

Where are we in Mark?

We have been looking through the Gospel of Mark as a Church these last several weeks, and in order to help us stay focused on what the author, Mark, is communicating, we have placed the text in the context of an essential question: Who is Jesus? Who is this fellow that has come on to the scene saying that God's space, God's Kingdom, has come to this Earth?

McKenna exhorted us a few weeks ago on where the ministry of Jesus began or, as she called it, our first impression, Jesus' baptism immediately followed by him being driven out to the wilderness. I would encourage you to spend some time thinking about that reality. Where else in the Bible have we seen someone delivered through water and then sent into the wilderness to test their trust in God?

And last week, Kevin unpacked for us what Jesus was communicating to us when Christ told the people that the Kingdom of God is here. And that Christ commanded us to turn away from our agenda toward the agenda Christ has for this world and that his will be done on Earth as it is in heaven. Church, what a place it would be if we would be the people who did the will of God—the generous, loving, forgiving, long-suffering people of God! What a difference that would make in our community. A people who would not seek first our own gain and our own comfort but would seek the Kingdom of God first and his righteousness.

Kevin concluded by sharing the calling of the first disciples and how we should respond as they did by dropping all that we have and prioritizing what Christ is calling us to do. What a beautiful thought that the first thing Christ thinks to do when he begins to declare that the Kingdom of God is near is to draw people to himself. He begins to reach out to the hard-working regular people out there and says, "I want you to be a part of this."

This brings us to our passage this week, Mark 1:21-34. This is a longer passage, and it seems to usually be broken up into a couple of different stories, but as you'll see, the stories really belong together. I want to read through this again and point some things out as we go, and we'll see who is this, Jesus?

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was." Mark 1:21-34

Some interesting stories here. He clearly is an Important guy who seems to have the abilities to heal illness and cast out demons. Cool. My concern is that some of us may stop here and not really consider the story further. I mean, what I just described is a picture of a really cool guy, good at teaching some cool things. There are a lot of really cool guys in history, but notice a few things about the story.

First, Let's notice that clearly, everyone thought Jesus was a big deal. People are coming from all over to see Jesus. But people came from all over to see John; what makes Jesus different?

Second, Mark just tells us a story. He doesn't even share with us what Jesus said. This is a common theme throughout Mark. Mark isn't primarily concerned with what Jesus said. He only tells us that Jesus did teach, the people were amazed, and it was authoritative. The point is about the response of the crowd.

So why did they respond that way?

The text seems to be a bit disjointed. The people have a strong positive reaction toward Jesus, and it seems we are supposed to notice it, but we are not told why explicitly. This is setting up a design pattern.

This brings us to something that I'm super passionate about. This concept has gripped my imagination since I first learned about it, and I've been working with the people I teach and preach to on developing. It's this thing called design patterns in the text or biblical motifs.

The way I try to define it is that throughout the Bible, whenever you read, watch for key repeated words or phrases that pop up throughout

the biblical text. Think about words like blessing. How many times throughout the Bible do we hear about blessings? Well over 600, so whatever a blessing is, clearly, it is important throughout the Bible. So if we wanted to know what Jesus means if he uses the word blessing, well, you would just go back to the rest of the Bible and see how it's used there. And that will inform you as to what Jesus means by blessing. And if you go back, you see that it's first used on page one of the Bible, talking about how God blesses the people he creates.

These texts and biblical motifs are all over the place. Things like mountains, trees, water, fire, generosity, justice, and the Kingdom of God. These permeate the biblical narrative, and once you start tracking how these show up throughout, you'll start to notice things you've never seen before. It will fundamentally shape how you read what Jesus is saying and what the Bible authors are communicating.

Now I know some of you may not really be catching what I'm saying right now, so I want to try to show you that this isn't just something that biblical authors do; this is a very common storytelling method used constantly, even today.

Have you ever seen the Star Wars movies? (You can tell I started writing this around May the Fourth.) If you have, you'll know that there are several repeated images and sounds that happen throughout the movies. What does every Star Wars movie start with? A crawl screen intro, then a cut to a spaceship flying in space. At some point in every movie, one of the characters is going to say, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

And every time Vader shows up, you hear the same music. When you see a door opening and smoke everywhere, you know that a bad guy is coming in the door, which is used to help us see clearly that Anakin has gone to the dark side in the prequel trilogy. These patterns and motifs help you know what the author is trying to say without the author having to come out and explicitly say to you, "This is the bad guy!" or "Major fight scene coming."

These patterns set the scene for you, and it is part of creating images in your mind for how to see the world the author is drawing you into. The biblical authors do this in the same way, and they are masters at this. So much so that any time words are used in the Bible, you should probably assume that they were put there intentionally. There aren't very many throwaway words and sentences. And there definitely aren't throwaway details either.

Mark just called us back to several biblical design patterns with the hope that you would know them and understand who Jesus is based on that. So let's go back and look at how the Hebrew Scriptures have set this up prior, so we can see how we should understand Mark's point.

Mark is a part of the Bigger Story.

Where the story begins is in Genesis. God created humans in a high mountain top Garden where they could be in perfect communion with him. When they sinned, they were then exiled out of God's presence. The world devolves and is cast into chaos by the actions of people. The people of God end up enslaved in Egypt, and God delivers them. Up on a high mountain top, God invites the people of God back into a

relationship with him and tells them to build a tabernacle or dwelling place where God will come and meet with his people. All throughout, It is designed with images that are calling us back to that Garden of Eden. But when Moses tries to enter, he can't, and that's the end of the story of Exodus. The story ends with Moses unable to enter the tabernacle.

Leviticus and atonement

Which drops us right into Leviticus (everyone's favorite book). This turns out to be very important because Leviticus shares with us how humans can get back into the presence of God. It talks about how we can be cleansed of our unrighteousness and enter the presence of God. What's interesting is the book's literary structure culminates with the day of atonement. The point is that we cannot be in the presence of God unless atonement is made for our uncleanness and sinfulness. And there are all these rules about what we can and cannot do that are ultimately explained by saying that if the Israelites touched and did things that were unclean, uncleanness that was outside of them would come into them. They wouldn't be able to enter the presence of God until they were made clean again.

So the Israelites developed and expanded on God's instructions to them and formed a system and rituals that would keep them clean so that they could regularly be in the presence of God. They were very diligent about keeping away from that which was unclean. This is why in the parable of the good Samaritan, you see everybody passing on the other side of the road from the victim in that story. They did not want to touch a dead body and make themselves unclean. They were so concerned with appearing externally holy that they would go so far as not to do justice. They would allow people to die so that they would not be unclean.

In Isaiah, the Lord is the Holy One

Several hundred years later, after Israel had once again strayed from God, God sent the prophet Isaiah to prophesy judgment on the people. And in chapter 6, Isaiah has a vision that begins to show us how God plans to ultimately solve the problem of our wickedness. Let's pick up in chapter 6, verse 1.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. Isaiah 6:1-4

A few key things to point out here. First, note who Isaiah sees. He sees the Lord. This is the God of the universe sitting on his throne. Emphasized by the fact he is high. Remember that Eden was a high mountain top garden. Remember that the Covenant with Israel was made at the top of the mountain. There's this idea in the ancient Jewish culture that Yahweh existed up high. This is why David, the psalmist, would say that his help comes from the mountains. His idea is that up there at the tops

of mountains is where God is. This is why it was such a big deal that the Israelite people would constantly put false idols on the high places.

Also, note that he is called Holy. Not just Holy but thrice Holy, which I would love to spend more time unpacking but suffice it to say this means he is the most holy. The Lord on his throne is the Holy One. So when Jesus goes into the synagogue in Mark, he is called the Holy One. This is the imagery that Mark is calling back to. In your mind, when all the demons are identifying him as the Holy One, your thoughts should go here. Jesus is God.

See, this proclamation is a much bigger one than merely just talking about how good of a communicator Jesus is or how good he is at teaching. Instead, he was being identified to you as the Lord on High.

And I want to push on this here for a minute. I think it is important that we think about what our response should be to the fact that Jesus is Lord. This is the fundamental question that we as believers need to constantly grapple with. Do you really believe that Jesus is Lord, and more directly, is he Lord over your life?

It is easy for us to acknowledge that truth as a factual statement. Even the people there thought he was “amazing.” But I sometimes wonder if I, and the Christians I interact with, if we actually believe it.

I mean, we call Spiderman the Amazing Spiderman; what makes Jesus different? And I find that many times it’s easier to engage in the conversation about the MCU than it is to get people, even Christians, to talk about Christ. People seem far more interested in sports, movies, tv, hobbies, social media, and what the news media has to say than in the risen Jesus. What are you passionate about? Is it God and what he is concerned with? Or is what you are really passionate about, what really stirs up your emotions, about what your political party says or your news network? What bothers you? Is it when people offend you or what you like?

Who do we really think is Lord?

When you’re posed with a decision in your life, do you go with what you think is best or what God has said is best? Who do you really trust? I think when faced again with the reality that Jesus is Lord, it’s important that we as individuals take a step back and look at our lives and ask, “Is Jesus Lord of my life?” When I get to the point in my life where I’m uncomfortable with the situation I’m in, how do I respond?

Kevin often talks about the relationship of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in our lives. How what we believe and what we do are inextricably woven into one another. And I want to add a sort of diagnostic tool for that reality here. We’ll call it orthopathy, or right feelings or emotions.

You see, I take a step back and realize that I get really upset that my soccer team loses but sometimes, when I read God’s Word, I feel nothing, and it’s more of a chore than a delight. I really get mad when things don’t go my way at work, but when another shooting happens, or a war starts, or a woman dies in childbirth in an underdeveloped country...the list goes on and on. I’ve grown numb to that reality. But what does God care more about, me getting my way, or that justice is being done in

the world? And when I am unconcerned about the things that I know bother God, it’s easy for me to realize that I need to reevaluate.

I am not thinking rightly about God if I don’t care about the hurt in the people around me. I can’t believe that I truly care when I spend all my time doing what I want to do, watching TV, on social media, and playing games rather than helping other people. When I fail and choose myself over others in my life, am I more concerned about how it affects my life or how it profanes the name of God? Because if I remember correctly, only one of those things is a part of the Ten Commandments.

And quite easily, our emotions betray us and reveal what’s really important to us. For me, it’s often getting what I want. Or the other people get paid back the way I did and feel how I felt. It shows me that I think I’m the lord of my life.

If you have 30 minutes this week, I encourage you to take a walk in the park and look back at what really bothered you this week. Pray that God begins to shape not just your actions and you’re thinking but also your emotions. And pray that Jesus would be the Lord of your life. Jesus came to make atonement for our sin and wipe away our guilt.

Back in Isaiah 6, the story continues:

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for. Isaiah 6:5-7

Isaiah identifies himself and the Jewish people as the unclean ones. As soon as he enters into the throne room of God, he realizes how unclean how unworthy he is to be in the presence of God.

What’s interesting is what happens next. A spiritual being goes from the presence of God to Isaiah with a coal and touches him on the lips, and says, “your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for.” Remember, this is not how it works. The Jewish people had to do everything they could to avoid uncleanness because the uncleanness traveled from the things outside of them into them. Animals had to be slaughtered to atone for the sins of the people so that they could go to God. But this time, something from the presence of God came to Isaiah and took away his guilt and atoned for his sin.

The author of Mark is making an intentional narrative parallel to say that Jesus is the fulfillment of the vision in Isaiah 6. He is the one who will make atonement and take away our guilt. He is communicating to you who this man is. Jesus is Lord, and he is the one who will cleanse us of our guilt and atone for our sins. So then, how do we respond in understanding this bigger view of who Christ is? Or why does this matter to me?

These two stories in Mark, being a unified part of Mark, points us to a third truth that we need to respond to. After the driving out of the demon, it is specifically mentioned that Christ has demonstrated his

authority. He has authority over the spiritual, but the story continues to tell us that he went and healed a sick woman and not just one. He healed various diseases and cast out many demons. His authority and power extend beyond just the spiritual and just the physical. He is God over both the material and the spiritual, and I want to establish in our minds that God is concerned with what plagues us physically and spiritually.

I think this is significant because it's easy for us to fall in an either-or camp in a lot of places in our lives. When we perhaps think about our financial problems, we might think this is primarily a physical thing and forget that there is a spiritual reality to how we interact with money and whether or not we trust God to direct where the money goes.

Sometimes if there is a physical illness, we may think we have to choose to either pray or choose to speak to the doctor, but I don't think that would be God's approach here. I would argue he is concerned with all of us, so yes, pray and depend on God for your healing but also remember that it is the grace of God that we have modern medicine and that we live in a country where this is a gift that is available to us. So pray for those who are ill, but also get them medical attention.

This also is an important aspect of how we approach mental health. Yes, we need to pray and seek after God and develop spiritual disciplines, and cast all your cares on God. But we also know that there is an actual physical reality to psychology. When I was getting my degree in psychology, one of the professors would constantly say that "everything psychological is biological." While I think he overstates his case, the point is ultimately made that there is a psychological and spiritual reality to a human being that must be addressed. And there is also a biological reality where our bodies don't function the way they should because of the fall, and that is just as likely to affect your mind as it is to affect your heart, as it is to cause cancer, as it is to do a whole host of things.

So if you are struggling with depression, if you're struggling with anxiety, if you are hurting, seek help. Don't try to do this on your own. God has given us the grace of therapists and medication to help us deal with our bodies that aren't functioning the way they are supposed to. Christ cares for all of you, not just the spiritual side of you and not just the physical side of you. He wants all of you.

There's an interesting bit of Hebrew I learned recently. I don't speak Hebrew or know Hebrew, but in my studies of the Bible, a teacher of the Bible was going over that old passage in the Bible that many of us know by heart. "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*" (Deut. 6:4-5). Jesus quotes this as well as a summary of the first portion of the Ten Commandments.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

The Bible teacher pointed out that the word translated as strength doesn't actually mean strength. There's a perfectly good Jewish word for strength, and it is not used in this phrase. The word there is *Me'od*, which would be most equivalent to our word "very." If you were to translate that sentence literally, it would say something like, "Love the Lord your God with all your very." Which doesn't make sense, so the translators have to make a decision here about how to translate it. They rely on how it is translated into Greek, which is why when Jesus quotes this, he says heart, soul, mind, and strength instead of heart, soul, and very. Because what the phrase is getting at and what Jesus is getting at is when you love God, you're supposed to love him with your very, or with all of you, with your strength, with all your ability to exert yourself, your every action, your every effort is geared toward demonstrating your trust in God.

I also think I would be remiss to pass on this opportunity to clearly say to those who are not in Christ, "Do you feel guilty?" Do you feel that you have done wrong to people and that wrong cannot just be made up? Do you feel that you are not good enough because of what you've done or what you said or where you've been, or what you do?

Have you convinced yourself that "Oh, because I smoke this or I watch this, or I did this thing," that somehow Christ cannot save you? I cheat on my taxes! God can't love me! I am in the midst of a homosexual relationship! God can't love me! I haven't been to church in years! God can't love me!

Please, please notice. That everyone came to see Jesus. Jesus didn't have harsh words for the people who came to him. He had harsh words for the demon, for that evil that plagues us. His arms are open. Turn to him. He is meek and low of heart. "*A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out*" (Isaiah 42:3a).

And if those metaphors aren't for you, what he's saying is that even if you are at the end of your rope. If your fire is burning out, God's not there to put out your fire. If you feel broken and down, he's not there to break what is already bruised. He's there to bring healing and life. He came down from heaven, and he doesn't come to break down those in need; he comes to make whole what has been broken by sin and our evil.

So if you feel like you are in that place of where you are down and out, this Jesus, this Lord on his throne, is calling to you to come rest in him. Stop trying to do it on your own. Trust that he knows what is best.

Love God with all of you—spirit and body. Because Jesus is the Lord on High, who atoned for our sins and took away our guilt.

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