. I was the last of my siblings to become Christian and at my brother's 21st birthday, he declared in his speech that following Jesus as his Lord and Saviour is the best thing in his life.

To which my aunty (a different one!) turned around, sighed and asked, "Jesus isn't your Lord and Saviour too is he Andrew? You're the last hope of your family!"

We've seen this time and time again in our youth group as teenagers become Christian from non-Christian homes. One of our year 12's wrestled and agonised over the desire to be baptised knowing it would cause great conflict with his Father and perhaps even result in needing to move out.

I imagine lots of you have experienced this tension – the friction or shock that comes from friends and family because of our allegiance to Jesus. As priorities change, how we use our money or time, following the King can put us on the outer as he changes our loyalty and values.

We might be asked or think to ourselves, have we got it right? Is giving all over to Jesus right? Why aren't we crazy to heed the King's call, to repent and believe? Well Mark answers that in the fast paced action of vv.21-45 that mostly takes place over one glorious weekend.

The Jesus who calls for all of our life is worthy of it – and heeding his call is not merely reasonable or logical, but wonderful, safe, and joy-filled.

And he begins by showing us his authority. ²¹ *They went into Capernaum, and right away he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and began to teach.* ²² *They were astonished at his teaching because he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not like the scribes.*

In the Jewish Synagogue, on the Sabbath, the OT would be read aloud and the Rabbis or teachers would speak. And they would quote other Rabbis for authority, like footnotes in an essay. They say the less you actually know, the more you footnote. That's the Rabbis.

But when Jesus gets up to speak, there is no referencing. He speaks with authority. The word means 'out of his own being' – it is where we get our word for author. Jesus speaks with authority as he teaches about God, our world and ourselves. And they recognize his authority as he teaches.

As they, as we listen to Jesus, they sensed somehow that he was explaining the story of their lives as the author, and it left them dumbfounded. You could hear a pin drop as he preached.

But in an almost comical scene, their stunned silence is interrupted as a demon-possessed man in the synagogue cries out in v.24, ²⁴ *"What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"*

The demon, or unclean spirit as Mark calls it, recognizes Jesus' authority immediately. Notice there is no resistance or fisticuffs, just submission. Now the presence of evil spirits or spirituality in general can be hard to take seriously in our materialistic world. But the bible just presents it as reality.

And Jesus has absolute authority over all evil as we move from his authority recognized to now demonstrated. ²⁵ *Jesus rebuked him saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"* ²⁶ *And the unclean spirit threw him into convulsions, shouted with a loud voice, and came out of him.*

Exorcisms were not uncommon in the ancient world but they were usually long and drawn out. Yet Jesus speaks just 5 words, essentially zip it and get out. And it does it, it obeys.

The people are amazed in v.27. They ask each other, *"What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."* It's no wonder his fame spreads in v.28.

When Jesus speaks, it happens – just as we saw as he called the four fishermen to follow him. He has that kind of authority, like God himself in creation, he speaks and it happens. Jesus teaches with authority and has authority even over the forces of evil, and even power over sickness.

In v.29 it's dinner time. They leave the synagogue and head to Simon and Andrew's house. But rather than a relaxing lunch, Peter's mother in law is in bed with a fever. And quite simply, he heals her: ³¹ *So he went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

The event is so calm and straightforward and matter-of-fact. He raised her up. And notice Mark records this not because it was unique or one off, but examples of what constantly happened.

³² *When evening came, after the sun had set, they brought to him all those who were sick and demon-possessed.* ³³ *The whole town was assembled at the door,* ³⁴ *and he healed many who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.*

As the King comes and brings the Kingdom, we see his work is not simply spiritual by physical. He comes to fix our broken world in every respect. These events are signs of the future. (Lk 11:20) As the King comes with authority and power, evil is conquered and sickness is healed as he is setting things right. These are foretastes of what life in the kingdom will be when it comes in its fullness.

But notice at the end of v.34, Jesus would *not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him*. Jesus silenced the spirit in v.25 and will command the healed leper to be silent in v.44.

Why would Jesus want his identity or ministry kept quiet? And this theme, what is sometimes called the 'messianic secret' does seem odd. But Mark shows us that with Jesus' ministry comes mass following. The sick and possessed are coming from everywhere, the whole town at his doorstep.

And as we heard last week, terms like Messiah, Son of God, King, and Holy One are loaded terms – full of expectation. The Jews were waiting for the Messiah, but in their mind that was military overthrow, conquering the Romans. If word spread that the Messiah had come, people might see it as a call to arms expecting a political overthrow.

But Jesus is adamant that the hysteria not distract people from coming to him for who he actually is. Coming not on their own terms or with their own expectations, but coming to the King, for the King.

We see this in vv.35-39 as Jesus shows us his clear priority. After spending the whole night healing many, Jesus is up at the crack of dawn, while it's still dark, to be alone and pray. In Mark's Gospel this is something Jesus does in moments of crisis – we'll see it again in chapter 6 and 14.

As Jesus heals and drives out demons, as the masses flock to him, benefit from him, love him, there must have been incredible pressure to make this his life's work. Not just the temptation of fame and adoration, but no doubt that it was something Jesus' actually enjoyed doing!

But this is where those scenes in our passage last week come in. There we saw that Jesus' identity and mission is to be both King who conquers, and suffering servant who dies for our forgiveness and peace with God. He's the king who rules and saves through his own costly death in our place.

But why suffer and die when the masses are already following you? To just heal and be loved?

And the pressure to be this is clear in v.36. Simon and the others search for Jesus, or literally they pursue or even hunt him down, and say, *everyone is looking for you*. And every time that phrase is used, *looking for you*, it is negative – searching for Jesus with an agenda.

An agenda of wanting the benefits of Jesus without Jesus. To be healed or fed. And the disciples come and seem to be saying, come get out here! They love you, your little prayer retreat is letting

the team down! Jesus' response must have both shocked and disappointed them. He says to them,

³⁸ *"Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too. This is why I have come."* Jesus will not be diverted from his priority of preaching. Now it isn't that Jesus is against the healings or doesn't want to do them, they are important signs of the Kingdom.

But the miracles are meant to confirm and support his preaching, not replace it. We see this in v.39 as Jesus does continue to cast out demons while preaching.

But preaching is more important. But why? On the surface preaching rather than healing looks cold and indifferent. How can he turn down so many good opportunities to help people? What could be more important? Yet what we need to see is that the sickness and evil and demons that Jesus encounters and we experience, are signs of the brokenness of our world but also symptoms of the bigger problem. Symptoms of the consequences of our rejection of God.

While my wife Holly was pregnant with our first child Thomas, I heard the story of Naomi Williams. While pregnant with her first child, she went to hospital in rural NSW with stomach pain. Though concerned she was assured all was fine, given panadol and an ice block, and went home feeling ok.

She died hours later due the meningococcal-related blood poisoning that was undiagnosed and untreated. We get the danger of treating the symptoms, not the illness – of merely masking pain.

Jesus is determined not simply to give us the paracetamol that takes away the immediate pain only to delay the inevitable. If he goes on healing, he fixes the body but not our soul. There is temporary relief but no forgiveness from sin, no rescue from hell, and no relationship with God.

What the King has come to do, the transformation he will bring through his blood goes to the core of the problem. And preaching the kingdom, calling people to repentance and faith based on his saving work on the cross, is the priority because it offers people not temporary relief but eternal rescue.

And so Jesus does what we want all good leaders to do. Choose not what is easy or popular, but what is right, what is needed. Jesus is determined to preach the kingdom of God because heeding that call is what we truly need, though costly and painful to him.

Jesus is worthy because he prioritizes what is needed, what is good for others, because as the final event shows us, he's the compassionate king. We know from our own experience, someone having power and authority is not necessarily a good thing or comforting! But in vv.40-45, Jesus' authority and power meet his character.

⁴⁰ *Then a man with leprosy came to him and, on his knees, begged him, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."* While we usually use the term leprosy to describe one illness, Hansen's disease, in the bible it's a broad term covering over 70 skin-related diseases.

And in the OT law, in Leviticus 13-14, there is quite specific requirements regarding leprosy. If you thought yourself infected, you'd go to the priest for assessment. Once diagnosed you were required to leave the community as they couldn't treat it and they didn't want it to spread (we get that!).

Then you would dress in tattered clothes, let your hair go wild, cover part of your mouth – all visual aids to others that you were sick – then call out ‘unclean, unclean’ whenever someone approached so they’d know to avoid you. Their status was public and horrible.

The Jewish historian Josephus says that “socially a leper was equivalent to a corpse.” His suffering is not simply physical, but social and religious with no access to the temple.

You can feel his desperation as he kneels and begs and asks if you are willing! He’s heard of Jesus’ authority and power, but is he willing? What of his character? Now fresh of Jesus’ prayer retreat and commitment to preaching we might expect Jesus to just walk past or even rebuke him right? No.

⁴¹ *Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched him. “I am willing,” he told him. “Be made clean.”* ⁴² *Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.*

Again the healing is instant at the command of Jesus. But notice Jesus touches him – possibly the first time he’d had human contact in months. And why? His *compassion* – a literally pain in your bowels. Jesus feels and is so moved by the situation and plight of others, he acts even at cost to himself.

Because according to OT law, Jesus would now also be unclean and exposed to the disease himself.

But the opposite happens. Rather than Jesus become unclean, the leper is cleansed – not simply healed. He is cleansed in that he is now restored into the community. That’s why Jesus tells him to go to the priest in v.44 – so his change in status can be publically recognised.

And so the call of the King, that the kingdom has come near, to repent and believe, now meets the worthiness of the king who has authority and power, but also the character and willingness to match it. But did you notice the passage finishes on a somewhat sour and confusing note.

In v.43, Jesus gives the now healed and clean leper a stern warning to *say nothing to anyone* – except the priest. But it seems he doesn’t do either in v.45, he talks about it to everyone so that *Jesus could no longer enter a town openly. But he was out in deserted places, and they came to him from everywhere*

Now some have seen this as a positive thing – what Jesus does is so significant he can’t keep it quiet and we should be like that too. Or even the irony that Christians are told to proclaim Jesus and we don’t, while this man is told not to and he does. That might be true (and sad) but not the point I think.

The man disobeys Jesus with a negative outcome that Jesus’ desire to preach the kingdom of God is railroaded by his fame as people flock to him, yet driven by their agenda for healing.

And so as Jesus calls people to repent and believe in v.15, we actually don’t see that happen anywhere in vv.21-45 despite the huge crowds coming to him.

And the language of v.43 is strong. Jesus is making it a big deal as what he is literally an ‘outburst of anger’. A word that was used to describe the snort of a warhorse about to go into battle. But having encountered Jesus, cleansed and given the command of King, how does he respond? Disobedience.

And so as the chapter ends, we are left asking if we too are giving Jesus the response he calls for or the one we prefer? Jesus calls for total, all-encompassing, loyalty and obedience. A far from unfair or harsh, heeding this call is actually so good for us both now and forever. A Tim Keller says,

“As a child blossoms under the authority of a wise and good parent, as a team flourishes under the direction of a skilful, brilliant coach, so when you come under the healing of the royal hands, under the kingship of Jesus, everything in your life will begin to heal. And when he comes back, everything sad will come untrue. His return will usher in the end of fear, suffering, and death.”

And so are you heeding the King’s call? Now if you are not yet a Christian, it’s so good you are here because the call to repent and believe is being made to you now – to find life and relief in the kingdom, to flourish under the King’s reign.

Will you give him the total and immediate response we saw in the fishermen? What would stop you from responding that way? If you are unsure, have questions, then come and ask, talk to a friend who invited you or sign up for a Christianity explored course starting next month. But for many of us here who are Christian, the danger might be for us to think, I’ve done that deed month, years, decades ago. I’m a Christian, let’s move on to the response song.

But as we heard last week, just as we need to keep the Gospel on repeat so we have a clear and right picture of Jesus, the call to repent and believe is not a one off but all of life for a Christian. To have what Paul calls *a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ* (Phil 1:27) – consistent with Jesus as King.

So have you got it right? Not just have you heeded, but are you heeding the call of the King? Are you giving Jesus the response, the worship he calls for and deserves, or what you’ve decided? It is easy to get Jesus, but not respond rightly. Did you see the tragedy in this passage? The main ones who do get Jesus are the demons who are terrified of the destruction he will bring!

Why there are so many stories of Christian leaders who are unfaithful to their spouse, who have been deceptive with their use of funds, abused their power and influence, or preyed on the weak?

For Christians there is always the temptation to minimize Jesus’ claim on our life. Or to compartmentalise the areas of your life so that Jesus has no authority to tell you what do to. To repent but with an asterisk, only where we deem it necessary or suitable.

So ask yourself, does total and immediate response to Jesus characterise all of your life? Whether it’s sexuality or service, our money or our minds, what we watch or wear, our giving or generosity is it shaped by loyalty to Jesus? Does repentance and faith permeate through all of your life?

The call of the King is good news, the worthiness of the king cannot be overstated, to repent and believe the good news, so what response are you giving him? Let’s pray.