

Jesus' Priority

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[0 : 00] Well, let's pray as we come to hear God's word some more. It's a lovely song, isn't it? It's sort of like a theme song I'd like to have us sing around here more and more at church.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do pray that your word would be at work in us, filling us, and that your glory would cover the whole earth. Help us to hear your word, to believe it, to obey and to submit where it's appropriate, and to repent where necessary.

We do pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I wonder if you've ever wondered why you do what you do. Why we've got the priorities we have, why we say no to some things and yes to others.

We aspire to do one thing, and as we do that, it comes at the cost of another. So I've asked you why Jesus came into the world. What was the purpose of you coming to the world?

What would you say? So here you go, there's a question to think about the person next to you. If I asked you, if you asked Jesus, he told you, why did Jesus come to the world?

[1 : 02] Alright, here we go. Have a think about it. What would you say? Why did Jesus come to the world? Alright, well that's long enough.

In Mark's Gospel, we hear three reasons why Jesus came to the world, and one of them was front and centre here this morning in the text. He came, in chapter 1 verse 38, he came to preach.

That's what he came to do. He also came, in chapter 2, he came to call sinners to himself in repentance and faith. We'll see that next week. And he also came, we remember, in chapter 10 verse 45, he came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

That's the reasons we're given in Mark's Gospel why Jesus came. And they're the three priorities that will actually shape what Jesus comes to do and what he does as we read through Mark's Gospel.

And so, we just heard that Jesus has begun his ministry, his kingdom is near. After John's been put in prison, John had been proclaiming, preaching, proclaiming repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[2 : 08] And now Jesus has begun his preaching ministry. He's up in Capernaum. There's a map up on the screen, hopefully you'll see that there. And he's preaching. Capernaum's up the top there near the river, near the ocean, top lake up there.

The time has come, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the Gospel. That's what he's been preaching. And now we see that kingdom, that rule breaking into the world.

The authority breaking into the world as Jesus preaches, as he teaches, as he proclaims the kingdom of God. And we get a foretaste of the kingdom as coming near, as Jesus comes in.

So, here's a bit of a diagram I showed last week, more complicated. But this is a much simpler sort of one page on it. You see here that the kingdom of God was there in the Garden of Eden.

Then you had the fall. And then you've had this present evil age, is the age we're in now. When Jesus comes, he starts preaching and teaching. And then moves up towards the cross.

[3 : 12] And at the cross, the new age, the kingdom of God breaks in fully. And that's when it begins. He begins his reign as king of the universe there. And one day, fully and finally, it will come when the present evil age finishes.

And the kingdom of God, the new heavens, the new earth, the new age, will continue forever unopposed. It exists right now, this kingdom of God, opposed by the evil forces, and in this age where there's sin and sickness and death.

But one day, it will come to an end when Jesus returns. And what we're seeing now is a foretaste, a breaking in, if you like, of that kingdom of heaven, that new age, into this present evil age, as Jesus goes about his work.

And so we saw a man with an unclean spirit is freed from demon possession last week. The unclean spirit knows that Jesus is the Messiah, the Holy One of God, and is driven out by Jesus.

So there you go. That's the time we're in now, which raises a bit of an aside. The demons know. The demons even believe that Jesus is the Messiah, that he is the Son of God, that he's the Holy One.

[4 : 26] But their knowledge of him doesn't lead them to change their attitudes towards him. Jesus teaches us, sorry, James, later in the book of James, teaches us that you say you believe that God is one.

Yes, that's true. Even the demons believe that. In chapter 2, verse 9 in James, they believe it and they tremble. But that doesn't lead them to repentance.

They won't repent of their rebellion against God and their siding with Satan, their opposition to him. And so now we just move into, we're seeing here the healing in the kingdom in verses 28 to 34.

After Jesus preaches in the synagogue, having cast out the demon from the man, he's finished that now, he goes home for lunch afterwards at Simon's place. And Simon's mother-in-law is there and she's got a fever.

Two things. First, Simon is a man who is later given the name Peter and he's a married man. Now, the whole idea of requiring singleness for priests is an atrocious requirement, really, that should never have been placed on anyone who wanted to be a gospel worker.

[5 : 42] That's one aside. Second, Simon's mother-in-law is sick. This is more important. A fever is a natural response to the body, to some kind of sickness or infection.

And the sickness is at one level indicates, it can do, that God's actually against her. In Leviticus chapter 26, that those who have a fever can be under the punishment of God for rebellion against him.

And an infection, until relatively recently, could easily enough result in death. I think I would be dead about three times by now if there wasn't modern medicine and penicillin for infections I've had.

Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law. There's no doubt about it. He cures her disease, which is the underlying symptom of the cause of the fever.

Jesus can't help but do good, can he? And shows love wherever he goes. And so the result is, after the sun goes down in verse 32, the Sabbath's over now. And so great crowds then turn up with their sick and their demon-oppressed people.

- [6 : 51] And Jesus heals every one of them. Every one of them. Didn't matter what was wrong with them. Whether they were blind, lame, had cancer or deformed. Jesus heals them.
- All those, the many who came to the door. And he gave them the therapy that they needed. And he also cast out demons. See there, verse 32 to 34.
- That evening at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And it healed many who were sick with various diseases. And cast out many demons.
- So he's done a lot. Those who turned up, all the many who were sick who turned up, he's gone and healed them all. Not one of them was not healed. And Jesus heals them. He gives them the therapy they need.
- But he tells the demons they're not allowed to speak. He would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him. They knew him to be the Messiah.
- [7 : 48] That's who they knew him to be. At this stage, Jesus doesn't want the crowds to think that the Messiah was simply here to give them the therapy. to heal them of the sicknesses they're experiencing in this world.
- As good as that is, let me tell you, that's good. Nor does he want them to give up, give them relief from, think they just came to give them relief from Roman rule primarily either. That's not why he came.
- By way of another aside, there's a thing called a therapeutic gospel. And it's becoming pretty dominant in our world these days. It goes like this. Jesus will fix your life and make it really, really comfortable.
- Come to Jesus and you'll have everything you could possibly ever want in this world. If you come to Jesus, life will be full of success and comfort and health and prosperity now.
- Now let me tell you, that's a half truth. It's nice, but it's only half the truth. See, the verse that's come to replace the most well-known verse in the Bible now comes from the Old Testament.
- [8 : 58] It used to be the most well-known verse in the Bible was, what was it? John 3, 16, yeah. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- That was the one that was supposed to hang down the billboards at the Olympic Games. That was the most famous verse in the world. But now an Old Testament verse has become sort of the most preached verse.
- Jeremiah 29, verse 11. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for evil and to give you a future and a hope. Which in the context of Jeremiah 29 is speaking about deliverance of Israel from being captives in Babylon, their return to Jerusalem and this is not a promise for every individual prosperity and everything going well in their lives.
- Welfare, yes, that's okay but salvation, eternal life, never perishing, being right with God, now that's something worth dying for.
- A therapeutic gospel is not the gospel, it's a distortion of the truth which doesn't equip people to live in this present evil age. It doesn't bring people to faith in Jesus as Lord.
- [10 : 14] A therapeutic gospel sets up people for experiencing Jesus to do for them what he primarily didn't come to do. I'll say it again, a therapeutic gospel sets up people for experiencing, expecting Jesus to do for them what he didn't primarily come to do.
- A therapeutic gospel is no gospel at all in the end because it leads to fair weather faith. Whatever Jesus gives me what I like, I'll stick with him but if things get difficult then I'll question whether he's worth following at all and so I get disappointed with Jesus or worse still, I'll dispute what he says and make up a gospel of my own.

There is a healing to come, let me tell you. When Jesus returns it will be perfect but before it does everyone will face death in some kind.

Simon's mother-in-law died one day. See, Jesus came to do more than heal temporarily so he could live a little while longer in his present evil age before perishing.

Jesus has a far, far greater priority. See, right now there is a gospel that is preached which prepares us for death which is far, far more important to hear and believe and so we see that the response to healing is an attraction simply for more healing.

[11 : 53] The response to healing we see in the gospel of Mark and the other gospels is an attraction to more and more expectation of Jesus to heal people in this world while the response that Jesus calls for in his preaching, listen to this, is repentance and faith.

The response that Jesus calls for in his preaching is repentance and faith. repentance from a rebellion against his rule and faith, trust, lie that he is the Lord, the King of the Kingdom.

Now, if we're finally following Jesus for what he can do for us then it's missing the point of what he came to do. Now, let me get you a little bit sharper here if I even need to. If we're only following Jesus while it feels good to do so, when no one challenges me what I'm doing, well, we're in grave danger.

When his call to repentance from sin and faith in him puts me at odds with the culture of my day, which will win out? Jesus and his kingdom or our worlds and the idols of our culture?

There is a priority which shapes his ministry and it's being prepared for his kingdom. That's the priority that Jesus is shaping and speaking and teaching and continues to preach and teach.

[13 : 32] Not first and foremost my ease and comfort in this world. And so we see now in verses 35 to 39 Jesus priority front and centre and clear.

It's established the next morning. Jesus is now famous. I mean he's bigger than the Beatles now. Jesus could have stayed and become a great hero.

Worshipped by all for what he come to do for them. The whole of Galilee the whole world kept coming streaming to him for therapy for physical healing. But that's not what Jesus came to do.

At a time when he's got the goodwill and the adulation of the crowds. They want to come to him and meet him. He's at one of the highest points in his popularity in his ministry.

And at this highest point in the popularity in his ministry turns his back, goes out early in the morning to a desolate place by himself and prays.

[14 : 39] That's what he does. the people want to come to him. Where are you Jesus? We expect you to turn up at nine o'clock in the morning out on the oval here and the whole of St.

Lucia is going to come and get healed. He's not there. What happens? Verse 36. Simon and those who were with him searched for him and they found him and said to him everyone's looking for you.

And he said to them let's go on to the next towns that I may what? What's he going to do at the next towns? What's he going to do at the next towns? You insert the words.

Ride the wave of popularity and pre-selection as president. Relieve poverty. Empty the hospitals of their sick. No.

What's he come to do? Preach there also for that is why I came out. And he went throughout all Galilee preaching their synagogues and casting out demons.

[15 : 46] Jesus came out from Capernaum to preach in the rest of Galilee. And what would he be preaching? Well I take it verse 15 the time is fulfilled the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe the gospel this great news. Being in the kingdom of God is the place that will mean we'll have every longing met. Every good thing perfectly good.

There's going to be no evil, no sickness, no suffering, no death if you're in the kingdom of God. And that's what Jesus is preaching. That's what the world needed to hear and that's what the world still needs to hear.

The kingdom of God is near and nearer today than it was yesterday. today. And with it comes the end of this world and the king of this world, Satan himself.

Which is what we constantly hear as result of the preaching. Jesus preaches, demons are cast out, evil is driven away, Satan and his agents are expelled.

[16 : 59] Now note with me there's a difference between demon possession and general sickness. Jesus deals with both, right? And his priority is preach, get ready, get ready for the Lord.

The kingdom of God is at hand, is near, repent and believe the gospel, that's the urgency, that's the priority, get ready for the kingdom of God, get ready for the Lord which is done as we repent and believe that this is true.

And so we see there's a kingdom distraction that comes in verses 40 to 45, it's really a distraction. Sometime later we're not quite sure, Jesus heals a leper of his disease.

The leper seeks to be made clean. Leviticus 13 gives us regulations about a person with skin disease, they're an outcast from society, they're not permitted to enter the temple, they're shut out from the people of God.

Outside the kingdom of God at one level, leprosy is still around today. Jesus cleanses him, Jesus touches him which is shocking enough in itself and he tells him what to do in requirement to fulfil the law in Leviticus 14.

[18 : 19] Jesus tells him with absolute clarity that he's to say nothing to anyone about what has happened. Do you see it there? Don't tell anybody. He's charging him there in verse 44.

See that you say nothing to anyone. Don't tell anyone, you can tell the priest but don't tell anybody else, right? And when he shows the priest in Jerusalem at the temple he will offer the sacrifices required of the Old Testament requirements and his cleansing will be proof to them.

Now what will his cleansing be proof to the temple authorities the priests of? Well, Jesus is the one who has the authority to make clean the unclean, will be one thing.

And the priests in Jerusalem will have no excuse if they reject Jesus and his message now. It will prove to them that Jesus is the one who comes to keep and fulfil the law.

That Jesus does restore people into the kingdom of God. He does cleansing completely. And what does the man do?

[19 : 31] Well, he starts to literally preach. That's what he does. He goes around preaching. He starts to preach that Jesus has healed him.

And so Jesus is hindered from going into the synagogues and preaching the kingdom of God now. Because the people are only going to come to him for what they can get out of the world. Therapy for this life in this world.

Not entry to the kingdom of God. This bloke's preaching is faulty. And so Jesus then has to do his preaching outside the towns. But even that doesn't stop the crowds coming to Jesus from everywhere.

Jesus is famous. But his fame at this stage is actually a hindrance to his purposes in coming to the world. I can understand this bloke being happy. I would be too.

So happy they can't help but tell the whole world the good things Jesus has done for him. In the Old Testament we only hear two people cleansed from leprosy. Miriam was one and the other one was Naaman and he won kings.

[20 : 40] Good news is hard to keep yourself isn't it? It really is hard to keep yourself. People burst to tell others the good news. I mean people even tell it on behalf of others did you know that my cousin who became a Christian last year just had a baby last week.

I can't help but tell you the good news on her behalf to you. It's fantastic. But let's think about kingdom preaching for a second.

One of the things I think we need to do these days is consider how we censor ourselves in what we say to those around about us. There are topics that we feel quite okay to talk about and acceptable in our some circles but we're hesitant to raise them in others.

I know I'm tempted to do the same all too often. We'll speak about the good things that come our way but can be slow to mention even better news that we have.

I mean in our Christian circles we talk about Christian things and in our non-Christian circles we talk about our other things. The two worlds are slow to coalesce.

[21 : 58] We can be slow to call people to repent and believe the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ that the kingdom of God is near. God has kindly brought us into it but we can be very slow can't we to invite others in as well to tell them the good news.

See all of us can be kingdom preachers in some way or another by our lip demonstrated by our lives and our priorities. Let's be careful what we preach so that Jesus is far far more than a welfare officer.

He is the saviour from sin and death. Let's be careful to proclaim that he is far far more than a therapist. Let's preach and be careful to preach that Jesus is Lord.

And let's be careful to proclaim that the kingdom of God is near and so not be deceived into thinking that life in this world is ultimate for it really isn't.

Instead let's be unashamed about preaching the priorities of the kingdom of God, making sure that we live for the kingdom, inviting people into it wherever, whenever we can.

[23 : 23] And finally as we live as God's people and heirs of the kingdom and all the blessings to come, let's rejoice knowing that being in the kingdom is far far better now and it's going to be far far better in the future.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you for the priority of the Lord Jesus to be preaching the kingdom of heaven. Thank you that you brought many of us into that kingdom and we pray that anyone here this morning who's not might come to faith in the Lord Jesus as well.

We thank you for the great joy it is to be known as your people, to be cleansed of our sins and so have entry into your kingdom. And Father we look forward to that day when we'll be gathered with all your people for all time, for all eternity, enjoying the great joy of being close to you and spending eternity in your eternal provisions.

which are far better than we can possibly imagine. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.