

The Gospel According to Mark 1:1-15

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EXHORDIUM

What in the world is God doing? No, I mean to literally ask, What is it in the world that God is doing? More precisely, What is God doing in the world? Or, another way, What is God doing with the world? What is God doing with the peoples of the world? What is God's interest in the world?

When God created the world good and then put people in it, what was He up to? What was the purpose? What was the place He made? Where was it? What was it for? Was it permanent? Or temporary?

Who were the first people God created? Why did He create them? What were they going to do? If they had not sinned, what would have been their long-term goals? If Adam and Eve had not sinned, can we imagine what a world without sin would look like now?

What is the problem in the world that we live in? What sorts of problems does this cause? How do we deal with the tyranny of sin?

Although we may not answer all of these questions, we need to have them in mind as we embark on the study of the Gospel according to Mark.

The Gospel according to Mark. That brings up an important question right at the beginning of the beginning of the text. What is the gospel? We may think we can easily answer that question but when we do so, are we answering according to the Bible's interpretation of itself? Or according to an accepted view that we simply no longer question. And, how do we know whether we have the Bible's view of this answer or simply our own? Well, we have to do some study. But the answer to this question, What is the gospel is very important for how we read the Bible. The word comes up often and it has a few shades of meaning but the general meaning of the word is fairly consistent. So, do we know what it means? Or are we importing the meaning into the text as we read? Or is our understanding of the word falling short of the Biblically full-orbed understanding?

Who is Jesus? That seems to be the central question to answer. Who is Jesus? Peter gave the great confession, Thou art the Christ. But we tend to think in terms of Jesus and Christ as simply two different ways of saying the name Jesus. He is Jesus. He is Christ. But what is going on in the text? Why is He sometimes called Jesus, sometimes Christ, sometimes Jesus Christ? He is also commonly referred to as the Son of God? We now take this as a vital part of our doctrine. Jesus is the Son of God, so He is God in the flesh.

That is what we mean by Son of God, but is that all the meaning there is in the term? Or does it say something more about who Jesus is?

I started these questions out by asking “What is God doing in the world?” That is to start at the beginning, it ought to take our minds back to Genesis 1, the creation, Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden, the serpent, the fall, the promise, being driven out, the evil of murder and the entire train of events leading up to this great declaration of the gospel.

Jesus and the New Testament do not exist on their own. They are not the story but they are the fulfillment of the story. They are the climax, the solution to the crises and problem of the story, the epilogue. But we would want to know how it all fits together in order to tell an accurate version of the story.

What do the gospel and Jesus have to do with God’s story?

Is the gospel that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life?
 Is the gospel that you should have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?
 Is the gospel that Jesus died for your sins?
 The gospel does include all of this but none of these declarations is what the gospel proper actually is. This is important because if we announce.

Compare that to how we typically take the gospel. We generally think of the gospel as the good news that we can be forgiven for our sins. Or, perhaps even less than that. We tend to think of the gospel as our potential salvation. We say the gospel is that you can be forgiven for your sins. But is that what the Bible means when it speaks of the gospel of Jesus Christ? The result of the gospel is that you can be forgiven your sins and be included with the people of God but that is not the gospel proper. Then what is the gospel?

The gospel is a public announcement of victory. So, when we talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ, we mean, specifically, the announcement that Jesus has gained the victory and entered into His Kingdom. This immediately brings up another textual problem that we have. What is the Kingdom? Is it the place in the sky where Jesus dwells? Is that where Jesus is the victor? As we shall see later, that is not accurate. Jesus is ruler of heaven and earth. That is part of the scandal. That is why it takes faith to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. The Messiah was to be victor, the one who was to defeat all the enemies of Israel. When Jesus shows up, many people

start to believe in Him as that Messiah but then He is killed. To believe in Jesus as Messiah is by earthly means, foolishness, but for those who believe, it is the power and wisdom of God. It is not really a scandal to believe that Jesus is ruling in heaven. We are all pretty sure that only good people go there, people who will love the Lord and obey Him. But it is quite scandalous to believe that Jesus is currently ruling the world, a place where many hate Him and will simply not do what He says. But the Bible calls us to believe exactly this.

We have come to speak of certain aspects of the gospel as if it were the whole gospel. Or, better said, we have come to speak of the individual results of the gospel as if those results were the entire gospel. In the gospel, we individuals partake of God's gospel. But we need to be clear that when the Bible says gospel it is emphatically NOT talking about individual salvation. So, why is this important? Because we need to understand the priority of what God is talking about. If individual salvation is the subtext of the greater salvation, it shows us where the priority is. Who or what is God saving? What does that salvation mean? Is it merely a spiritual salvation, our souls? It is departed spirits, clouds and separation from bodies? Or is it altogether something else?

When the Bible talks about salvation it is not merely talking about 'spiritual' salvation that is set against salvation of the world that we actually live in. While this may seem unimportant to some, that is only because we have come to think in really Gnostic terms. If God is saving us spiritually but is not interested in saving the world, the planet, the globe, the stuff of the world, then that reveals a great deal about what we think of God. Did God create the world? Was and is that creation good? If so, what is God's interest in the world now?

Was Jesus simply talking about how individuals get saved? When we say the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are saying that Jesus Christ is the good news.

Let us examine what these words mean.

Jesus Christ is not the first and last name of the man Jesus of Nazareth. If we are going to talk about His name, it might be better to call Him Emmanuel Davidson.

But Jesus Christ is both a name and a title, much like we might refer to Herod, or even to Caesar, Augustus Caesar, Julius Caesar. Caesar was the office. Kaizer or we may now say Czar or Tsar.

Gospel- Good new, glad tidings, evangelion.

Old Testament Context

Isaiah 40:9 ⁹O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift *it* up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

Isaiah 52:4-10 ⁴For thus saith the Lord GOD, My people went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn there; and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. ⁵Now therefore, what have I here, saith the LORD, that my people is taken away for nought? they that rule over them make them to howl, saith the LORD; and my name continually every day *is* blasphemed. ⁶Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore *they shall know* in that day that I *am* he that doth speak: behold, *it is* I.

⁷How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! ⁸Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. ⁹Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Christ- is the term we use when we refer to the Messiah. In fact, we could use the word Messiah, whenever we see the Word Christ in the New Testament. Messiah is the Hebrew transliteration of the Greek Word Christos.

So, from Hebrew, Messiah becomes Christos. Both, then mean exactly the same thing. What is that meaning? The meaning is “Anointed One.” Or, we could say, “The One who is Anointed.” Again, we run into trouble with terminology. What do we mean when we say anointed? We mean something like this, “Somebody who has a special gift.” He is an anointed

teacher, or speller, or football player, although the last one might be a stretch. But is our meaning the Bible's meaning? Well, no, it isn't. When David was anointed by the prophet, this meant that David was chosen and appointed to a particular calling. The anointing made David the King elect, if you will allow a mixed metaphor. We sometimes call this the Crown Prince, or heir apparent. When Jesus is called Christ, it means that Jesus, the man, the son of a carpenter, from a Gentile region, was anointed to be King of Israel.

This is why people keep asking, Is He Messiah? They were wondering if Jesus was the King who was to deliver them from their oppressors. Of course, the answer is emphatically yes but the Messiah looks far different than anyone imagined. Plus, when it becomes apparent that Jesus is going to die, the scandal of His ministry really sets in. He claimed to be the Messiah, the anointed One. He commends His disciples for declaring this and even says that only His Father in Heaven could have revealed this truth. And then He dies. What scandal! How could the Messiah die? How can the ruling King not be ruling? This did not compute for the Jews at all. And so we see some of the huge implications of the Apostle's teaching in Acts. They went around preaching that Jesus is Messiah, Jesus is King. In order for that to make any sense at all, the resurrection had to be true. So, they preach Messiah Crucified. A scandal.

EXEGESIS

Mark 1 ¹The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;

So, we need to slow down right at the beginning and make sure we have some context. As you know, I generally like to preach fairly large sections of Scripture. My goal is that we see the big picture and then know how to fit the little pieces into the big puzzle. However, it is also true that if you cannot fit some of the little pieces into the puzzle, you have an incomplete puzzle.

If the puzzle is quite large and the pieces are quite small, then certain missing pieces might not be noticed that much. Let's say you have a lot of brown space in your puzzle picture of a child playing in a large field. A missing piece of the field will not make that much difference. But what if the missing piece is the child's eyeball? Then the puzzle is greatly distorted. Something is really out of whack and we don't see the picture the way that the photographer meant us to see it. The picture can look grotesque without that all important piece.

So, here at the beginning of Mark's gospel are some really important puzzle pieces. If you make the mistake of thinking they are insignificant

background, you will put them in the wrong place, or not be able to place them at all. Your puzzle will look incomplete or even grotesque.

We might read this first phrase like this, Jesus began to preach that you can be saved from your sins. He did this because He is the Son of God. Now, that sentence happens to be true. It is a puzzle piece. But it is not what Mark means by His opening.

We should read this opening this way, “Jesus showed up so that we could see that God’s plan of salvation was coming true. This was the beginning of the final triumph of Yahweh. Yahweh had always been King of His people, even though they repeatedly rejected Him. But now Yahweh sent His Son into the world. He gave His people a savior, a judge like Joshua, to rule over them and save them from their enemies. His name is Jesus and He is the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed One, the one spoken of by the prophets who would come and be the savior of Israel. He was anointed as King and He has come into His kingdom. Some of you may have heard that He is dead. That is not so. He was dead but He is the Son of God. God cannot die but is eternal and so is His Son. Thus, Jesus, who is Christ, is not dead. He is alive and He is ruling over the Kingdom that God has given Him. He is the ruler, Jesus Christ, King Jesus.”

All of that can be read into this opening salvo. And furthermore, those Jews who were expecting the Messiah could have read Mark’s words this way. So, it should be no wonder to us that many of them did not believe Mark or the other disciples. It seemed like a message of fancy, one that was made up to fit the old prophecies but without the reality of those prophecies. Mark boldly asserts the truth right at the beginning of his writing and then he begins to expand on how this is actually the case.

²As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. ³The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

⁴John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶And John was clothed with camel’s hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; ⁷And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. ⁸I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

⁹And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. ¹⁰And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: ¹¹And there came a voice from heaven, *saying*, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. ¹²And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. ¹³And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

¹⁴Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

EXHORTATION

The main thing I wanted to accomplish in this introduction is to remind us to sit as students of the Bible. While we always bring what we have learned into whatever we read, we need to slow down a bit and read carefully. In order to see things accurately, we need to think in Biblical terms. As we think about the gospel, about Christ, about Kingdom, about salvation, we need to begin to think in more Biblical terms. This will enable us to accurately understand the story that God is telling. This means that we can then tell the story accurately.

The first thing this should do is bring us down to Earth. For some, coming down to Earth means a big thud. What? Come down to Earth? I thought the goal was to get to heaven? Well, if that is what you thought, then that simply shows that you have read the Scriptures a particular way. You have to ask if that reading of the Scriptures is an accurate one.

When I say that we need to come down to Earth, I don't mean to say that this earth, this way, the fallen world, is the best that we can hope to attain to. Not at all. In the beginning of Mark, we have the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We should keep in mind that Jesus as King, is the beginning of the gospel. But the end, what we shall be, is not yet written. 1Cor. 15 is about the Resurrection, when all the sin and death that we currently endure is finally and completely overcome by our King Jesus. But that is a coming down to earth as well and helps us to understand the gospel. When Jesus comes in the clouds to visit the church and we go out to meet Him, it is not so that we can go up to heaven. It is so that we can go and receive our King and bring Him with glad tidings into the fully New

Heavens and New Earth. This bringing down to Earth will mean that everything that God has said will now become fully and might I say, literally true. This is no disappointment but the final and glorious victory of the gospel of Jesus Christ.