

Mark 1:1-10

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[0 : 0 0] About 20 years ago, I was a Sunday school teacher at Govan Hill Free Church on the south side of Glasgow. I imagine many of you are protesting that it would be impossible that I could have been a Sunday school teacher at such a tender age, but I was 20 years ago there in Glasgow.

And on a good day, my class consisted of three children. Now, two of them were twins who were faithfully brought to a Sunday school by their granny. Now, Bible stories were not their specialist subject, and questions posed with a view to discovering what they had remembered from a previous lesson were often met with a blank expression. That perhaps had something to do with the abilities of their teacher, I don't know. Now, had I asked them about who had scored down the road in Govan the previous Saturday afternoon? They would have answered immediately, animatedly, and would have been spot on, I'm sure, with the answer. That said, at Sunday school, they did have an interesting strategy that they employed for just about any and every question. And the strategy that they had can be summarized in this way, if in doubt, say Jesus. Or put another way, never mind the question, the answer is Jesus. And I still smile as I remember those days. But the story does highlight a truth that we need to be constantly reminded of. It is all about Jesus. In a very real sense, the answer is always, always, always, always, always, Jesus. Where did all this come from? This beautiful autumn day that we have woken to, where did it come from? Jesus. What is the meaning of life? Jesus. What's it all about?

It's all about Jesus. Who can I turn to for hope and joy and love? Jesus. And certainly, the answer to the question, what is the gospel all about, can be answered with that name that is above every name, Jesus.

It's all about Jesus. As a congregation, we are about to begin an exciting journey of discovery, discovering Jesus, who He is and what He has done as we study the gospel of Mark. Not on Sundays, though we will today by way of introduction and encouragement, but midweek at the neighborhood fellowships. Now, as I introduce this gospel, I do ask you the question, will you be part of that adventure? Will you take this opportunity to meet the one around whom the universe revolves, the one of whom the Apostle Paul states, He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together? Or perhaps you have better things to do on a Wednesday night. This morning, I want to introduce you to the subject matter by considering the very first verse of Mark's gospel. It is no more than an introduction, a taster, if you wish, of the feast to come, but though just a taster, it is some taster. Let us notice how Mark begins his gospel, the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is these words that we want to consider this morning, the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As an introduction to the gospel, it serves to provide some crucial information about the gospel. It is, if you wish, an executive summary that will be developed and expanded in all that follows. And in this introduction, in this executive summary, there are three elements that I want to identify. They're not actually the only elements that we have there, but three that I want to identify and consider this morning that are addressed at, in some cases maybe hinted at, in other cases more explicitly addressed. Three elements. First of all, the nature of the gospel, the origins of the gospel in second place, and finally, and where we will spend the bulk of our time, the heart of the gospel. What is the nature of the gospel? What are the origins of the gospel? And what is the heart of the gospel? First of all, then, the nature of the gospel.

And here I'm referring to the very word itself that Mark used, the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ. And I'm going to make mention of this word. It is a familiar word, and I know that as it is familiar, and I think we can say its meaning is also familiar, we don't need to overly dwell on it.

[5 : 27] The word gospel is the Greek word evangelion, evangel, and it means good news. Those who have studied these matters, the word gospel, and it means good news. And the word of good news would come back and bring the good news of the victory that had been won. And this individual would be described as the evangel, the bearer of good news. But in times, as happens with language, the word came to describe the good news itself that this man carried. It was a word in common usage at the time that Mark and the other evangelists wrote. And in the New Testament, the word is adopted, we might say, to speak of the coming of Jesus and His work as the good news. The good news of salvation, salvation for men and women. And indeed, over time, it develops almost a technical sense to signify the content of the Christian message, the gospel. All that is involved in the Christian message, in shorthand, if you wish, can be described as the gospel, the good news concerning Jesus Christ.

And so, as I say very briefly on this point, we simply notice that Mark begins his account of the life and ministry of Jesus, assuring us and reminding us and stressing that what he writes is good news. It's good news. And what do you do with good news? Well, you do what Mark is doing.

You tell people good news. We all enjoy sharing good news. We hear some good news, and there is an instinctive desire to tell somebody else. That's what you do with good news. You shout it from the rooftops. You share it. And especially this good news, you share it with a world thirsting for good news.

The world we live in is a world that thirsts for good news. But good news that really is good news. Good news that is truly good news. And Mark begins his gospel by stressing that the nature of the gospel is this, that it is good news. It is much more than that. But this is the one truth that we begin by stressing, taking our cue from the language that Mark uses. What is the gospel? It is good news.

But moving on to the second element that we want to stress here, and that is what Paul, or rather, sorry, Mark comments regarding the origins of the gospel. Perhaps to put it this way, or to pose the question in this way, where does this good news story start? Well, like all good storytellers, Mark wants to start at the very beginning. And the question really for us is, when is the time of the once upon a time? You know, as we tell a story, we can begin with once upon a time. And in that way, we identify the beginning of the story. Well, Mark is doing something like that. He's beginning his story by pointing us to the once upon a time, the very beginning of the story that he is to tell.

[9 : 14] And what is that very beginning? Well, the verse begins with the word beginning, the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ. What does Mark mean by this? When he begins his account with this word, the beginning of the gospel. Now, some suggest that all that Mark is doing is saying something along these lines. This is the beginning of my account. I am going to give an account, and well, this is the beginning. Or we could paraphrase it in this way, let me begin as I would tell you about Jesus. Some suggest that is all the significance of the word, and if that is so, then it's not greatly significant.

But there are others, and I think very persuasively, who suggest that Mark here is referring very specifically to what he goes on to say in verse 2. The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, it is written in Isaiah the prophet. As we know, of course, the verse divisions that we have are imposed on the text. And so, if we are to understand the significance of this word that Mark begins with, the beginning, as relating to what he goes on to say in verse 2 and 3, where he makes reference to and quotes the Old Testament prophets, the manner in which we would read the beginning of this chapter would be something along these lines. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it is written in the prophet Isaiah. Verse 2 would run smoothly and naturally from verse 1, and specifically the word that verse 1 begins with, beginning, the beginning.

If we are to understand it in that way, and I think there is good reason to do so, what Mark is telling us is that if we want to know the beginning of the story of Jesus Christ, we don't go to Bethlehem. We go to the prophets of the Old Testament. Bethlehem is not the beginning of the story. Bethlehem is the beginning of the fulfillment of an ancient story, a story of a Messiah promised by the prophets. Is this then the beginning of the story? The wise words of the prophets quoted by Mark, is that the beginning? Well, no, that's not the beginning either, because the words of the prophets that we're not going to dwell on or even consider their significance this morning simply note that they are quoted. The words of the prophets are words that reveal the purposes of God for his people, purposes that God chose to reveal through the prophets.

The purpose itself, the divine purpose itself, was not conceived in the days of Isaiah or Micah or any of the prophets that Mark chooses to quote. The purpose itself is the eternal purpose of God that takes us back into eternity before the very creation of the world. The beginning of the gospel, the origin and ultimate source of this good news, is to be found in the eternal purposes of a good news God. Our God is a good news God. He is a giving, loving, and gracious God. And the beginning of the gospel is to be identified, is to be located, is to be found in the eternal purposes of this good news God.

The beginning of the gospel. There is an interesting parallel with how Mark begins his account of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, with how we begin the account of the first Adam in Genesis 1. Genesis 1 also begins with the word, in the beginning, as Mark begins, in the beginning. And the interesting thing is that the beginning of Mark's gospel goes beyond in time the beginning of Genesis 1.

[13 : 21] Genesis 1 does speak of a point in time at the very beginning when the world was created, but that the beginning that Mark speaks of goes even beyond that beginning. The origins of the gospel are to be found in the eternal purposes of a good news God. But that brings us on to the third element that we find in this introduction or executive summary that Mark presents for us to then develop and expand in what follows. And it is the matter that we must dwell more carefully on. The heart of the gospel. The heart of the gospel is also presented to us here in this verse. What is it all about, this gospel? What is it all about?

Well, remember my star Sunday school children at Govan Hill. It's all about Jesus. The gospel, the good news is about Jesus. And this is precisely what Mark says in these words, the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ. It's about Jesus Christ. If we were to be precise, as I think it's probably helpful to be the word that is translated about, could perhaps be more helpfully translated as of.

Indeed, in some versions it is. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I say it's helpful to use that word because that takes us beyond simply the idea of the gospel being about Jesus Christ, which it most certainly is. But it also introduces the idea of the gospel as belonging to Jesus Christ, as being authored by Jesus Christ. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I think that truth is one that we wouldn't want to exclude or miss out on. And certainly the word about does rather cloud that truth.

Well, that's an aside. Our concern this morning is to recognize that the heart of the gospel is indeed Jesus Christ. It is indeed about Jesus Christ. And Mark describes Jesus in these words. He tells us essentially two fundamental things concerning Jesus. He tells us that Jesus is the Christ, and he tells us that Jesus is the Son of God. And it is these two things that we want to now just consider briefly. First of all, Jesus the Christ. Jesus Christ. What does this name or this combination name title tell us about him? Well, if we begin with the name, Jesus. Jesus is his personal name, but it has a meaning. And again, this is familiar territory, I'm sure, for most of us.

This personal name has a meaning, and it means Savior. The angel explained this to Joseph in the Christmas story, and we can do no better than listen to his words without further commentary.

[16 : 26] The angel addressed Joseph in this way. Mary will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. Jesus. This gospel is about Jesus. It's about Jesus the Savior. And what does he save us from? He saves us from our sin. He saves you from your sin.

If you would seek that salvation that he offers to you. Jesus. But Mark tells us that this Jesus is the Christ. The Christ, and the word here is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Messiah, and both words, they mean the same, and they mean the anointed one. Now, in the Old Testament, those set aside by God for a special function, were anointed. They were anointed with oil. That was the custom. Prophets, priests, and kings very particularly would be anointed. And the Old Testament revolves around the coming, or rather the promise of a coming Messiah, the anointed one. There are several strands to this prophetic expectation that come together in the person of Jesus. And these strands that come together in Jesus relate to those functions for which men were anointed in the Old Testament. So, to illustrate that in Jesus, we have the promised eternal King. In Jesus, we have the promised archetypal priest who would not only bring a sacrifice for sin, but would be himself the perfect and sufficient and indeed final sacrifice for sin. In Jesus, we have the prophet who would not only bring a message from God, but be himself

God's message. This Jesus is the Christ. He is the Messiah. He is the foretold, prophesied, coming, anointed one. The gospel then, Mark assures us as he introduces his account, his good news, the gospel is about a Savior, a Savior who will deal with the problem of human sin, a Savior who will deal with the problem of your sin. The gospel is about a Messiah. It's about the Messiah.

It is about the one who is the promised prophet, the promised priest, the promised king, the one who would be your prophet, and your priest, and your king.

What is the heart of the gospel? The heart of the gospel is Jesus Christ. But Mark goes on and describes Jesus in another way, or gives to Jesus another title that we want to notice also. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of God. What does this designation or title mean?

[19 : 36] Now, it's true that the Bible describes all men and women indiscriminately as God's offspring.

That is the way in which Paul describes all human beings as he addresses his audience in Athens. And we are all God's offspring. We are all God's children in that sense by virtue of creation.

God has created us all. And as our creator, there are occasions in which we are described in that way. The Bible then goes on to describe in a more particular way, in a more restricted way, we might or could say, those who believe in Jesus as children of God. That is the way in which, or one of the things that John says, as he begins his gospel in a verse that is also very familiar to us. What does he say there in the first chapter of John's gospel in verse 12? Yet to all who received him, to all who received Jesus, to all those who believed in his name, all those who believed in the name of Jesus, he, God, gave the right to become children of God. And so if this morning you have believed in Jesus, if this morning you have received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and I trust that you have, and if you have not,

I would urge you to do so. But if you have, then the Bible says you are a child of God, you are a son of God, you are a daughter of God. But to return to our text, is that all that is being said of Jesus?

Well, no. Jesus as the Son of God is presented in the Bible as uniquely and eternally the Son of God.

[21 : 31] I think these are the two critical words that we need to have very clear in our mind. Jesus is presented as uniquely and eternally the Son of God. Unlike those who believe in Jesus and so become children of God, you, in God's grace, have become a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ. That has not always been your condition. It is something that you become. Not so with Jesus. Jesus was eternally the Son of God. There are, as I say, these two critical elements. There are maybe others, but I think these are the crucial elements. Uniquely the Son and eternally the Son. And there is a verse that perhaps unexpectedly reveals these two features of the sonship of Jesus. Mark simply states it. It's not his purpose, clearly in a verse of how many words, I don't know, a handful of words to develop what he is saying. But as we would develop it somewhat, there is a verse, as I say, that reveals these two elements. And it's, I think, an unexpected one, partly because of its familiarity. John 3.16.

If there is one verse in the Bible that perhaps folks might know of by heart, it would be John 3.16. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. And in this verse, these two elements of Jesus' sonship, or these two features of Jesus' sonship, uniquely the Son and eternally the Son, are, in one case, very explicitly highlighted, and in another, more hinted at. As regards Jesus as uniquely the Son of God, the Son of God in a way that none other is. Well, that is clearly presented to us in that verse in John 3.16, when He is described as the one and only Son. And you say, well, if we are sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ, how can Jesus be the one and only Son? That must be wrong. Well, He's the one and only Son in this sense of the uniqueness of His sonship. Or, as it is perhaps more familiarly rendered in the older versions, the only begotten Son. He is uniquely the Son of God. But that verse also hints at, certainly, the eternal sonship of Jesus. And it does so in that we're told that the Father gave His Son. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. And the implication is that Jesus was the Son before

He was given. He doesn't become the Son. This isn't some idea that God has. Well, how can I save this sin-sick world, this lost world? Well, I'll beget a Son, and the Son will save them. No, the Son was already the Son. The Son had eternally been the Son. And this eternal Son the Father gives. He doesn't become the Son. He doesn't become the Son at Bethlehem. No, He is the Son, and as the Son, He is given.

That we might be saved. That He might die for you and me. Jesus, the Son of God. Uniquely the Son.

Eternally the Son. Now, the eternal sonship of Jesus has as a necessary corollary the divinity of Jesus. And it is something that is clearly taught in the Scriptures. As eternal, He is also divine.

[25 : 24] In addition to what we've already commented, just making use of that verse in John 3.16, we can also pinpoint two central planks to the case, if you wish, for the eternal sonship of Jesus. And so, better understand the way in which Mark is describing Him here as the Son of God.

The case really is built on two elements. First of all, the eternal fatherhood of God. Now, it's not our intention, nor do we have the time to establish that by reference to the Scriptures, though that wouldn't be a difficult thing to do. The Scriptures very clearly present God, God the Father, as eternally the Father. God didn't become the Father at some point. Fatherhood is of His essence. It's of His nature. He is God the Father. And the eternal fatherhood of God, of course, requires the eternal sonship of the Son. You see, God is eternally the Father because eternally, He has enjoyed a relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. But then, of course, also, we have the testimony of Jesus Himself concerning His eternal existence, and as a result of that, also concerning His divinity. And Jesus Himself gives testimony to that most eloquently on one particular occasion that we can just notice briefly in John's gospel in chapter 8 and verse 58.

Jesus is in a debate with His enemies, or indeed, or in any case, those who are arguing with Him about a number of matters, and the issue of Abraham comes up. And it's not our purpose to go into all that was being discussed there, but simply to highlight or to notice the manner in which Jesus responds.

There in John chapter 8 and verse 58, and He responds with these words, I tell you the truth, Jesus answered, before Abraham was born, I am. Or indeed, that can be translated simply, before Abraham was, I am. Before Abraham was, I am. This man who was only 30 years old, and yet He was able to declare in this manner how He understood Himself before Abraham was, I am. And there Jesus not only makes reference to His eternal existence, He also is making a very clear and explicit claim to divinity, I am, taking upon Himself the divine name, I am, that I am.

And so when Mark, here at the beginning of his gospel, as he introduces this good news story, as he assures us that it's about Jesus, and as he would tell us something about who this Jesus is, he tells us that Jesus is the Savior, that's what His name means. He tells us that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah, the anointed One. But he tells us also that He is the Son of God, uniquely the Son, eternally the Son. This then is Mark's excellent summary. The gospel is good news.

[28 : 53] The origins of the gospel is to be found in the eternal purposes of a gracious God. The heart of the gospel is the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And I ask you, having been given a brief taster of the subject matter that is Mark's concern, having been given this fleeting introduction to all that he will now go on to develop and explore. I ask you, will you abandon the journey of discovery at this point, when we've hardly begun, or will you launch into the deep and explore and discover this gospel, discover for yourself this good news? Perhaps in what we've said this morning, there is a sense of, well, there's surely more to be said, and of course there is so much more to be said, so much more to be learned, so much more to be discovered. And so the challenge is laid to you. Will you take up the challenge? Will you avail yourself of this opportunity? Yes, indeed, to meet face to face with this Jesus, of whom the gospel speaks. Let us pray.

Thank you.