

# The Reign of the Gospel

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, all that said, let's talk about the Bible. So we are starting, like churches do series, they do sermon series. I feel like a series isn't quite the right word for what we're gonna do.

What we're gonna be doing from now until I don't know when is going verse by verse, passage by passage through the gospel of Mark. We have a vision statement, a mission statement here at the Table Church that we wanna help create and develop, disciple thoughtful and authentic followers of Jesus.

That's our whole mission. That's why we exist. We wanna create thoughtful, authentic followers of Jesus. And so if we're gonna do that well, we probably need to study, look at the life of Jesus.

So we're gonna take a look at the gospel of Mark, what scholars believe is the first, the earliest gospel written. So Mark, he was writing somewhere in like 60 AD.

And if you heard last week's sermon, you heard a little bit of his story about one of these tagalongs with the disciples. He eventually befriends Peter and Paul and he starts gathering these stories about the disciples of Jesus and about Jesus's ministry itself.

[ 1 : 11 ] And Mark begins to write during a highly hard time for both Jews and Christians. The Roman army is knocking at the doors of Jerusalem.

And in 70 AD, the entire city is going to be burned down, the temple torn apart brick by brick. It's also around this time that an emperor named Nero, who was fiddling while Rome burned, decided to blame the Christians and the Jews on the burning of Rome.

And so he expels them all from Rome. And now the Christians and the Jewish people, they're not sure if they have a home, if they're going to live, if they're gonna be persecuted, they're gonna be allowed in the marketplace.

And so Mark is writing to a Jewish and Greek and Christian population. He's the first one to write down all of these stories that have been passed around for a couple of decades now about this person called Jesus.

And Mark, his gospel was written first and then Matthew and Luke come along a decade or a couple of decades after Mark and they use his gospel and they use it to write their own gospels called Matthew and Luke.

[ 2 : 18 ] And then John comes along a little bit later and he does completely something different. That's a different story for a different day. But Mark, I would argue, is probably the, one of the, if not the most influential book in the world because it's the starting place of where people began to write down their stories about Jesus.

And we all have an inkling about what those stories have done throughout history. So we're going to spend a lot, a lot of time over the next couple years, I'm not joking, studying this book.

Now we'll take some breaks during like Advent, the Christmas season, Lent, the Easter season, maybe a break in the summer, talk about some topical issues. But for the most part, what I want our preaching, our sermons to be about, is about Jesus and about the verses and the gospel of Mark.

We'll make connections to the Old Testament, make connections to other passages, but we're going to be studying the gospel of Mark for a good long time. So to kind of, by way of introduction, let me ask you a question.

If you're online, hello, good evening. You can put this answer to this question in the chat. For all you hear, you can actually like answer out loud. What was your favorite birthday gift or one of your favorite birthday gifts from, you know, childhood till now?

[ 3 : 35 ] What's one of your favorite birthday gifts? An easy bake oven, like a hot light bulb and some food that you could theoretically eat afterwards.

Yes, yes. How old were you when you got that? Like 22? Seven? Yeah, yeah, that's good. That's good. Somebody else? A go-kart?

Oh, dang, that's a good birthday gift. How old were you, seven? 13, that's a better age for that. Yeah, good, good. Any other favorite birthday gifts? Do you have a birthday gift throughout your life?

Do we all need to like have some counseling about like bad birthdays or something? So my favorite birthday gift, I was also around seven, eight. And I was living with my aunt and uncle at the time. They threw me a birthday party at a bowling alley with some friends. And then the gift that I got to unwrap and I tried my best to find a picture of it. I could not find it. I was looking on like vintage eBay for like vintage toys or whatever.

[ 4 : 39 ] But it was this little, like a little bigger than a phone. And it had a giant Batman symbol on it. And it would open up and it was a personal digital assistant. And you could put in like phone numbers and calendar entries and like all the things that an eight-year-old nerd like me loved to do on this little like calculator-sized screen.

And I think it's what like started in me, like my love for technology. I love gadgets. And I like did IT when I was in college. Like I think it started that in me. And it was like 1994.

And I had this little PDA as an eight-year-old. Like tell me your phone number. Like we can be friends and I can call you. I didn't have friends as an eight-year-old. But that's a different story. That's my own counseling, okay? That was one of my favorite birthday gifts because it set me on a path of like loving technology.

Now, if you were a high-ranking official, somebody of high status in the Roman Empire, then you could also get birthday gifts. And one of the most prestigious gifts that you could get was a calendar inscription, meaning that someone would chisel into stone something about your birthday.

It was a pretty amazing thing because it would mean it would last for a really, really long time. So long, in fact, that we still find these calendar inscriptions today. So you can take a look at the screen. This is an example of one.

[ 5 : 58 ] This is the calendar inscription of Pyrene. And so each one of those markings is a capital Greek letter. Fun fact that if you're a New Testament scholar and you're reading Greek, they wrote in all capital letters with no spaces and no punctuation, which makes it really hard to read.

But papyrus and stone was, you know, really hard to come across or to chisel into. So you squished as much in as you possibly could, which makes it a hard job for people to translate today.

But you get a calendar inscription like this and they would write really, really nice things about you. So here's an example of one for Augustus, the emperor of Rome in 9 BC.

It says, The fate which has ordered the whole of our life has ordained the most perfect consummation for human life by giving to us Augustus, by sending him as a savior for us and those who come after us to make war, to cease, to create order everywhere.

The birthday of the God Augustus was the beginning of the good news for the world that has come to men through him. So it's a pretty good birthday gift.

[ 7 : 06 ] Somebody has chiseled this into stone for you to last generations. This is making some pretty high praise that you are a God, that the fate has ordered the whole of life to come to this moment in time when you could be born.

And it's saying that, you know, through Augustus, war is going to cease and he's going to be a savior. And this is the beginning of the good news. Now, let's talk about that word good news. It's a Greek word, ouangelion.

Talked a little bit about this last week. Ou is a Greek prefix that means good and gelion means message. You can see the word angel inside that word, angel, a messenger.

So you've got good message and this got translated into middle English as good spell or God spell, which eventually got simplified down to gospel.

It's where we get the word gospel. So the euangelion was all about usually the empire and the emperor, where the Roman army would go marching into a city and say, euangelion, good news.

[ 8 : 09 ] The Roman empire is here to rid you of your barbarism and to proclaim the savior Augustus has come to set you free from your wicked ways and to show you the way of Pax Romana, the peace of Rome.

This was the euangelion, the good news that Rome would proclaim. Or you can see it in this birthday message. The birthday of the God Augustus was the beginning of the good news of the

world that has come to men through him.

The good news, the euangelion, was this highly political word, a propaganda word about Rome, about empire, about the good news of them making war to cease because if you tried to oppose them, they would just kill you.

So war is going to cease now. Now, that's the birthday message to Caesar Augustus. Listen to Mark chapter one, verse one. The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God. And you see the similarities. So Mark is writing this highly politically charged time where his life, the life of his friends, the life of his people, the life of the Jews in Jerusalem, the Christians and Jews in Rome, it's all going, it's all a risky, risky time.

[ 9 : 24 ] And Mark writes this phrase. We read today and it seems blase and a little boring and yeah, we've heard this before. But for somebody writing in these highly politically charged times, highly politically charged times, something we know nothing about, Mark decides to use this language.

What if, Mark thinks, I take the language used about empire and Caesar and apply it to Jesus and a different kind of son of God?

So the main idea for today is that the gospel is number one, political. Number two, the gospel is news. Number three, the gospel is good.

The gospel is political. The gospel is news. And the gospel is good. So let's go through this word by word. Mark one, verse one says, the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God.

Now the word beginning, again, in the Greek, I'm sure you're all excited about Greek lessons today. The Greek word, archa. Let me hear you say archa. Archa. And it can actually have two meanings.

[ 10 : 28 ] It can mean beginning, like in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Or it can also mean reign and ruler. There's an English word. It's kind of the obscure archon, somebody who's in charge of it all.

And so archa can be used either way, the beginning of something or the reign and ruler. And we actually see this throughout the New Testament when Paul writes, our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers and the principalities, the rulers and authorities.

That's archa. Okay? So archa, Mark begins his gospel, the archa of the gospel, the beginning of the good news. Or does he mean beginning?

Does he mean something else? Anybody watch How I Met Your Mother? Yeah. Good show until like the last season, right? I think we're all agreed. And in the last season, Barney Stinson has this recurring joke with Robin where Barney refers to the ring bear.

And Robin, his fiancée, who they're planning their wedding, it's the weekend of the wedding, Robin asks as Barney, are you saying ring bear, like the animal? Or ring bearer, like the person who carries the ring?

[ 11 : 34 ] To which Barney says, yes. Uh-huh. The same thing is happening here with RK. Mark, Mark, Mark, you're saying, are you saying the beginning of the gospel? Or are you saying the reign of the gospel?

To which I think Mark would say, mm-hmm. Yeah, that's right. So we read Mark chapter 1, verse 1, the reign of the good news, the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Again, explosive implications in a highly politically charged environment. No, no, no, no, no. You don't go talking about different rulers and reigners and kings. You don't go talking about a beginning of some other euangelion that's not about Caesar and not about Rome.

That's how you end up on the wrong side of a Roman cross. Now, you may have heard different versions of the gospel. One version of the gospel, I'll put in quotation marks, is that the gospel is not political.

Here's an example from one of a thousand blogs that I looked at. I put it in this font because I don't respect the opinion. It says, Comic Sans, gotta love it.

[ 12 : 39 ] The gospel of Jesus Christ is not political. It is obedience to the gospel that will lead us back to our Father in heaven to receive all of his promises. Now, there's a lot of things going on in this.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not political, meaning, if you were to read through the rest of this blog post, that what the author is arguing for is the gospel is personal. It needs to change your inside, and that's it.

If it changes social policy, well, then that's the social gospel. That's the left. We don't want to get confused with that stuff. So it's about changing your inside. Don't worry about the outside stuff so that we can escape to heaven.

It's not about what's going here on earth. No, no, no. The gospel is about escaping to heaven.

That's what this blog that I put in Comic Sans is talking about. Now, there's a different extreme that says, well, yes, of course the gospel is political.

In fact, the gospel is partisan. It's about one particular party, and if you don't belong to that party, well, you must not really be a Christian. We've probably heard versions of this gospel as well. So there's two ditches that we can fall into.

[ 13 : 41 ] The gospel has no implications for this world and social policy and doing anything about people suffering here today. No, it's about the soul. Let's save souls, not bodies.

Bodies are just going to die and be burned up anyway. Let's save souls, and the gospel will be about evacuation, about being ejected from earth into heaven, and there you will stay forever by and by.

What a glorious day that will be. That's one ditch. And the other ditch is, no, the gospel, yes, it's highly political. It's partisan. It's about one party. It's about aligning yourself with that party and sticking with it. Party above all else, and if you're not part of that, well, do you really believe in Jesus?

And what I want to say is that, no, the gospel is political. It has implications for how we set up our society. It has implications about how we answer questions about how we interact with the poor and why are there poor and how do we interact with people from different nations and why are there borders and all these kinds of questions.

I mean the gospel is political, not partisan. The gospel is about heaven coming down to earth, not escapism. Excuse me, heaven coming down to earth is not merely us waiting around for God to do it by fiat, by just a snap of his fingers.

[ 14 : 58 ] No, in fact, we're going to pray a prayer later tonight that says, Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. How does God's kingdom come? Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Who is there to do God's will? Well, it's people like you and me. So the gospel is political, not partisan. It's about heaven coming to earth, not escapism, not, well, let's be raptured up and then wait for the world to burn.

And it's persuasive and it's cooperative. It's not coercive. We can talk about politics and Romans love to talk about politics and their politics made their point by the end of the sword.

And so Mark and Jesus, more specifically, come along and they say, yeah, let's talk about it, but let's not talk about it in the ways that the powers usually do. And we're going to spend a long time in the gospel of Mark talking about the way Jesus confronts the powers, the archaes, the rulers and authorities, and does it in ways we wouldn't expect.

Ephesians chapter 3, Paul says that through the church, the wisdom of God will now be made known to the archaes, the rulers, and the authorities.

[ 16 : 05 ] Through the church, the church has a purpose. Is the church about inspiration? Sure. Is the church about personal transformation? Of course. Is the church about like-minded people coming together and finding a community that they can belong to and feel supported in?

Absolutely. So that the wisdom of God, God's knowledge, God's wisdom, God's care and concern and love for the world can be made known, some translations say made manifest, put flesh and bone onto it to the rulers and authorities.

And of course, that's going to bring a confrontation. Because when God's people are doing things in God's way and including people who aren't supposed to be included and loving people who aren't supposed to be loved and showing grace and mercy to people who aren't supposed to be graced and mercied and showing anger towards the people who are using their power to hurt, well, there's going to be confrontation about that.

So the gospel is political. Continue on. Mark 1.1 says, the reign or the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. Now the Romans, of course, were not the only one who used the phrase euangelion, good news.

The Jews used it as well. And so if you go to the prophets, the Hebrew prophets, you find this phrase, euangelion, in the Greek translation of their Hebrew scriptures, what we call the Septuagint.

[ 17 : 25 ] And so Isaiah, one of their prophets, would write things like this. Hey, you who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout.

Lift it up and do not be afraid and say to the towns of Judah, here is your God. This was the good news because Israel has this long story of being captured and then exiled and then sent back to their land and then taken over by the Greeks and then the Romans.

And they were waiting expectantly for God to show up and set all things right. That was the good news that Isaiah was prophesying about, that God would come back in person and set things right. This was the good news. Isaiah 52. Isaiah says, how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, your God reigns.

And so whatever the Hebrews, the Jews believed about God showing up, it would be about the rule and the reign of God. When Jesus shows up on the scene and says, behold, the kingdom of God has shown up, this is what he's talking about, this expectation that God would come and reign and set all things right.

[ 18 : 40 ] Isaiah 61. The Lord, God's spirit is upon me because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim release for the captives and liberation for the prisoners.

When God shows up, when God begins to reign, when it becomes on earth as it is in heaven, as if life becomes as if God were king, things happen, things change.

So the second thing I want you to know about the good news of the gospel is that it's not only political, but it's news. When you turn on the news, you aren't looking for advice, usually, unless you're watching like the Today Show or something about how to make a salad dressing.

I have no idea what they talk about in the Today Show, I'm sorry. Usually when you turn on the news or when you're reading the news, you're looking for reports about stuff that happened, stuff that occurred, stuff that actually, you know, was done in the world.

And when we talk about the good news, the gospel, the euangelion, oftentimes in churches by preachers like me, it gets reduced to good advice. Well, here are three easy ways to fix your relationship and seven easy ways to move forward in your career and five maybe not so easy ways to like make up with your parents or whatever.

[ 20 : 01 ] Well, that's advice, which could or could not be good, I suppose, but that's not the gospel. The gospel is a report about something that happened. Go back to those passages in Isaiah.

God, the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to proclaim the good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim release for the captives, liberation for the prisoners. Prisoners and brokenhearted and captives and poor, they're not looking for advice.

They want to hear the news. Has the situation on the ground changed or not? And so, Mark begins his gospel by saying, there is the beginning, the reign of good news.

Something has changed because of Jesus. The world is not the same as it was because of the Son of God showing up on the scene. Let's go back to Isaiah 61.

It says, the Lord's God's spirit is upon me because the Lord has anointed me. Now, key word here, anointed. Hebrew word, Messiah, Mashiach, and the Greek word, Christos.

[ 21 : 07 ] It's a word that simply means to anoint, to pour oil or water on the head of. And this was done for rulers, kings, those put in charge. You would anoint them with oil or with water to say that God's presence is upon them and they are now going to be God's representative on earth as it is in heaven.

And so, King David was known as the Lord's Mashiach, the Lord's anointed, the Lord's Messiah. Now, this word began to take on more and more meaning as the life of Israel became harder and more difficult.

And then prophets like Isaiah and others began to talk about a Messiah to come would be the Messiah to end all Messiahs, the Messiah that would top them all and that would finally put things to write again.

This was the Messiah, the Christos. And so, the Jews were anxiously awaiting this anointed figure. But because the situation was getting more and more desperate on the ground, people became more and more reckless about this expectation.

So, Messiahs would show up quite frequently. They would show up in the cities and in the wilderness around Galilee and Judea and they would say, I'm the Messiah, I'm the one that Isaiah and the prophets were talking about.

[ 22 : 23 ] And they would gather an army of a couple dozen, a couple hundred, a couple thousand and they would say, through me, God is going to deliver Israel from the Romans. So everyone gather up your swords and your spears and your shields and let's go and take on the Roman army and then the Roman army would crucify them.

They would line up crosses along roads and put heads on pikes to remind the people, terrorize them into remembering, let's not forget who's in charge here.

Messiahs happen quite a bit. You can read the history of the Messiahs in the first century all during the life of Jesus who would show up on the scene, say, I'm the Messiah and then die and then their movement would dissipate because who would follow a crucified, dead Messiah?

How foolish. So Mark begins his gospel saying, this is the beginning the good news about the Messiah, the anointed one, the Christos.

Again, you don't go around saying that you're the anointed one, that you're the Messiah because that's a proclaiming political revolution, that you're meant to be king and not Caesar.

[ 23 : 37 ] Mark says, well, let me tell you the story about how the rule of the good news of the Messiah, the Son of God, started. Son of God, of course, as well, highly political term.

You could get coins with Augustus or Caesar's face on it and on the top it would say, Phileas de Venai, the Son of God. The Caesars claim that they were gods themselves sent from Zeus or whoever to come and reign and show the world how it's supposed to be done.

But then the Christians began saying, no, no, no, no, let me tell you about a different kind of Son of God. Let me tell you about a different kind of anointed one. Let me tell you about a different kind of good news, a different kind of ruler.

And this, of course, led to their persecution, led to the Christians being marginalized on all places of society because Rome does not take a liking the people speaking like this.

But I want you to remember that the gospel is meant to be good news. Oftentimes, the gospel can be reduced down to advice that brings shame and condemnation.

[ 24 : 49 ] Oftentimes, the gospel can be reduced to something that makes us feel less than and worse. But for someone who is in a season of political turmoil, someone who is in the wrong place at the wrong time because the Roman army is knocking on your door, someone who is waiting for the Messiah to come to set all things right.

Well, when you hear a euangelion about a Messiah who comes who is God in the flesh and was crucified, died, and buried, and on the third day rose again as the Christians believed, well, then that's good news.

It's something that brings hope and expectation. It's something that brings you joy. It gives something that causes you to no longer fear death because you believe that God has shown up on the scene and now has poured out his spirit on all people.

to live the same kind of life that Jesus lived. So let me give you a challenge and an invitation today. The challenge is to take stock of the places where your understanding of the gospel is no longer political or news or good.

Meaning, oftentimes, the gospel can kind of get sanded down into something that's, you know, cute, and you can put on a Hallmark card and it's cozy and it doesn't really challenge you all that much and it doesn't really challenge the world all that much.

[ 26 : 10 ] There are places where the gospel or understanding of God and Jesus' message can be reduced down to merely feel-goodism about a God somewhere out there who only intervenes when he absolutely has to and me who wants to feel good about myself and that's it.

But isn't the gospel a little bit more explosive than that? Doesn't it have implications about how we set up our society, about a group of people called the church who are meant to be living in the way that Jesus lived meant to be treating each other the way that Jesus treated people so to the point that outside rulers and authorities say, no, you can't live like that.

You can't be that way. That's not how the world is meant to be. And for us to say with confidence, ah, but we've seen God and we know how it is. So what are the places where your understanding of the gospel that's no longer has implications on the ground?

It's no longer news but good advice and it's no longer good. It's more about shame and condemnation. Let me give you an invitation. This is a quote from late 1800s writer George MacDonald.

He says, if you find what I tell you untrue, it will only be that it is not grand and free and bounteous enough. To think anything too good to be true is to deny God.

[ 27 : 25 ] Don't say the untrue may be better than the true. Don't say there might be a greater God than he. And what MacDonald is saying is there are ways that we can talk about the gospel that it's so big and so grand and so beautiful we're actually a little bit embarrassed by it.

Could God be that loving? Could God be that kind? Could God be that forgiving? Could God's vision for the future be that all-encompassing and all-including? Could it be?

And so we reduce God down to a more manageable box. Well, God's on our side but God's not on theirs. Well, God's going to give us eternal rewards but he's going to make sure to punish them for eternity.

Well, God is God is only doing active work in our community but not those communities over there. What if God is bigger and grander and better than that?

So my invitation is to let your imagination run free with the idea of how good God can be how good the gospel can be and if it's that good that means that there are those who will oppose it.

[ 28 : 38 ] Don't get me wrong a good gospel a gospel better than we imagine will be bad news to someone but it should be bad news to someone because it is more all-encompassing and loving and willing to confront the powers that would exclude it should be bad news to those who want to cut out and leave out and it should be good news to those who have been cut out and left out.