

Jesus' Identity 2

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[0 : 00] Well, let's push into Mark 1 now. So it's been 400 years of silence we learnt last year. Before John the Baptist came, it had been 400 years since God had spoken by a prophet to Israel.

There had been no new word from God for 400 years. They still had his word, the written word, but no prophetic word for 400 years. I don't know about you, but have you ever received a silent treatment from someone?

You know, from your spouse, from your sister, from your brother. Four hours seems like eternity. But 400 years, that's a long time.

But the silence is broken. Last week we saw that John the Baptist turns up and he's preparing the way for the Lord. Verses 1 to 8, John the Baptist is the expected Elijah figure we saw last week. And he comes before the great and terrible day of the Lord in Malachi chapter 4, when the kingdom of God comes.

So here's a bit of a slide. The action is happening up in the north of Israel by the Sea of Galilee. See, God the Father speaks, authenticates Jesus in verses 9 to 13, saying, this is my son.

[1 : 06] And God declares him to be his son. And so God's king. And God's anointed him with the Holy Spirit. And now Jesus speaks in verses 14 and 15.

We read that after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel.

Why was John arrested? Do you remember why John was arrested? Well, in Matthew chapter 14 and Mark chapter 6, we can find out that John had told Herod, right, that it was not lawful of him to have his brother's wife, Herodias.

Herod, right, was Antipas the Tetrarch Herod. He was a half Jew. His father was Herod the Great, the great builder, who was a Jew. And because John had upset Herodias, his now wife, by telling Herod he shouldn't have married her because he's Philip's wife.

Herodias has a grudge against him. And John the Baptist preached without fear, without favour, and ended up being killed because of Herodias and the grudge that she had against John the Baptist.

[2 : 29] But he'd been put in prison by Herod for that very reason. So Jesus then begins his public ministry. John's been imprisoned, silenced, killed. But God hasn't been silenced.

Jesus now announces the gospel that the kingdom of God is near. Imagine the feelings that would bring about. The one baptised and authenticated the king is proclaiming that the kingdom of God is near.

And how will that come about? Military conquest, raising an army, forging swords, shields, weapons, build chariots, acquire horses. Will that how he do it?

Not for Jesus. His kingdom is going to come by his word and by his very presence, growing steadily as his authority is displayed everywhere he goes.

And the question is, what do we mean by kingdom of God? Because a sentence to explain what the gospel is would be to say that the kingdom of God is near.

[3 : 29] Repent and believe. That is the good news. That is the gospel. So we need to get some idea of kingdom of God. I've prepared a little sheet for you.

It's in your bulletins. You've got that there. But I'm just going to explain the first little bit of it to start with. It gets pretty complicated as we go on. To show, so the Old Testament has a shadow of the kingdom of God being revealed over time.

And here's a few key points. God rules his people. God rules the world, right? But in the beginning, the kingdom was the entire idyllic Garden of Eden.

That's where the kingdom was. And God ruled that by his word as he spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden. However, as you know, they rebelled. And the rest of the Old Testament is about the rescue of mankind.

And after the fall, God rules his word through his word, the law, in the Old Testament. And we get the promise of the kingdom given to Abraham. And then under Joshua, the people of God enter the land.

[4 : 40] After Moses had brought them out of Egypt. And the kingdom then, if you like, is the land. And the kingdom of God is under God's king.

And it reaches its high point, right? Under King David and under King Solomon. And that's when the kingdom of Israel is at its highest point in the Old Testament. And the Queen of Sheba comes and says, wow, this is absolutely fantastic, this kingdom.

However, that kingdom was short-lived and crumbled under Israel's kings. And you can keep reading those in one and two kings as you go on. And as the kings of Israel, some good, mostly bad, led Israel into sin.

And then God's people are kicked out of the land. And at one level, out of the kingdom. And then the prophets prophesy about the kingdom coming. And the ways which will transcend people's understanding and ideas of how that could, what would it look like and how could it possibly be?

But then God goes quiet until John speaks. And then Jesus turns up. And now in Mark's Gospel, in chapter 1, the kingdom of God is near.

[5 : 53] At hand. In first century Palestine, the Jews are living in their land, but the Romans are ruling over them. They are now under the Roman occupational force, under Roman rule.

And ever since the return from exile around about 500 years ago, they have been trying to establish their own rule, wanting their own kingdom. They've been longing for the day when it would be like the days of King Solomon.

The golden days when Israel was the powerful nation and the world streamed to them. When the king of Israel sat on the throne and ruled a great kingdom. A kingdom with God's blessing.

A kingdom where God fought for his people and protected his people. A kingdom which was invincible in their mind. But there'd been no word from God for 400 years.

And their present experience is nothing like what Isaiah and Zechariah had spoken about. John has come and spoken and all Jerusalem and Judea are saying, wow, this is good news.

[6 : 53] And they are convicted of their sins and they confessed them to John. And now John's been arrested and he's in prison. And Jesus begins to speak.

And now Jesus is here saying that the kingdom of God is near. Revolution maybe is in the air. The anointed king must be coming.

400 years of silence. 400 years of frustration. 400 years of expectations. And finally, the kingdom of God is coming. And Jesus begins his preaching.

The time has come. Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel. The kingdom of God is near.

Repent and believe the good news. The coming of the kingdom places radical demands upon all the people. A clear choice. You can either believe it or reject it.

[7 : 52] It's good news. It's not bad news. The kingdom of God, God's king coming to rule is great news. And God is about to reveal his mighty power in all the world.

Isaiah speaks about it in Isaiah 52 verse 7. It was a lovely night. It was a pointy end of things for Unichurch last night. For our organisation last night. To see the raising up of gospel workers.

And sending them out and partnering with them. And God promises a new exodus in Isaiah 52 verse 7. When the Jews were in bondage. And the Babylonians were there.

In their exile there. And God promises in Isaiah 52 verse 7. How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news. That's the gospel.

Good news. Who proclaim peace. Who bring good tidings. And proclaim salvation. Who say it is Zion. Your God reigns.

[8 : 52] And now that kingdom of God has drawn nearer than it ever was before. Jesus is teaching more than just God reigns as king. But that the time has now come for God to fix up what is wrong in the world.

And bring about the new king. New kingdom where there's no rival kings. And the chaos and the corruption of the world due to sin will be rioted. And everything will be good.

Zechariah speaks about it in Zechariah chapter 14 verse 9. The Lord will bring the whole earth. So the Lord will be king of the whole earth. And on that day there will be one Lord and his name the only name.

No rival kings. No rebellion against him. One king established as king. Nobody else. Now would this coming of Jesus then be one of triumphant conquest over the political enemies of the day.

See when the kingdom of God comes it's going to be fantastic. Comfort. Peace. Health. Security. Joy. And justice. It's what the Jew has been longing for and hoping for.

[10 : 01] It's good news. And Jesus is saying it's ever so close. And now we start seeing the in-breaking of this kingdom as Jesus starts his life of ministry.

We see the kingdom at hand what it looks like. And we see it at hand beside the sea. See what goes on here now. Passing alongside the sea of Galilee he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting nets into the sea for they were fishermen.

And Jesus said to them follow me and I make you become fishers of men. And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going little farther he saw James and the son of Zebedee and John his brother who were in their boats and many in the nets.

And immediately he called them and they left their father and Zebedee in the boat with a hired servant and followed him. We're beside the sea of Galilee up in the north of Judea. And we see Jesus calling his first disciples with authority.

No doubting, no debating, but immediate obedience by them. And Jesus sees Simon and Andrew. Simon had once been a disciple of John actually.

[11 : 09] And both Simon and Andrew had met Jesus probably a year or so earlier before John was put in prison. And Jesus calls them to follow them and immediately they follow him.

Giving up their family business, leaving their nets to become fishers, not of fish, but of men. And Jesus sees James and John and calls them to follow him and immediately they do as he commands.

Giving up their family business, leaving their nets. In the years to come, these ordinary unskilled men who had been with Jesus will be the ones spreading the news that Jesus is the Messiah of God's kingdom to the whole Roman world.

That's what they'll be doing. And they become fishermen of men. These first disciples are called by Jesus to be disciples. His authoritative word summons them and they follow him, they obey.

Leaving is a key word in Mark's gospel. The disciples leave their nets in obedience to Jesus' command to follow.

[12 : 17] And they do it immediately, there's no mucking around. Peter will tell Jesus that they've left everything to follow him in chapter 10. And Jesus will say that if a person wants to follow him, they must leave family, earthly security and possessions to follow him in Mark chapter 10.

To be a follower of Jesus means to leave, leave behind the attachments of the world. And that can mean family, that can mean people, that can mean livelihood, that can mean career, that does mean sin.

And then we see the kingdom breaking in in the synagogue, in the teaching. They come to Capernaum and straight away, immediately, it's a fast packed action game going through Mark's gospel.

Immediately he enters the synagogue and starts teaching. He would have opened up the passage from the law and then the prophets and read it and then taught what it meant in the light of his announcement of verses 14 to 15, I guess.

Taught them about the kingdom of God being at hand and the need to repent and believe the good news. And the people who hear him respond in two ways. First, first they're astonished at his teaching, it's new.

[13 : 35] They haven't heard the scriptures explained like this ever before. It's clear, it's accurate, it's nothing less than a perfect sermon. It would have been great to hear a sermon from Jesus. Engaging, challenging, confronting.

And he says it's all about him. I mean, what school has he been to to teach him like this? To be able to do that? And second, they recognise his authority. The scribes would teach referring to other scribes.

And say, well, scribe, so and so says this and so I say it to you as well. But Jesus refers to no higher authority than himself. And Jesus teaches with the prophetic fulfilment of the scriptures in himself.

The scribes teach by the authority of the scribes. But Jesus teaches by the authority of God. His authority which comes from God.

And as soon as the people recognise this new teaching and his authority that goes with it, immediately the next thing happens. He's there exercising, not exercising physically, but exercising demons.

[14 : 38] Verse 23. A man with an unclean spirit cries out. Now, unclean spirit equals a demon. Do the work with chapter 7 verse 25. Unclean spirit is a demon in 7:26.

The demon breaks, the kingdom breaks into the world and challenges our understanding of the world. Let me tell you, there are such things as evil spirits.

And there are such things as demons. But they are not the thing which are front and centre in the centre of the scriptures.

What is central in the scriptures is the Lord Jesus Christ. It's all about him and his cross. And we're not taught a lot about the demons and the unclean spirits.

But notice what the demon-possessed man cries out in verse 24. Verse 24. What have you come to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

[15 : 39] Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. It's plural. There's demons inside this man.

There's a community of demons. But the demons are pals before Jesus. They know that he's come to destroy them. And so Jesus rebukes them. Now rebuking is telling someone that they're out of order, strongly.

To get in line. That's what rebuke means. And so Jesus tells them to stop behaving the way they are. To stop doing what they're doing. And he silences them. Which amazes the crowd in the synagogue in verse 27.

And they say, even the unclean spirits, plural, obey him. The kingdom of God breaking in means the days of the evil spirits having any kind of influence and power and authority are well and truly over.

Even the unclean spirits are under him. And the way that he does it is not by some spell or by some incantation or by some technique or by some symbolic act.

[16 : 47] Jesus does it just by his powerful, authoritative word. Be silent. Come out. And they do.

And then the reputation of Jesus then goes viral all through Galilee. The whole region hears about him. Well, the kingdom of God means, the breaking in of the kingdom of God means that the evil spirits days are over.

Let me try and build on then a picture of the kingdom of God we saw earlier and try and make some sense of what's going on here. The important thing is kingdom timing. Alright?

So we need to get an idea of the time that we're in to understand the kingdom of God more fully. Ever since the fall, when sinned into the world in Genesis chapter 3, we've been living in a present evil age.

That's what we're living in right now. A present evil age. It's the age where God has permitted Satan to roam in the world. You read about it in Job. And so we live under the curse of God and a world frustrated by the ravages of sin.

[17 : 50] That is the present evil age we're in right now. Romans chapter 1 teaches that God has handed us over to our own desires. And so we get a world that we deserve for our rebellion against God.

That's the world we're in right now. And that's the age, the present evil age, the way that Paul describes it in Galatians chapter 1, that Jesus entered as well.

And that age that Jesus is in is when he preaches in the synagogue. In Mark chapter 1, as the kingdom of God breaks in and Jesus' authority is exercised, we get a taste, right?

We start getting a taste of the kingdom where God's anointed king rules without any opposition. And that is the age to come. Where the rulers and authorities of the present evil age cannot and will not stand before him.

Over and over in the Gospels we work through them, we'll see the evil spirits cast out and fleeing before the presence of God. Before the presence of Jesus.

[18 : 55] And so we get a taste of the age to come, the kingdom at hand. We'll see some more next week as well. The kingdom at hand breaks into the present evil age.

And one day there will be a day when the kingdom of God is no longer just at hand, but when the kingdom of God has fully and finally come and not opposed by anybody.

Where there's no opposition left standing against God's rightful rule. When the present evil age comes to an end and when the new creation comes, that's when the kingdom of God is seen in the new heavens and the new earth, the home of righteousness.

Now, the way that comes about is by the cross. The age to come comes by the cross, the crucifixion and the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus to reign.

That's how it comes about. And until he returns to bring about the end of the present evil age, we'll be in these last days now. There's going to be an end of all opposition, an end of all evil, an end of all sin, an end of all corruption, an end of all wickedness.

[20 : 10] And Jesus will bring about all who are following him, who obeyed him, who've repented and believed the good news that the kingdom of God is near.

He will bring all those people who are waiting for him into his eternal, final new creation and new earth. All those who ever lived and all those who are alive at the time will spend eternity in the new creation, the perfect, unopposed kingdom of God in the age to come, where God rules in unopposed glory, where there's nothing unclean, no demons, no sin, no conflict, no war, no hatred, no death.

That's what the world longs for, doesn't it? That's what we want. We look forward to that. We want that to happen. Wouldn't that be good news if that kind of world would come?

And that's what Jesus is saying, is at hand. Repent and believe that good news. Right now, today, we live after the death and the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus, looking forward to his return and the new creation has to come.

Now, there are two extremes to avoid when it comes to evil spirits, demons and the like. C.S. Lewis highlights it in screw tape letters. Other writers repeat the same idea. Peter Bolt in his book, *Living with the Underworld*, that is, you can either deny that they exist and so be unaware of the devil's schemes, that's one way to treat evil and unclean spirits and Satan, or to be overly fascinated by it all and focused on them and want to find out more about them.

[22 : 04] And so take our eyes off Jesus and the cross and his victory over sin and death. Now, wherever the gospel of Jesus goes, the kingdom and a foretaste of the kingdom breaks in.

I mean, it's right here amongst us this morning. There are people from different parts of the world, different nations, different ages, different ethnicities, all in the one place, breaking down walls of hostility and creating one new people in Christ.

That's who we are in this room here who love the Lord Jesus. When the demons know who Jesus is and what he's come to do, notice that they know he is the Holy One of God and that they are not.

And they know that he has come to destroy them and they know that they are powerless before him. He speaks, they are defeated.

And so, we resist the devil and he flees from us, we're told in the Scriptures. And those who oppose the Lord Jesus are defeated foes.

[23 : 20] It's not dualism, right? Dualism is like one is strong and one is strong and there's going to be an arm wrestle and see who wins. That's not how it is. We don't need to go into excesses of exercising evil spirits from people who are sick and that kind of stuff or thinking that there's a demon of gluttony or any other vice holding sway over people or some demon of this or demon of that.

No. Be clear of this. If you have God's Holy Spirit living in you already, already, if I have God's Holy Spirit in me already because no one can confess that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit, well the age to come has then broken into my life, your life and there is no place for any evil spirit to be in me or you either.

God's Holy Spirit won't share a space with evil. and so we don't need to go into excesses of exercising evil spirits from people when they are sick or thinking that the demon made me do something, that kind of thing.

Christians cannot, followers of Jesus cannot, disciples of Jesus cannot be possessed by demons. You cannot be possessed by a demon if you are a child of the true and living God.

God himself is a source of this new but now old teaching that Jesus brings all authority. The immediate obedience of the disciples, the immediate obedience of those in the amazement of the sin of God, the casting out of the unclean spirits show that something new and supernatural has come in the Lord Jesus.

[25 : 08] So let me draw a couple of implications in for kingdom living. Alright? First and foremost, this is first and foremost, remember the time in which we live.

Remember the time which we live. Brother, we live in the last minutes of the last minutes of extra time that had been blown at the end of the full time whistle.

That's the time we live in. Extra time has been added to the football match and we're not quite sure what that extra time is going to finish.

The kingdom of God is at hand and as Josh said last week we need to or last night, sorry, really helpful, we need to be awake to that reality.

The kingdom of God is at hand and since this is at hand the kingdom of God has actually been even closer now that Jesus has been crowned king on the cross and now it's seated in the throne in glory and all that's yet to happen is him to return at any tick of the clock and bring about the new creation and the end of the present evil age.

[26 : 37] Now since that's the case can I urge you if you haven't yet submitted to Jesus Lord then nothing could be more urgent in this world to do.

There's a prayer in a bulletin each week about how you can actually come to submit to Jesus. Jesus I know I haven't lived your way, I know that you're the boss, please forgive me, help me to live with you as Lord in my life.

That's the essence of the prayer that's on the bulletin every week. But if you're in the kingdom which I pray and trust that most in this room are, nothing could be more urgent in our priorities than praying for our family, our friends, our neighbours, our colleagues to be in that kingdom as well by repenting and believing that Jesus is King of the kingdom and telling them, I think I've got a new line for the people in the park, I go and talk to them in the dog park these days, tell them the kingdom of God is near, do you believe it?

That would be a good conversation starter, wouldn't it? Second, right, that's the first priority, the time we're in. Second, remembering the time we live in, discipleship will mean following Jesus, that means he can be Lord of my life in every area of my life, recognise his authority over my life.

So I need to be ready, right, this is important, I need to be ready to leave, forsake the attractions of this world, the things of my kingdom, leave them behind for the eternal glories of the kingdom to come.

[28 : 28] And finally, remembering the time that we live in, the kingdom of God is at hand, Satan is powerless before God. Don't be able to be fascinated by the things of the occult.

There is a world of evil spirits, demons that we can't ordinarily see with our eyes, at the same time, don't be fooled in thinking that there is no Satan, that there is no malevolent force at work in this world opposing the reign of Jesus.

That's going on all around about us, all the time. Remember the world where the evil age, we're swimming in. But remember that Satan and his fiends are powerless before Jesus.

Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth and Jesus said, and so Jesus says, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you for the gospel that Jesus is king, that the kingdom is near. Help us to live with our lives with him as truly Lord and as God.

[29 : 37] And we pray you help us to live wise in the times that we're in, knowing that the time is short and that his kingdom is at hand. So help us to repent of the things in this world, the delights of this world, that we might leave them behind for his glory.

We pray in Jesus name, Amen.