

Jason Upchurch - Mark 1:1 - It's All Good News

Well, this morning we begin our look specifically at the gospel itself. Last week was really mostly about background and an overview of Mark's gospel. If you didn't catch last week's sermon, I would highly encourage you to listen to it or read from the website. I think it might be helpful for you understanding a lot of what we're getting into as we study Mark's gospel.

This morning what I want to do is unpack 5 statements Mark makes here in the first few verses as we begin our trek through this book: Beginning, gospel, Jesus, Christ, and the phrase "Son of God." Part of the reason for that is because a lot of these terms are used constantly throughout the book and if we don't understand them - or we think we understand them and we don't really - we could get confused.

I remember one time about 15 years ago I was in a group meeting with my boss and he used the word "behoove." And I thought he had used it incorrectly. So after the meeting I asked him about it, I said that I always thought the word meant to hinder or be a bad thing to a mission. And he said no it meant quite the opposite. Behoove means to do something in line with what you're trying to accomplish. It's a good thing. So I looked it up. I had been using the word wrong all that time.

Now with a simple word like behoove, it doesn't matter much. But when we're talking about who Jesus is or what he's accomplishing for us it matters. So let's look at these 5 words or phrases and unpack them.

1) Beginning. Read

One of the unique features of Mark's gospel is that he doesn't have hardly any introduction. Matthew begins with a long genealogy, Luke begins with the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah and the shepherds and angels and Mary. John begins his gospel before **Genesis 1:1**: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He goes on to make some very incredible theological statements about Jesus and his coming.

Mark doesn't do any of that. He just kind of jumps into the story of Jesus. His whole introduction is this one sentence and this brief citation of Malachi and Isaiah to explain.

But this is what most people call the prologue of Mark's gospel. The introduction. And what we'll see next week is that the beginning of the gospel is really the ministry of John the Baptist.

You know how in the morning there's light before the sun comes up over the horizon? That's really what we're talking about here. John the Baptist is the early morning light of hope that God sends just before the sun comes up on the world of darkness.

John the Baptists is intricately linked to the ministry of Jesus. What's the end of the gospel? What's the sunset?

It could be the death of Jesus, or more accurately the resurrection of Jesus. But I think it's actually even bigger than that. I think it's the consummation of the Kingdom with Jesus as king. It's the Lord Jesus coming in glory and establishing the New Heavens and New Earth forever where there is no darkness and there is no need for sun because the glory of God is the light and its lamp is the Lamb of God.

This is just the beginning of God's ultimate story of Jesus.

2) Gospel.

When I go up to camp to preach or be the camp pastor, one of the biggest points of confusion with the campers is the word gospel. A lot of times I'll ask them "What is the gospel?" And they'll raise their hands and usually respond "Matthew" or "John" - I ask them what the gospel is and they assume that it's one of the 4 books in the Bible describing the life of Jesus.

Are they wrong? No they're not. In fact in a minute, I'm going to make the case that they are more right than they know and than we give them credit for. We call these the 4 gospels, and so that's a correct answer.

When I ask the question “What is the gospel” what I’m really asking is how is a person saved? How does a person go from being a child of Satan to a child of God?

That’s usually what we mean when we talk about the gospel. The word gospel in Greek is euangellion - it literally means good news. A good message. And I want to make the case from **Mark 1:1** that the gospel message is the entire life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

See, what usually what comes to mind for us when we think of **the gospel** is penal substitutionary atonement. Penal substitutionary atonement - 3 really big words - that encompass the very heart of the gospel message.

When we talk about the gospel - the good news - it’s because there’s bad news. The bad news is that we are sinners by nature and by choice. And because we are sinners in the eyes of a holy God we deserve eternal damnation. We deserve to be thrown in hell forever. That’s bad news. The news gets worse because there’s nothing we can do to get out of that judgement. Our sins have covered us like filth and like blood and we are guilty as charged.

The gospel - the heart of the gospel - is the work of Jesus to save his people through penal substitutionary atonement.

Penal is where we get the word **penalty**. When Jesus died on the cross, he took the penalty we deserve for our sins. He took the wrath of the Father. So when he’s praying in the Garden: “let this cup pass from me,” what he’s asking is that if there is some other means by which he can be faithful other than enduring the full wrath of the Father for the sins of all his people, please let that happen because that penalty is weighty. Obviously there was not.

And so what Jesus endures in his suffering and death on the cross is not just the physical pain of crucifixion. It is more significantly that he endures the full awesome blast of the Father’s wrath as punishment for sins. Jesus died for the penalty of sins.

Whose sins? Well, Jesus didn’t sin. He didn’t die for his sins, because he had no sins. He was the perfect, spotless lamb of God.

He was made in every way like us yet without sin.

He didn’t die for his sins, he died to pay the **penalty** for our sins. That’s **substitutionary**.

If you were convicted of a crime and an innocent person said they would pay your fine for you, they are substituting for you.

Penal. Substitutionary. **Atonement**. Atonement is appeasing the wrath of someone. When someone goes to hell for their sins, it’s not Satan in hell punishing them; it’s the Lord God.

Rev. 12:10 talking about idolators says: he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night.

God is the one pouring out wrath in hell. And it’s God’s wrath that needs to be appeased.

And it’s only Jesus’s sacrifice that does it. When a person trusts in the Lordship of the risen Christ over all creation, to pay the penalty for their sin as their substitute, atonement is made. The Father’s wrath is appeased.

Penal substitutionary atonement. This is the heart of the gospel.

But can I tell you something? That's not all of the gospel. Not even close. What Mark is getting at here is that this opening is just the beginning of the good news - the gospel - of Jesus Christ. Everything that has been written down in Mark's gospel is part of the good news about Jesus.

John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah - that's good news.

Jesus being tempted by Satan for 40 days and night in the wilderness and never failing - good news.

Casting out demons - good news.

Healing paralytics, choosing apostles, preaching parables, calming storms, teaching about marriage and divorce, cleansing the temple - all of it is the good news of Jesus.

In fact, **turn** to **14:3-9**. This is right before Jesus is crucified. It's his anointing in Bethany. Luke records a similar event - even with a guy named Simon - but they are different situations. In any case, notice what Jesus says about this event. **Read 3-9**

Now, be honest: How many of you guys who served at camp told this story when you were proclaiming the gospel to kids?

And how many of the rest of you when you muster up the courage to tell you friends and family and neighbors the gospel have thought "Man, how am going to weave in the story of the woman anointing Jesus when I'm just trying to choke out penal substitutionary atonement?"

That's because when we talk about "the gospel" usually we limit it to penal substitutionary atonement, and not the whole amazing life of Jesus. Everything Jesus did, everything done to him, everything he said and fulfilled is all good news.

His entire life - along with his death resurrection, ascension, and coming is all good news. And what's interesting is that it's not necessarily us who are fulfilling the command Jesus mentions here. Mark is fulfilling the command. I mean, why add this story in the book? Why make a big deal of it? It doesn't push the narrative, it's not particularly amazing. Except that it is a beautiful act of sacrificial worship of Jesus that anticipated his death.

Every square inch of Mark's gospel about Jesus - every jot and tittle - is good news. Every pericope - every little story - it's all the gospel.

By the way, because everything in here is good news, one of the best questions to ask yourself while reading the gospels specifically - but all of the Bible - is "why is this good news for me?" Or why is this good news in general?

So this is the beginning of the gospel; just the beginning of the good news of Jesus.

3) **Back** in **Mark 1:1**: Next word is Jesus. We'll get to Christ in a minute.

Every good thing that we have is wrapped up in Jesus. Even Jesus's name embodies who he is and what he has accomplished for us. Jesus - Ἰησοῦς - is a Greek form of the name Joshua and means Yahweh is salvation. Even Jesus's name indicates the whole purpose of his coming. Everything about his coming and his life is aiming toward the salvation of his people.

And I think we all know this, but it's important to remember. The good news that our life revolves around is not morality. The good news is not escape from hell. The good news is not correct theology. The good news is not enjoying no more tears and no more pain for eternity.

A lot of people - even regular church attenders - like the religious stuff that comes along with Christianity.

But the good news is Jesus. All of our lives revolve around Jesus. Who he is and what he has done and what he is doing and what he will complete when he returns.

Are there morals that Jesus calls us to? Yes. But that's not the good news.

Does believing and following Jesus get us out of hell? Yes, but that's not primarily the good news. And I can't stress this enough. When we tell people the heart of the gospel, our main goal is not to get them out of hell. It's not fire insurance. We tell people about Jesus so that they will know and love and enjoy the mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus himself in all of his glory.

If all we're selling is fire insurance we devalue Jesus. If all we're selling is eternal life of vacation at the lake, we devalue Jesus. If all we're selling is that our theology is precise or our morals are correct which is what the Pharisees did, we devalue Jesus.

We get all those other things by following Jesus, but never forget that Jesus himself is the good news.

4) Christ. Jesus is the Christ. When I was first saved I thought Christ was Jesus's last name. I'm Jason Upchurch and I worship Jesus Christ. That's not the case. He would have been referred to technically as Jesus, Son of Joseph, of Nazareth. Or Jesus Bar Joseph. Or Jesus of Nazareth.

Christ is a title. Like governor or president or mayor or CEO. Christ is his role. What is Christ?

Well, Christ and Messiah are two words that mean the same thing. Christ - Χριστος in Greek - means anointed one. Messiah - which is the Hebrew term meaning the same thing - also means anointed one.

So it means anointed. Great. What does that mean? Well, biblically when you anoint someone you pour oil on their head as a way to confirm that this person has been chosen - that's the key word "chosen" - by God for a specific task.

In the OT kings and prophets and priests were anointed to show that they were chosen by God to lead in a specific way. The Tabernacle and the pieces in the Tabernacle were also anointed with oil to show that they were sacred and to be used by God.

But what happened over the course of time in the OT was that there was an expectation of someone to come. Someone who would be particularly used by God in great ways.

Genesis 3 promises someone who will crush the head of the serpent and thereby reverse the curse, but that person's heel will be bruised.

Deut. 18 predicts a prophet like Moses who will lead the people of God and we are to follow him.

2 Samuel 7 - called the David's covenant - foretells of a king who is to come from the line of David and establish a Kingdom forever and ever.

Psalms 2 - predicts another King to whom all the nations will come.

Isaiah 53 a suffering servant who would bear the sins of the people of God.

And what seems to have happened over time is that the people of Israel - because of their suffering and subjugation from Babylon and Greece and Rome - the Jews began to long for this Messiah. It wasn't just a simple belief in a promise that sounded nice. They longed to see this Christ.

Look at John 1:35-42 for a minute. It's hard to emphasize enough how much the Jews wanted deliverance. They wanted a new Moses to deliver them out of oppression. And so by the time of Jesus there was this Messianic expectation. **Read 35-42**

So when Andrew tells Simon about Jesus he says we've found the guy! He's here; jackpot! And they both know exactly what Andrew was talking about. No one was confused about the idea of Messiah.

Here it is again, notice the expectation. **Read 43-51**

So this is a cool passage. Something was going on with Phillip that Jesus knew about and Phillip about. And Phillip knew it was miraculous that Jesus knew which led him to believe Jesus was the Messiah.

And again, notice some of the connections: The Messiah is the one the Law and the Prophets - that's the whole OT - wrote about. Messiah is all over the OT.

Nathaniel exclaims that Jesus is the Son of God and the King of Israel. These are 2 additional things people knew about the Messiah. Messiah would be the Son of God.

In **Psalm 2:7** - the Psalm about the Messiah being King - the Lord says of the Messiah: You are my Son, today I have begotten you.

In **2 Samuel 7** - called the Davidic covenant - the Lord promises David a son who will be king, the Lord also speaks about David's far off son that he will also be a Son of the Lord.

So Messiah was to be a king. And Messiah was to be the Son of God.

Now those were good expectations, but Jesus didn't fulfill them the way people thought he would fulfill them. **Look at John 18:28-40**

This is Jesus before Pilate. Pilate was the Roman governor who actually sealed the fate of Jesus in handing him over to be crucified.

By the way, do you know the actual reason Jesus was crucified? What crime did he commit that warranted execution? One of the few crimes that Rome was execute someone for was treason: trying to take over the country as king. That's what Jesus is on trial for when he finally talks to Pilate. **Read 18:28-40**

This whole monkey trial revolves around the Jews telling Pilate Jesus was an insurrectionist. That he was a traitor trying to take over Caesar. They knew Messiah was going to be a king. Jesus admitted he was a king.

Remember what was put on the sign above Jesus on the cross? They usually wrote the crime above the people they crucified: Jesus King of the Jews. He was executed because he claimed to be a King.

This is Messiah, this is Christ. The anointed one - the chosen one - whom the entire OT looked forward to. He would be a King, he would be a prophet, he would be the new and greater Moses, he would suffer for the sins of his people.

Back in Mark 1, he would also be the Son of God.

5) Son of God. Read 1:1

When we read through the gospels we find many titles for Jesus. Actually, Jesus's favorite title for himself is Son of Man. We'll get to that later.

But here we have the title Son of God. Now, this title is absolutely loaded with meaning. But let me address maybe a hard part of this title. When you say someone is the son of someone, usually there is an implication they are lesser in some way. Either they are lesser in authority, sons typically have less authority and less power than their Fathers. But it could also mean that they were born of someone.

When we hear the word "son" we almost always connect it to "father" which means the son didn't always exist.

So let me just address those 2 issues. First, Jesus has all the authority that the Father has.

Matt 28:18: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Jesus has all authority. All the authority that the Father has, Jesus has.

Now, there is a sense in which Jesus submits to the Father: Jesus says that he does everything he sees the Father doing, so the Father takes the lead, so to speak.

In the New Heavens and New Earth Jesus is in subjection to the Father, not the Father to him. But at the same time Jesus rules on the throne of the Father in the New Heavens and new earth. So there is equal authority, but a sense of deference as well.

Also, we need to make sure we understand that Jesus was not created. The Nicene Creed says that there never was a time when the Son did not exist. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the eternal persons of the Godhead. All three have always existed and all three have always had a fully divine nature.

Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, did take on a human nature at his incarnation, when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb. He has not always had a human nature, but he has always been divine. Now that he has a human nature, he will always have a human nature along with a divine nature.

So Jesus has the same authority as the Father because they are both God. And Jesus is eternal, again by virtue of his divine nature.

So what does "Son of God" mean? Well, as we saw in some of the other passages a few minutes ago, "Son of God" indicates Jesus as Messiah.

And whatever else we might gather from the phrase "Son of God" it should seem clear that it's an elevated status and intimate relationship with the Father.

So this is interesting, you know that when someone comes to faith in Jesus we become children of God, sons of God. Amen and Amen.

If you read through John's gospel, there's only one Son of God: Jesus. Everyone else is called a child of God. What John is trying to get at is that although we are all part of the family of God, there is a qualitative difference between us and Jesus. Because it could be confusing to say we're the sons of God and that Jesus is the Son of God. We're sons in that we're part of the family, we have an inheritance, we've been adopted. Jesus is a Son in that he has the same divine nature as his Father.

This phrase Son of God is also one exclusive to the Messiah. Messiah would be the Son of God. He would have a unique relationship with the Father.

And, of course, the term Son of God implies divinity. It implies that Jesus is God. We'd probably prefer Mark to say "God the Son" that would be clearer for us.

Side: from church history is that it's always been hard to reconcile Jesus's divine nature and his human nature. For us, we usually get that he was human and it's difficult for us to wrap our brains around the fact that he's also God.

For the early church it was just the opposite. They understood that Jesus was divine. The hard part was wrapping their brains around the fact that he was also fully human. The Greeks and Romans and usually looked down on the physical world - assuming it was evil. One of the earliest heresies in the church was a heresy called docetism.

Dokeo in Greek means to seem. And so the docetists believed that Jesus was fully God but only seemed to be human. He looked like a human, acted like a human. But they couldn't get their mind around the fact that Jesus was fully human. They knew he was God, but how can God be paired to sinful human flesh? Isn't the physical world sinful in and of itself?

No. God created all things and declared them what? Very good. We have a sinful nature, but creation itself is not sinful. And so Jesus is able to be fully divine and fully human.

In fact he has to be in order to be a sacrifice for our sins. He has to be made like us in every way, yet without sin. That he might be the perfect offering in our place.

One of the reasons fallen angels will never have redemption is because they have no substitute. Angels are not human so Jesus sacrifice does not apply to them. And Jesus is not angelic, and never will be an angel, so there is no substitute available to them.

Hebrews says: It's not angels he helps, but the offspring of Abraham. He helps the chosen people of God. Hebrews goes on to say: Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

So what does Son of God mean? It's another term for Messiah. It's another way to say he has an elevated status with the Father. It's another way to say he is divine. He is God in the flesh. Worthy of all all worship and obedience.

Everything in Mark's gospel is good news. And we should praise Jesus Christ, the Son of God for all of it.

Pray