

Mark 1:12-15 "The King...So What?"

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I'd like to start with a [question]... [Does] *Christianity actually make any difference?* Does it actually change lives?

I ask this question because a lot of people today think that it doesn't really matter what you believe. It's a matter of personal opinion. You can be a buddhist, you can be an atheist, you can believe in nothing at all, it's all much of a muchness, I respect your beliefs and you respect mine. We all try to get along.

But I want to show us from Mark's gospel today that true Christianity actually changes lives.

I want us to see that if we really "get" the message of the Bible, (what we are calling the "good news about Jesus Christ") it will impact our everyday life for the better.

Sunday will affect Monday, and people will start to notice as our lives begin to change. Our values, our dreams, our lifestyles, our very characters.

Today we are going to focus on Jesus' first words in Mark's gospel under two headings [REALITY] and [RESPONSE].

But there's a few verses since last week's passage which I'd like to fill in by way of backdrop, so we can see what was the world Jesus was going to bring his message into.

So let's just look at the context to Jesus' words in verses 12-14.

V12,13.

- First there's the [wilderness].

That picture there is the one that we are using for the imagery at the side of the screen for our series- an [aerial view] of the desert or wilderness of Israel. And it's a place of [suffering].

The desert is where God's people were wandering because of their sin in the Old Testament, it's also the place where John the Baptist was preaching as promised in Isaiah (v3).

You can see that for Jesus it's a place of suffering. V13. He was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. And the other gospels add that he didn't eat anything and yet he didn't fall for the devil's temptations.

[Wow- I get grumpy even 1 hour late for a meal, let alone 40 days late for a meal]. Jesus stood up to Satan's attacks. He succeeded where the people in the desert failed when they were there for 40 years. And he succeeded where you and I have failed.

And so from the start we are seeing that Jesus is amazing and perfect, and that Satan wants to stop Jesus from being amazing and perfect. So he's tempted in the wilderness. A place of pain.

- But did you see a fascinating thing in verse 12. It was the **Holy Spirit** who sent him there. It was part of God's [Plan].

God hadn't abandoned him.

Suffering doesn't mean we have fallen out of God's plans. For Jesus God the Holy Spirit actually drove him to suffering.

We will see later in the book that God's plan for the rescue of the world centres on a suffering servant dying on the cross.

In marks' gospel Pain and Plan go together.

The wilderness speaks of God's plans coming together. Plans to rescue and to bless. Plans to set the captives free as we saw in verse 3 last week. So there's PAIN, but there's a PLAN.

It's the same for John the Baptist. V14.

- We see John the Baptist being arrested and put into prison.

Again- more suffering and pain. It will be a key theme in this book. John was put in prison for challenging King Herod, and in chapter 6 we will see that he is beheaded.

PAIN. YET PLAN.

- Plan because this suffering signals the time for God's plan to be unfolded (just like he promised), and Jesus is now taking over and starting to speak the good news.

So do you see from this backdrop that God's plan is going to involve suffering. It did for Jesus, and it did for John the Baptist, and it will for us too.

I was chatting to one of you earlier in the week who said that it was actually through a time of suffering that you came back to the Christian faith. One writer, CS Lewis said that Suffering is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Suffering is painful. No-one wants it. Yet God can purpose it and use it. A lot of people think that suffering means that God has abandoned them, and that Christianity can't be real. Actually in a strange way we can trust God through the midst of suffering, however painful it is, that God has a plan and is working it out in our lives.

Well let's move on now to the main focus for today v15: the first words of Jesus recorded in this gospel. First the reality and then the response.

So let's look at **1) THE REALITY**. V15 "The time has come; the Kingdom of God has come near".

Jesus is saying, much as John the Baptist has been saying, that a new era that has arrived. "*The Time has come*" ... Why? Because the King has come. "*The kingdom of God has come near*".

▲ Now do you know what a **Kingdom** is? Of course? The United Kingdom is the nation we live in comprising of 4 (mainly!) united countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

And because they have a King or Queen, **Denmark** is a Kingdom, **Morocco** is a Kingdom, **Saudi Arabia** is a Kingdom and of course **Belgium** is a kingdom, hence the name of the pub in Hartford, "King of the Belgians"!

A Kingdom is the area over which a King or Queen reigns. But this Kingdom is different. You can't plot it on a map, because it cuts across countries. It's the realm where God is actively bringing about his rule in people's lives.

Of course God is always on the throne. He is always King. But the prophet Daniel (famous for being in the lions' den) hundreds of years earlier looked forward to the day when the God of heaven would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed and would ultimately crush all other kingdoms and bring them to an end¹.

¹ Daniel 2:44

And what Mark and Isaiah and John the Baptist, and now Jesus are claiming is that Jesus is that King. God's Kingdom is at hand. It has come near.

The Kingdom is here, because Jesus, God's King is here. The SON of God who will defeat all who oppose him, and yet in whom we can take refuge as we were seeing in Psalm 2.

This is the reality. And we'll see evidence for it in the coming weeks.

I wonder if we've all grasped it.

Jesus is not just another religious leader of history, some hippy who had some great new ideas, a charismatic figure who tragically got the wrong side of the authorities.

Jesus is "fully man, fully God" as we've been singing. "That's the truth we must understand".

That's the reality of the universe.

God himself has come to our earth on a search and rescue mission. Jesus is the King.

You could sum up Christianity in 4 words "Jesus Christ is King". Or using bible language "Jesus Christ is Lord".

This is such a wonderful thing. We can know God, because he isn't hiding. He has come to us.

We can know how he wants us to live, because he has sent his King to tell us.

And wonderfully we can be friends with God because his King has come not all high and mighty to lord it over us (though he has every right to do so) but as a Kind and Humble servant who wants to bless us.

The Kingdom of God has come near.

I wonder if you are convinced that this is the reality of the universe. Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus is the King.

The **big things** in your life might feel like deadlines or work stresses, finances, a new relationship.

But no, the big thing in life is making sure that we are getting with reality. Jesus Christ is King.

It has huge implications. If we reject this King, we will find ourselves rejected.

When we get to the end of our lives, the big issue won't be how did we do in our GCSEs (that's a relief) or whether we ever got married. It's did we recognise Jesus as King.

Can I bring this into even further focus.

If Jesus Christ is King, and if the Kingdom has come in Jesus, then we have to say that Allah is not King, Krisna is not King. Our work, our stuff, our friends mustn't call the shots. Jesus Christ is King.

Jesus Christ is King. That's the reality.

And if you are saying I need more evidence, it will come in the coming weeks as we look at Mark's gospel. Why not read ahead.

The Reality 2) The RESPONSE.

Well the title of this sermon is "The King... So What?"

If Jesus is God's King, what should we do?

Well Jesus himself tells us in two words.

REPENT and BELIEVE.

The bible repeats these 2 words again and again.

- If you want to become a Christian this is what you've got to do.
- **If you are not doing this, you are not a Christian, no matter how much churchgoing or charity you do.**

1) **REPENT**.

This means **turn** around.

▲ We have a few military links in this area, US and UK air force bases. And occasionally you will see soldiers or other military marching and then doing an "about turn".

That's what repentance is. It's turning from one direction and moving in another. A 180degree turn.

We go from living life for ourselves, 180degrees to living life for God.

You see If Jesus is the King, then we can no longer live with ourselves as King, in charge of our lives- he has to come first.

We'll see that as he calls his first disciples in our passage next week.

2) And the second part is **BELIEVE** in the good news.

That is to say trust.

People think that faith is something complicated these days. Rob the Northern Irish painter-decorator I met a couple of weeks ago said, "wow Charlie I wish I had your faith".

But faith isn't something complicated.

It's **trust**. It's trusting a person.

Whenever we get in a taxi, or go to the doctor, or listen to some directions to find the bank we are trusting someone.

The question is the person in question trustworthy?

And if you read Mark's gospel you'll see that Jesus is totally trustworthy.

So repent (turn) and believe the good news (trust Jesus) – trust that this message is true.

And by the way, the two go together.

That's why I've tried to draw them as a continuation of each other on the diagram. Turn and Trust.

Not turn without trusting.

That's trying to save ourselves.

Not trusting without turning.

It's impossible to be a Christian without turning. There's no good news about having ourselves on the throne of our lives.

Sometimes people say, "I trusted Jesus as my saviour, I asked him into my life when I was a child", but I only turned to him as my Lord when I was at high school.

Now I'm not saying that when you become a Christian you become perfect. No your life is like a building project and there's always a long way to go. But following Jesus involves a change, and if there's no change, then you aren't a Christian. [that's what we are praying for for Higher].

As we conclude can I say a few words to those who aren't Christians, or aren't sure...

What's your opinion about Jesus? Is he just an ordinary bloke, or is he really as he claims, God's King come to earth?

Everything hangs on this. Who is this man?

The evidence of his life, death and resurrection as recorded by Mark is that he really is God's King. Keep reading and you will see. This is the reality.

And each of us needs to get with that reality.

And we will find that he is such a **good** King. He knows what's best for our lives. Putting him first will be for our good.

He's come to forgive us and cleanse us and give us new life once we turn and trust him.

Yes it will mean changes, but they are good change.

- When he says Jesus comes first over:
 - Videogames, social media, holidays, sport, in our private lives
 - We'll find that we never miss out. Because he's giving us as a free gift his **love** and **care** and **rescue**.

What a great King. Turn and Trust him.

And can I say a few words to those who are already following Jesus?

You have turned from your old way of life to having Jesus as your King. You have trusted that this good news is true, and now you are following Jesus.

The building project has begun.

Well can I say that the **way on** is the same as the **way in**. You came to faith by turning and trusting, now you must continue to turn and trust.

Where do you need to continue to TURN?

[Take a moment to think about that]

For me it's doing things for God's glory rather than my own.

I'm tempted to make myself look good, but life goes better when I'm trying to make God look good.

Where do you need to continue to TRUST?

[Take a moment to think about that]

For me. I need to trust God that my rescue is a gift and not dependent on my good works.

Ask me how I'm getting on, and I'll ask you too.

AS a church we can find someone to help you with these things.

Back to that question at the start. Does Christianity actually make any difference?

Yes it does. If Jesus is King, then we turn and trust his wonderful ways, and we seek to put him first. His beautiful kindness starts to impact us. His unconditional love starts to spread out to others.

Talk to one another over coffee about how Jesus has changed your life.

I'm going to finish with a quote by an atheist. That might sound like a funny place to end, but I hope you can see why.

This atheist is a journalist called Matthew Parris. And a few years ago he wrote this in the Times newspaper.

"Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa.... In Africa Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good"².

The whole article is worth a read, and there's a link on our website. He's saying that even though he personally doesn't believe in it, there's no doubt that it's not just schools and aid charities that will transform Africa, but Christianity which actually changes the heart.

And if that is happening in Africa, it can happen in Huntingdon too.

Let's pray.

² http://www.hopeinview.org/files/As_an_atheist_I_truly_believe_Africa_needs_God--Matthew_Parris.pdf