

The Heavens Are Opened

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[0 : 00] We are, we're in a series talking about the gospel of Mark. So if you have your Bible, I'm going to encourage you to turn it on, flip it open. We're actually going to start in the very beginning, the book of Genesis chapter 1, verse 1.

It's a story you may have heard before about the creation of the entire universe. And I'm going to give you some background about the passage in Mark, the gospel of Mark, that we're going to talk about today, about Jesus' baptism and everything that's going on there.

But in order to understand what's going on with Jesus, we need to start all the way back at Genesis chapter 1. And it says this. It says, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Now, the writer says, the earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. And the ruach, the spirit, the wind of God was hovering, some translations say, brooding like a bird over its nest, hovering over the waters.

And then from there, the story goes on about what God does with this formless, empty, void world and what God does with the waters. Now, in the Jewish imagination, the waters were the source of evil and chaos.

[1 : 21] And so there is this kind of superstitious belief that the ocean, the sea, large bodies of water, that is where evil and chaos came from. There's this scene in the other end of scripture, the book of Revelation, where John, the author, the revelator, says that he sees a new heaven and a new earth coming down and a new Jerusalem.

And then to the great disappointment of beach lovers everywhere, John writes, and there was no sea. And the fishermen are like, well, that sucks for me. Anybody who likes the ocean is like, what's going on, John?

Why is there no sea? Now, this is not an actual description of the geography of the new heavens and the new earth. What John is saying is that place where chaos is born, where God pushed it back into the waters, it doesn't even exist anymore.

The sea is gone. Chaos, evil is gone. So in Genesis chapter 1, you see that verse 6, let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.

So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And God called the vault sky. And then God said, verse 9, let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear.

[2 : 29] And it was so. So God called the dry ground land and gathered the waters and called that the seas. And so there's the separation of land from water and from the sky, the water above in the Hebrew imagination and the land, the world below.

Then Genesis chapter 2, the story continues about God gathering the ground, the Adama in the Hebrew. The Adama, the dust, the dirt of the ground and forming it together and bending down and breathing in his ruach, his spirit, his wind into that pile of dust.

And then it becomes a living soul. And so the Adama, the ground, becomes Adam, the first human being. In verse 8, now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east.

And there he put the Adam, the first human that God had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow. And then God realizes that it's not good for this person to be alone. And so God forms out of the ground all of the wild animals.

Key word, wild animals. Keep that word in mind. For us to see if this is going to be a suitable partner for the Adam. It's not. And so the first woman is created.

[3 : 39] That's Genesis chapter 2. Genesis chapter 3, the humans let the chaos back in. Because the serpent was more crafty than any other animal and deceives the woman and the man to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

So then they give birth to children. And Cain kills Abel. And that murderous cycle continues until we get to Genesis chapter 6. Verse 5, the Lord saw how great the weakness of the human race had become on the earth.

That every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted, was sorry that he had made human beings on the earth. And so the Lord said, I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created.

And with them the animals and the birds and the creatures. For I regret that I have made them. And so we get introduced to Noah and the ark. And the story of Noah and his family building this ark.

And then gathering the animals together. Then verse 7. In the 600th year of Noah's life. The 17th day of the second month. On that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth.

[4 : 46] And listen. The floodgates of the heavens were opened. The skies, the heavens were opened. And so Genesis 1 is undone.

The chaos that God had put in its place far above the ground. Well now the heavens are opened and allowed to pour their chaos back onto creation. And so creation is uncreated.

Made into the land of chaos once again. Except for Noah and the animals and the ark. And it says that verse 13. On that day Noah his sons and his wives of his three sons.

They entered the ark. And they had with them. Listen to this word again. And every wild animal according to its kind. And then Noah is looking for signs of new creation.

Because God had promised that the human race would continue through him. And so what does Noah do? He sends out a dove to go looking for signs of vegetation.

[5 : 43] That the floodwaters had receded. Noah had been waiting on the ark for 40 days and 40 nights as it rained. And then it stopped raining. And there was still water covering the ground. And so Noah sends out a dove to go search for new signs of life.

Eventually the dove comes back holding a little bit of an olive branch. And so the dove is bringing signs of new creation. And Noah sends it out again. And then the dove doesn't come back. Presumably because it found somewhere to live.

So this is all prelude to our passage for today. So if you would go to Mark chapter 1. Now this is where we've been so far.

Verse 1. In the beginning. You see the overtones from Genesis already. In the beginning. Of the good news. The euangelion. This proclamation about what the king was going to do.

About Jesus. The Messiah. The son of God. As it is written in Isaiah. The prophets. I'm going to send my messenger ahead of you. Who will prepare your way. A voice of one calling in the wilderness.

[6 : 45] Prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for him. And so Mark is saying. I have a new euangelion. I'm taking this empire word. About supposedly good news. About the emperor coming to take over your land.

And I'm going to use it about a different kind of king called Jesus. And the beginning of the good news. Is that a messenger is going to come. What Malachi thought was going to be Elijah. Reincarnated. Brought back from the dead.

Brought back to proclaim that God. God's self. Was going to show up on the scene. And set all things right. The great hope and expectation of Israel. Is that they would experience a new exodus.

Because if we had turned to the book of Exodus. We could also look about stories about a people. Who had been in slavery. And then they are brought to the chaos waters. The Red Sea. And God parts it. And allows them to walk through those chaos waters.

And then they wander around the wilderness for 40 years. And then they get to the Jordan River. And God parts it again. And they are allowed to enter into that promised land. And then they are exiled.

[7 : 44] And they are brought back. And they rebuild a temple. But the glory of the Lord does not fill the temple. They are waiting for the exodus to happen again. They are waiting for a new exodus. And new creation.

So then John the Baptist shows up on the scene. And says repent. Change direction. Because God is about to arrive. And this is the story that Mark is telling. Verse 9.

At that time. This is our passage for the day. Jesus came from Nazareth. In Galilee. And was baptized. By John in the Jordan. And 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 saying. You are my son. Whom I love. With you I am well pleased.

And at once the spirit sent him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness for 40 days. Being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals. And the angels attended him.

[8 : 45] Now we got three things we're going to need to talk about today. Number one. In Jesus. God is relaunching creation. Starting the new creation.

And the new exodus. So Jesus goes. And he goes to be baptized. By John in the Jordan. And so Jesus is entering into the waters.

Now some of the other gospel writers. Matthew and Luke and John. They actually tell the story about John the Baptist. Stopping Jesus from entering the water. Saying I'm not even worthy to untie your sandals.

You don't need to be baptized by me. You need to baptize me. John says to Jesus. And the ancient church fathers and mothers. They pondered this. Why would Jesus need to be baptized?

Jesus is God in the flesh. The first Christians believed. God incarnate. Why would Jesus need to be baptized by John? And what they surmised was. It wasn't that.

[9 : 40] Jesus needed to be washed in the waters. But rather. That Jesus by stepping foot into the waters. Makes all water clean. And so.

When we are baptized. We are being baptized into that same. Fresh. New. Clean water. That Jesus's own baptism. Had made it clean.

In his day. And we see. This launch. Of new creation. And new exodus. In the story of Jesus. Because just as Jesus was coming up.

Out of the water. He saw heaven. Being torn open. And this is the same language used. In Genesis chapter 7. When God was rendering his judgment. On the earth.

The heavens were torn open. And the chaos came down. Isaiah chapter 42. Talks about this prayer of Isaiah. Where Isaiah is beating his chest. And asking God. God do you not see the chaos.

[10 : 32] Happening on planet earth right now. Do you not see the horrible things. That the leaders. And the politicians. And all the people who practice evil. Against me. And against my friends. And my family are doing. Oh.

Isaiah writes. Oh. That you would rend the heavens. And come down. And then render your judgment on earth. And so Mark is telling a different kind of story.

Jesus steps into the waters. And the heavens are rent open. Torn asunder. But it's a different kind of judgment that happens.

Rather we see the spirit. That ruach. That ruach of God. That in Genesis 1. Hovers. Broods over the surface of the waters. And here it descends.

On Jesus like a dove. That sign of new creation. That Noah had seen. Now fun fact. Fun fact. In both.

[11 : 28] All three. Hebrew. And Greek. And in English. The word for dove. Can also be translated. Pigeon. So in English.

Like. The pigeons and doves. Are actually the same species of birds. They just have different coloration. In Hebrew and Greek. You can use the same word. You can go to the temple. And you can sacrifice. Two turtle doves.

Or two pigeons. And translators just have to make a choice. Do we think we're talking about like a. Like a motley city. Ugly bird. Or do we think about. We're talking about like a dove. And so we tell this story. About Jesus being baptized.

And down comes this beautiful. Pure white dove. That's what all the paintings. And pictures show. But like guys. It could have just been like a normal. Ass pigeon. Because why wouldn't it?

Like. We make God. Jesus. Holy Spirit. Out to be like this. Super holy. Sanctified. Like better than now. Kind of God. But I told some of the people. After the service.

[12 : 22] Earlier this morning. Like. One of the most theologically. Accurate statements. That you can make. Is Jesus pooped. Okay. That's a theologically. Accurate statement. Because Jesus is. Divine.

But fully human. And so if Jesus can. Poop. Then why can't the Holy Spirit. Show up as a pigeon. That's all I'm asking. All right. So. Jesus steps into the waters.

By his presence. Makes all waters clean. Doesn't just. Put the water. Somewhere else. But actually. Purifies them. By his very presence. In the waters. And then the heavens. Are rent open.

Isaiah's prayer. Is coming true. Genesis 7. Is happening all over again. And then the dove. The pigeon. The spirit. Comes down. And descends on Jesus. The sign of new creation.

And so. The story that Mark is telling. The story that we're going to be talking about. For a long time now. Is that Jesus. Is launching the new creation. That Jesus is launching the new exodus.

[13 : 19] That Jesus is. Taking all of the hopes and expectations. Of Israel. And the world. And making them come true. In how he lives his life. Dies his death.

And comes back. That's thing number one. Thing number two. Is that God in Jesus. Is revealing. The divine character. There is some repetition up there for me. Getting too excited while typing.

In Jesus. God. Is revealing. The divine character. There is this truth. That Christians for generations. And centuries have proclaimed.

That when we look at Jesus. We are beholding. God. This is what Jesus says. Over and over again. In the book of John. Says whatever you see me doing. I only do.

What I see the father doing. Jesus says that. Whatever you hear me say. I only say what I hear the father. Saying. And we're going to see these themes. Show up in the gospel of Mark as well.

[14 : 14] That Jesus is simply. Showing us what God. Has always been like. And the kind of controversial part of this. Is that the Hebrew writers. The Hebrew prophets. Hebrew scriptures.

They got glimpses. They got looks. They got little. Little pieces of what God's character is like. And they write this down. In these beautiful scriptures. About a God who is faithful. And kind. And forgives for a thousand generations.

Whose very name and essence. Is love. And loving kindness. And mercy. And compassion. But. They didn't have the full picture in Jesus. Jesus is the revelation of who God is.

And so when we look at Jesus. We're not looking. Have to look behind Jesus to get to God. When we look at Jesus. We are looking at God. God's self. And so everything that we're going to see. Jesus do in this gospel.

We're seeing God do. And so. The expectation Isaiah had. The expectation of Genesis 7. That God would rend the heavens. Come down. And render judgment. What John says.

[15 : 14] Just a couple verses before. In Mark chapter 1. Verse 7. He says. I will baptize you with water. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. After one comes more powerful than I. All the quotes.

So that we've talked about so far. From the prophets of Isaiah. And Malachi. About God bringing his wrath. Down on earth. Yes. It's coming true. It's being fulfilled. But in ways that nobody expected.

That Jesus is about to show us. God in Jesus is revealing. The divine character. Notice how you see. The Trinity. In this very first chapter. Of the very first gospel ever written.

Jesus. Is coming up out of the water. The son of God. He sees heaven being torn open. And the spirit. The spirit of God. Descending on Jesus like a dove. And then a voice.

God the father says. You are my son. Whom I love. With you. I am well pleased. We see that Jesus. Is retelling. The whole story of Israel.

[16 : 12] Is retelling. The entire story. Of humanity. In theological terms. This is the idea of. Recapitulation. Let me hear you say. Recapitulation. Recapitulation.

Now it's this. You know. Fancy. Two dollar term. It's not that fancy. Tell me what the word. Decapitate means. To cut off. Someone said.

To decapitate them. To take the capital. The head. Of them off. Okay. To. So for someone. To recapitulate. Is to. Take.

All up. Within them. Become the head. Of. Humanity. Or a nation. Or a people group. And to do it over again. To recapitulate. And so what Jesus is doing. Is that he is taking up.

The whole of Israel story. And the whole of humanity story. And living it out again. In the way that only God can. And so. Jesus.

[17 : 08] He steps into the water. He purifies it. As the heavens torn open. Like Genesis 7. Like the prayer of Isaiah. He has God say. You are my son. The father say.

You are my son. Whom I love. And the spirit. And the spirit. Sends him out into the wilderness. For 40 days. Just like Noah. Was on an ark. For 40 days. Just like Israel. Wandered around the desert. For 40 years.

Jesus is out there. Doing the same thing. Recapitulating. Retelling. Reliving. The entire story. Of humanity. And of Israel. All over again. God is showing us.

What God is like. By doing this in Jesus. And showing us. What humanity. Can do. Can be up to. When we rely on the power.

Of our creator. So. We see Jesus. Retelling the story of Israel. Relaunching. Creation. Starting a new. Exodus story.

[18 : 03] We see Jesus. Revealing what God's character. Is like. And then. Our third point. For tonight. Is that. God. Is revealing. How they feel. About us.

Now. Whenever you use pronouns. To talk about God. It gets messy. Really fast. Right. So you can use. He pronouns. But that. Overemphasizes. The single. That God is a single person.

Also. Overemphasizes. The patriarchal. Fatherhood. Views of God. That we all. Grew up with. And are used to. And that our Bibles use. And that some of us. Are triggered by. Because we had bad.

Male characters. In our life. Or bad father figures. Or father figures. Who weren't there at all. So then you can go to the other side. And you can use she language. And she language. Is the kind of thing. That as a preacher.

I know that as soon as I say. God is she. You all stop listening to me. And wonder. Wonder what he's talking about. And like. Is it part of some radical. Feminist agenda. As if that were such a bad thing.

[18 : 57] To be like. May God. Into a she. I think. But also. Again. Over emphasizes. That God is a single person. Christians. Throughout the centuries. Have believed that God is a.

Trinity. I know you all came. At five o'clock. On a Sunday evening. To launch your week. To talk about Trinitarian theology. But. God is a Trinity. Which means that God is one. God.

A single essence. In three persons. They are united. In will. And purpose. And yet God reveals. God's self. In three persons. Father. Son.

And Holy Spirit. Sometimes I pray. Creator. Redeemer. And sustainer. So. God is revealing. How they. Feel about us. Now there's another problem. With they.

Because it over emphasizes. The threeness of God. And maybe we lose out. On the oneness of God. But. I think we've had. You know. 20 centuries. Of God is he. We can deal with. The day of God is they. Amen.

[19 : 50] Amen. Okay. So. In this passage. We see God. Is launching new creation. Launching new exodus. Is revealing God's character. In the person of Jesus. And.

God is revealing. How they feel. About us. We read. A voice comes from the heavens. Those broken. Open heavens. And it's not. Chaos waters. That come pouring out.

It's not. Judgment and wrath. That comes. Pouring out. But rather. A voice that says. You. Are my son. Whom I love. With you. I am well pleased.

And after the story of Jesus. Is told in the New Testament. There's this theme. That comes up again. And again. And again. In the letters of Paul. And Peter. And Revelation. About how. What is true of Jesus.

Is true. And is becoming true of us. Ephesians chapter 1. Talks about how. Before the world was created. God. Predestined us to be adopted. As God's children. To be seated.

[20 : 47] In heavenly places. With the son. Ephesians chapter 2. Talks about how. We are all adopted. And given the same. Divine name. Colossians chapter 3. Talks about how. Our lives.

Are hidden. In Christ. With God. The book of Revelation. Says that. We are actually. Enthroned. On the same throne. That Jesus is. Which sounds like. Heresy.

Or some sort of. Like happy. Clappy crap. But it's in the Bible. I promise you. The story of Jesus. Tells us. Again and again. That what is true of Jesus. Is true of us.

That whatever is true of. Jesus. God in the flesh. Can be said of the people of God. You and me. And so when we read. In the story. About the heavens being opened.

And a voice coming down. Saying you are my child. Whom I love. With you. I am well pleased. How many of us. Need a voice. To tell us that. Tonight.

[21 : 42] Some of us. We wish it were our fathers. Who are the ones. Telling us that. Maybe they. Grew up in a generation. Where they don't say mushy gushy. Things like that. Maybe. They just said.

Harmful and abusive things. And said. Or maybe. Those fathers weren't around at all. Maybe it's somebody in our life. That we admire. And that we love. And that we would just melt. If they said.

I'm pleased with you. You make me happy. And here. We see that God. Says this to Jesus. And Jesus. Who is recapitulating.

All of humanity. We can trust and believe. That. That same voice from heaven. Is speaking. To you. And to me. You are my child.

Whom I love. With you. I am well. Pleased. And it's that voice. That we need. To tune. Our attention to.

[22 : 39] To hone the antennas. Of our soul. Towards. Because there are a thousand. Million. Other voices. Who will tell us. Something very different. You are not my child.

You are not loved. You make me sick. Hardly pleased. And our. Attention spans. Gravitate. Towards those other voices. So.

What do I. What do I. What I want. To invite you to. Is to tune your attention. To this divine voice. A voice that says. I love you. You are my child.

And with you. I am well. Pleased. This is all. A bunch of. Throat clearing. These past three weeks. A bunch of. Laying the groundwork.

For the gospel. Of Mark. And if we get this right. That. In. Jesus. There. God is. Mashing together. Old and new. Things.

[23 : 36] That the story of Israel. Is coming. To its. Climax. It's conclusion. In the person of Jesus. Who's going to live out. Israel's story. In the flesh. That if we get it right.

That we understand. That when we look at Jesus. We are beholding. The very image. Of God. If we get it right. That the message. That Jesus. Has come to proclaim. Is that you are loved.

That you are my child. With you. I am well pleased. Then that gospel. That euangelion. That good news. Can actually be good news.

And it can actually bring healing. To a world. That's broken. And needs a little bit of healing. And that affects our mission.

And our purpose. As Christians. As human beings. Become bearers. Of that kind of love. Bearers. Of that kind of news. To become. With Christ.

[24 : 34] Seated in heavenly places. Ones. Who can make this proclamation. To the world. You are loved. With you. I am well pleased. To become.

Thank you. I am glad of being. I am so glad. I am. At the family. I am so glad. I am so glad. I am so glad. So glad. I am so glad.