

*Reading Isaiah 40:1-5, Mark 1:1-8 Andrew Hoggan May 2025*

*Prayer, Living God, in these few moments as we look into what is headed up “the good news, or the gospel, of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” help us to see the wonderful provision you have given us and the freedom we have in you, Amen*

*I trust what we find in the introduction of Mark will be a great encouragement to each one of us.*

Mark has been described as the action man of gospel writers. As he tells the story of Jesus he emphasises the dramatic and the immediate. It's pretty much in your face. Here is what happened. This is what it means.

V1 The beginning of the good news, the gospel about Jesus Christ the Son of God.

The rest of the gospel will, with as much immediacy and drama as possible, seek to convince us that Marks opening statement is an accurate one in regards.

- Jesus identity.
- Jesus authority.
- And why it is we can call this story about Jesus good news.

Some background around Vs 1.

It might surprise some to know the word “Gospel” is not really a religious word. Back in the day, any kind of news that was good, was called gospel news.

For example, if two regions were fighting, and one side beat the other, the proclamation of that victory would be called “gospel news”, “good news”. Depending I guess on which side you were on. Or say the Roman authorities wanted to drop taxes the proclamation of that tax break would be called gospel news.

Another clarification by way of background.

Many people think “Christ” is Jesus surname, like Fred Dagg, or Bill Smith. But most people of the day didn't have surnames. You were known by what town you came from, or maybe what you did for a job.

If I were to say Bob the builder is coming to preach next Sunday, you would know at least two things about who was coming.

- His name is Bob
- He builds stuff.

Bob the builder. Jesus the Christ.

Christ is a title. It tells us something about Jesus and why he came. It tells us that Jesus was the one that the people of God had been waiting for.

“Son of God”, another title. It was a title of divinity, and again not a specifically religious word. The Roman Emperor saw himself as divine and called himself, “son of god”.

For Christians though the titles that are linked with Jesus in this first vs are there to help us understand, and believe, that Jesus is divine, and he is the one the people of God have been waiting for.

You could say the cat is out of the bag in the first vs.  
So what of this Jesus? What are we to make of him?

I think it would be fair to say, even today, people generally don't badmouth, or say nasty things about Jesus. I'm yet to hear anyone say, “yeah that Jesus bloke, he was was a real creep, a real jerk”.

Most will say “nice guy.” “I'm all for the idea of loving your neighbour and keeping the golden rule”, that sort of thing.  
Look at the global accolades that are being heaped on Pope Francis because of his emphasis on love and looking after the poor.

Back to Jesus, at the very least most will say he seemed like a nice sort of fellow.

- “Not sure about the God bit.”
- “As far as the church and religion, no thanks”.

Mark is playing his hand as he begins. His aim is not to have us thinking Jesus is just one good or nice guy among many.

Jesus is unique. Jesus carries a unique authority.

He needs to because it's gonna take more than a good or nice guy to change the world. Even more so, to change the human heart.

Good news. God in the person of Jesus is here to change things. And change them from the inside out.

How? Very early in the story, in the introduction, enter John the Baptist. His job? Getting the people ready to meet with Jesus.

How? Vs 4, A Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. Let's just sit on that word repentance for a moment.

It's helpful to know the deepest meaning of repentance is not so much about feeling guilty or bad, as much as it simply means to turn around, and change direction.

To go from facing away, and moving away from God, to facing him and moving towards him. As we do that of course we see ourselves as we are and the differences between us and God becomes clear.

Thankfully with repentance comes the promise of forgiveness.

Get ready to meet with God through the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin is the cry of John

Now if we want to compare John and Jesus baptism. Think of it in terms of JB washing the outside, and Jesus washing the inside as he deals with sin in the most profound and effective way by changing the human heart and recalibrating our mind.

Let's then think of repentance as a good and liberating gift of God.

Something to be celebrated and embraced as compared to say, thinking repentance is something like taking medicine. We sense it will do us good, but it doesn't taste very nice.

Further, understanding the link that Mk is making between repentance and meeting with God might even bring a greater degree of freedom into our lives.

Bear with me for a moment.

Think of the Pharisees and Sadducee's, the religious lawyers and leaders of Jesus day. They thought getting right with God came by following a certain set of rules. Along came the gospel that said No! It's about following a certain person, Jesus.

Sometimes when people find out I'm an Anglican minister they say, usually very nicely and respectfully, "I'm not really a very religious person". My answer to that is always "well, neither am I."

Did you know there is only one faith, or religion, or belief system that does not concentrate mainly on what we do.

Without exception, every belief system, except Christianity, puts the pressure on us to

- try harder,
- do better,
- be more spiritual.
- Get up there on Gods level by doing good stuff, being a good person.

The gospel, the good news would say this. "Save yourselves the effort of trying to get right with God through your own efforts."

It's called good news because it's about what God does for us, because try as we might, we are unable to do for ourselves.

When we understand and embrace that, it's not that we want to disregard or break the rules. It's more we want to live as Jesus would have us live out of gratitude and freedom, as compared guilt and fear

So how do we best meet with Jesus and get right with God?

All through scripture we are told the best way to meet with God is in humility and in repentance.

700 years before the coming of Jesus a prophet, a messenger, someone that delivers a message from God, a prophet named Isaiah talked of one who would prepare a way for people to meet with Jesus.

Isaiah talks of a highway that is straight and level. The valleys and the hills been levelled. The crooked paths being made strait.

Think of a giant excavator digging up the mountains filling in the valleys as this super straight and level highway is built.

Question. If we were walking down a highway how would we get from point a) to point b) as quickly and comfortably as possible?

If that highway was straight and level.

Let's make one of the points us and the other point God. The good news is that God does everything possible to help us connect with him.

Ultimately, of course that points to Jesus and the cross but let's use the imagery of Isaiah. This straight level highway of God.

If we think we have to "be good" and do good stuff to get right with God, we are on a path that I would argue is windy, hilly and won't actually get us where we need to be.

Contrast the imagery of Isaiah and JB where facing God in an attitude of humility and repentance is the quickest, the most effective, and surprisingly, somewhat counterintuitively, the easiest way of connecting.

Decades ago I saw this definition of sin. Sin S-I-N, sin at its heart is when "I" is at the centre instead of God.

Repentance at heart is turning from our own ambitions and objectives, even the idea we can be good enough, and in essence putting Jesus in the driving seat and trusting in him and what he did for us on the cross.

And lest we think this all too hard and confronting the good news reminds us that we are helped and encouraged on the journey by Jesus himself in the power and presence of the HS, the Spirit of Jesus.

Vs 8, I baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.

To finish, Repentance may not be the most popular word in our world. But in the context of the good news, God wanting to meet with us and make the way as smooth and painless as possible, repentance is a glorious word.

It's a practice to be celebrated and embraced. It is good news also given repentance is followed by the promise of forgiveness.

And with forgiveness comes the freedom that is a part of following Jesus the Christ, the son of God.

Let's pray, Lord Jesus, you call us to follow you and you make it possible for us to follow you. That is good news indeed. We thank you and we praise you and ask that our lives would be marked both by the forgiveness and the freedom you make possible, Amen.