

Meeting Jesus

- Mark 1v1-13

Fact or Fiction

'The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' 1v1

In a very clear statement Mark the author of this book is saying:
If we want to know about who Jesus is, why he came and what he claims to do we must read his book.

Now I imagine for most of us that is straight forward assumption but for the majority of people that is intellectual suicide.
Atheists like Richard Dawkins (Who wrote the God Delusion) and Conspiracy theorists like the author Dan Brown have made it popular for people to view the Gospels like Mark as nothing more than legend and fabrication.

Here's a quote from Dawkins website about who wrote the bible and whether we can trust it.

'good Christian scholars of the Bible, including the top Protestant and Catholic scholars will tell you that the Bible is full of lies, even if they refuse to use the term. And here is the truth: Many of the books of the New Testament were written by people who lied about their identity, claiming to be a famous apostle -- Peter, Paul or James -- knowing full well they were someone else. In modern parlance, that is a lie, and a book written by someone who lies about his identity is a forgery.'

Or listen to Dan Brown's view of the Gospels.

'The Gospels are the product of man, not of God. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions.'

So modern views and opinions would have us believe that we can't take this book of Mark seriously.

It's lies, it's made up.

Which raises the question for us, Can we trust what Mark has written to be a reliable record about the person of Jesus Christ?

Well I am persuaded we can.

Eyewitness Account

First Mark draws his material from an eyewitness.

Papias was a bishop 130 AD.

In his writings he records that Mark was a secretary and translator for Peter one of the first followers of Jesus, and wrote accurately all that Peter remembered.

As we read through Mark we see that Peter is not only mentioned the most, nothing happens in which Peter is not present.

So the Gospel of Mark is certainly the eyewitness account of Peter.

Counterproductive Content

Second the content is too counterproductive to be considered legend or fabrication.

Peter is consistently seen as the first leader of the Christian church.

Yet he is portrayed as an enormous failure who denied Jesus and cursed him in public.

Mark records in detail all that Peter said and how he wept. (Ch 14)

Why would anyone in the early church want to highlight the spectacular failures of their most prominent leader?

Yet it seems Peter relays to Mark an honest and truthful account of himself, which suggests it's all true.

Literary Detail.

Third as you read through the gospel of Mark there is too much detail to be considered fiction.

For example in Mark chapter 4 we read that 'Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the stern of a boat'.

The detail is not necessary to the story but yet it verifies the fact that there were eyewitnesses present and recorded what they saw and heard.

This is what makes the Gospel of Mark reliable.

The detail, content and eyewitness account provide the necessary evidence for us that Mark is a reliable record about Jesus Christ.

But this is not just historical evidence this is good news about Jesus for us today.

That's what Gospel means.

Something good has happened and it's all found in the person of Jesus.

So let's look and see what Mark has to say about Jesus.

Intervention

'The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God', 1v1

Marks introduction is carefully chosen to show us this is all about a history shaping, world impacting, intervention.

Two things point to this.

First the Emperor Augustus who ruled the Roman empire in the first century had his birth announced in this way.

'the birthday of the god, marked for the world the beginning of good news through his coming.'

It is almost identical to how Mark announces the coming of Jesus.

The beginning of the gospel (good news) about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,

On hearing about the birth of Augustus the Roman world anticipated a new age of peace freedom and victory.

And that's what Mark is communicating to us here.

He uses similar language to tell us that Jesus Christ has intervened to restore this broken and disordered world.

He has come to rescue us, he has come to free us, he has come to bring peace.

Of course Jesus is not like the Emperor Augustus he is The Son of God.

A title of divinity.

He is nothing less than God in human form intervening in our world.

Second Marks introduction is also similar to the first book of the bible – Genesis.

The first verse tells us *'In the beginning God...'*

Genesis records how the earth was formless and empty. There was disorder and chaos.

But God intervened and brought order and design – he created the world into something that was very good.

And look at how Mark starts: *'The beginning of the gospel..' 1v1.*

There is disorder and chaos in our lives and in our world and it all needs to be put right.

God has intervened through Jesus, not to create the world but to renew the world to bring about a new creation in the lives of people.

Now when we take these two thoughts together we can see that this is an intervention that means the world will never be the same again.

The intervention of Jesus was no accident just as creation was no accident.

It was planned and purposed by God.

People like Isaiah wrote about the day when Jesus would come.

'as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" "a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' 1v2-3

God planned for Jesus to come, he planned to intervene, he planned to rescue us and restore us.

Mark is announcing that Jesus is God's long awaited promised King who has come to put right our broken lives and our disordered world.

Now if Jesus has come we need to be prepared to meet him.

Preparation

'And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.' 1v4

Repentance and Baptism is the way we prepare ourselves for meeting Jesus.

John like all the prophets before spoke about the need to repent before the coming of God's Son, because it was a matter of utmost seriousness.

Look back to Malachi who Mark quotes in verse 2.

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver;..so I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice,.." Malachi 3v1-5

It's a startling question v2. *'Who can stand when he (Jesus) appears?'*

Because of peoples rebellion and sin no one could stand guiltless and faultless before God's promised King, a refiner and purifier.

It was a serious matter because he was coming to sort it out.

But look what he says at the end of Malachi 3v5:

'But do not fear me – says the Lord Almighty'.

How could they not fear?

Well lets look to Isaiah who Mark quotes in verse 3.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD;.." Isaiah 40v1-3a

They need not fear because their *'sin had been paid for'.*

The promised King was coming to intervene with the promise of judgement and justice but with it came the offer of forgiveness.

That's the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The good news that justice will be done and that people can be forgiven.

Now if we are to avail of that same forgiveness we must also be people who respond with repentance and baptism.

'The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.' Mark 1v5

People who are prepared to meet Jesus Repent and are Baptised.

It's not about presenting yourself as perfect. It's not about being better than others.

No! It's about being honest, admitting your sin and seeking his forgiveness.

And lets not be mistaken. Repentance is not a once off event it is a life long process.

Now the way to demonstrate that life of repentance is through baptism.

Baptism is an external expression of an internal reality.

And so people who were serious about meeting Jesus prepared themselves by repenting personally and being baptised publicly.

In fact repenting and being baptised would prepare them for something supernatural.
And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." 1v7-8

The Holy Spirit is God's supernatural power equipping and enabling us to live and experience the new life he came to bring.
His Spirit will transform you and change you and bring about that renewal and restoration that he has promised.
Preparing to meet Jesus is serious and it begins with a life of personal repentance expressed through baptism publicly.

Confirmation

Now if we are serious about meeting Jesus – how do we know he is who he claims to be? Maybe he is a fraud – a religious guru obsessed with power and control?
'At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.' 1v9

Baptism as we have seen was an outward expression of repentance!
Does that mean Jesus needed to repent – was he just as rebellious as us?
No, this was about identifying with us.

As Jesus comes to be baptised he is saying: I am one with you. I am not pushing myself above you.
I have come to intervene into your broken lives and into your disordered world.
I have come to serve you not to control you.
I have come to be like you so that I can save you.

'Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."' 1v10-11

This is how we know Jesus is no fraud.
The Father confirms to us at Jesus Baptism who he is.
No one in the history of the world has received an audible voice from heaven saying:
'You are my Son whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

It's like Mark wants us to be there, to hear the words for ourselves to see the Spirit descending – so that we know this is God's long awaited promised King who has come to restore our broken lives and renew this disordered world.

In many ways this was Jesus commissioning.
Sent by the Father and Empowered by the Spirit.
God's confirmation that Jesus is the one to intervene and put things right.

Opposition

But it would not be plain sailing. Opposition would accompany Jesus in his task.
'At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.' 1v12-13

Satan is aware of God's plan and purpose.
He knows that Jesus has come to renew and restore things and he is out to stop it.
He wants this plan destroyed before it even begins.

It's not unlike what we see in Genesis.
God created a world that was very good. But who was lurking in the background? Satan.
He got hold of Adam and Eve, the first Man and Woman, and he broke them.
He tempted them and they fell and failed – and we are living with the consequences ever since.

Now Satan is out to break Jesus.
But this time things are different.
Jesus is tempted for forty days but Jesus does not break.
In fact Jesus is the one who will crush Satan.
Jesus is on a mission and no one and nothing will stop his plan of restoration.

The Garden of Eden is a picture of a perfect world with people living in a perfect relationship with God.
Satan deceived Adam and Eve, the world was cursed and it's now terribly broken.
We face disorder, death and disease.
But the message of Mark is that Jesus Christ has come, he has intervened to put it right.

As we read through Mark we see Jesus undoing the brokenness, he reverses the effects of the curse.
Mark is full of miracles. The sick are healed, evil spirits are cast out, the poor are fed, the dead are raised, the storms are calmed, sins are forgiven, lives are transformed.
All evidence of his restoring power.

While Adam and Eve and us have failed, Jesus will triumph.
He will restore our disordered lives, he will renew this broken world.
'This is the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.'