

Welcome, everyone. I am so excited about this new sermon series called Unexpected King. Over the next 13 weeks we are going to open up the gospel of Mark together and spend time looking at, learning from, and committing ourselves to live like Jesus. And I think God has so much in store for us. I have been excited about this series all year long. When I graduated college, even though I had spent five years studying the Bible, I realized that Mark was the one gospel I knew least about. I wanted to change that, so I took about three years and studied every aspect of this gospel. I read about 10 commentaries on it. I wrote a several hundred-page bible study on this book and then I had the privilege of leading several groups of people through studying it, as well. Personally speaking, over the last 10 years, God has used the gospel of Mark to radically change my life. I have seen God use the gospel of Mark radically change the lives of many of my best friends, as well. And I can't wait to spend time with you in this book and see what God does as we study it together.

Many of you know that there are four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They make up the beginning of the New Testament. The gospel accounts are eyewitness testimonies about the life of Jesus, and each of them tell us unique and different things about Jesus, his life, his teaching, his ministry. One of the families in our life group have five kids, and recently took a two-week road trip out West. Camping, hiking in the mountains, seeing incredible parts of God's creation. When I talked to them when they got back, they all emphasized different parts of the trip...different campsites, different meals, different conversations. It was the same story, same beginning, same middle, same end, same people, same events, but told from different vantage points. That's what the gospels are like.

So, what do we know about Mark? Who is he, and what's distinct about his gospel? Very early tradition, from the middle of the second century, tells us that Mark actually wrote down the accounts of Peter, the leader of the apostles. He recorded Peter's sermons and teaching about Jesus. Most consider Mark to be the very first gospel written down, and the book is action-packed and fast-paced. Mark uses the word immediately more than 40 times...Jesus did this, then immediately he went and did that, then immediately he gave this teaching...it's used 11 times in chapter one alone. When I listen to podcasts, I listen to them at 2x speed, so I can get as much content in as possible during a walk, a run, a car-ride...that's kind of what Mark does, in the shortest of all the gospels he packs a lot of activity in. However, when it comes to the final days and hours of Jesus' life, he slows way down, so we can give the appropriate amount of sacred attention to the most critical window of his life.

Mark is writing to a Roman audience, people who never met Jesus, as a way of helping them get to know who Jesus is, what he did, how he taught, and what it means to follow him. And how relevant is that to us? We've never met Jesus. We weren't around in Israel 2,000 years ago. But through Mark's gospel we are going to be able to get to know Jesus better. Some of you have been following Jesus for a long time, and maybe you'll learn a few new things. Others are of you are brand new to Jesus, you are just exploring the Christian faith for the first time (or for the first time in a long time), and in this study will help you know who Jesus is and what it means to be his disciple.

We are calling this study “The Unexpected King” because there are so many aspects about Jesus that are unexpected. No one, not even the most devout, the most studied and learned of religious scholars, expected Jesus to do what he did. Not even his own family expected him to do what he did. Jesus is a king unlike anyone ever expected. He’s also the exact king the world desperately needed. But he’s also the king I need, and the king you need. So, with that being said, let’s open up Mark’s gospel. Today we are going to look at chapter one and talk about the unexpected beginning. Jesus’ ministry kicks off in a very unanticipated way.

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

Let me stop right there, because if we are talking about unexpected beginnings, this is one of the most unexpected beginnings to any book or letter you are ever going to read. This one verse is one of the most power-packed, theologically infused, and even politically provocative sentences in the entire bible.

Mark begins by saying, “**The beginning**” and of course it’s the beginning of the actual book, but it’s more than that. These are the same words used all the way back in Genesis 1:1 to talk about the very beginning, the creation of the world. And Mark uses the exact same words in his chapter one, verse one. I think that’s his way of saying, with Jesus, the entire world is going to have a new beginning. With Jesus, God is beginning the process of re-creating the world.

Next: “**of the good news**”. You might remember that we’ve talked about this phrase before. In the first century world, this wasn’t a religious word, it was a political word. The gospel was an official, royal announcement from those in power typically indicating one of three things: the birth of the future king, the defeat of a major military enemy, or that a new ruler has been seated on the throne. The gospel is a royal declaration that things in the world are different. Because there is a new leader who has power to push back the enemy and establish justice, righteousness, and peace over his entire domain.

Next: the beginning of the gospel “**of Jesus**”. That’s not just any name, that is a name with a meaning. In Hebrew, the language of the Jews, the name Jesus literally means God saves. Even imbedded in the meaning of his name is the message of what God intends to accomplish with his life. In sending Jesus, God has come to save the world.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus “**the Messiah**”. Messiah sounds like a very religious term. Someone is said to have a Messiah complex if they have an inflated view of themselves and thinks of themselves as a savior to another person, company, or country. In the original language, Messiah simply means “anointed one”. In ancient Israel, three groups of people were anointed: prophets, priests, and kings. Prophets spoke the word of God. Priests offered the sacrifice to God. Kings ruled on behalf of God. Think about Jesus: He is more than a prophet who speaks the word of God, he is the Word of God. He’s more than a priest who offers a sacrifice to God, he’s a priest who becomes the sacrifice, providing forgiveness for all mankind. He is more than a king who rules on behalf of God, he is God himself who has come to rule, he is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah, “**the Son of God**”. We hear this phrase and we think—the second person of the Trinity. And that is true. But Mark is writing in the first century to a Roman audience, and this phrase was a title given to only one person on the planet at the time. Do you know who that was? Caesar—the ruler of the world. That’s part of what makes this such a politically supercharged first verse. Mark, writing to Romans, takes a title they have been using in reference to their leader and says, “You got it wrong, Caesar isn’t the Son of God, the ruler of the world, Jesus is.”

That’s an unexpected way to begin his book. Next, look at the unexpected announcement that was made about him. Mark 1:2-4, **As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way—a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.**

Before Jesus’ ministry officially began, John the Baptist was sent ahead of him, to tell the people to get ready and prepare for him. Think of it this way, every year, before the President enters the house chamber to give his state of the union address, the Sergeant at Arms makes an announcement and proclaims in a loud voice: “Mister or Madam Speaker, The President of the United States!” Everyone stands and looks toward the doors. That’s what John was sent to do. He was sent ahead of Jesus to tell everyone throughout Israel: The Messiah is coming. Get ready. I remember when I was a kid, I knew what time of the day my dad would get home from work. About five minutes before his normal arrival time, I would go to the kitchen and start doing chores. Putting away dishes, sweeping up the floor. When my dad came home, I wanted him to find me hard at work. That’s kind of like what John was doing. He went ahead of Jesus not just to tell them he’s near, but to tell them to prepare their hearts. I love this phrase, “**Make straight paths for him.**” That was John’s mission, and that’s our mission. As servants of Jesus, we want to do everything we can to bring down mountains and to fill in valleys to prepare a wide and straight path for Jesus into the lives and hearts of those we know. Our vision as a church is to connect people to Jesus. We want to do anything and everything we can, short of sinning, to prepare people for a relationship with Jesus. That’s one of the reasons we serve so consistently in our community. That’s one of the reasons we support families in need. That’s one of the reasons we mentor at-risk youth. That’s one of the reasons we give away thousands of pounds of food. That’s one of the reasons we give almost \$1,000,000 a year overseas. Yes, we want to help and enrich people’s lives...but more than anything else, we want to make straight paths for them to know Jesus.

So, John the Baptist brought an unexpected announcement, and do you know what happened to John? They didn’t like his announcement, so he was put into prison. As John steps off the scene, Jesus steps onto center stage. And as he does, listen to what he says. **14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”** This is the essence of Jesus’ message. If you had to boil everything he taught into just a few words, this is it: “**The kingdom of God has come near.**” As we have talked about this before, we’ve used **two circles**. The kingdom of God, and the kingdom of the world. This is where God gets what God wants. This is where mankind does whatever they want. Jesus said that in and

through his life, these two circles become a Venn diagram. Jesus said his life has ushered in the kingdom of God. And it comes with two commands: Repent and believe the good news. **Repent** simply means to turn around, to change course, change behavior, change mindset, change perspective. It means to quit living how you want to live and begin living how Jesus tells you to live. And **believe** means to put your faith in Jesus. We operate in faith all the time. We put our faith in a chair when we sit down because we believe it will support our weight. We put our faith in our car because we believe that when we turn the ignition it is going to start up. We put our faith in our employer when we work 40 hours and believe they will give us a paycheck. When we believe something or someone is reliable, dependable, or trustworthy, we place our faith in them, we believe them. Jesus is asking us to believe him, to place our faith in him. And we learn elsewhere in Scripture that those who do believe in him will not perish but have eternal life.

This was Jesus' message: the kingdom of God has come: quit living how you've been living and become my disciple, learn to live from me. But not everyone loved his message. Not everyone agreed with his message. Some people rejected his message.

A few moments ago, we talked about what happens when the President of the United States enters into the House Chamber to give his State of the Union Address. Last year, after President Trump gave his announcement, his declaration, do you remember what the speaker of the house did? **She tore it in half.** Which is a remarkable commentary about what a sad state of affairs we are at in regards to the political climate of our nation. Now I want you to hear me on this: I am not making any statement about Trump, Pelosi, or the content of that speech. No comment. But what I want you to see here is that just because someone gives an announcement doesn't mean others will agree, accept, or affirm it.

Do you know what a lot of people have done with Jesus' announcements? They've listened, assessed it, and torn it up. They've rejected it. So, there is an implicit question: what could Jesus do to prove he has the right, the authority, the power to make such a claim? How could Jesus show us that when he says the Kingdom of God is near, we need to change our lives, and believe in him...that he's actually right.

Look just a few verses down: Jesus went into a synagogue in Capernaum and began to teach. But this wasn't your normal bible study. Look at 1:23 **"Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, 24 "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!"** The demons began to testify to his identity, telling everyone who Jesus was. Jesus cast the demon out of that man, restoring him to his right mind. And then look at verse 27 **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."**

What gives Jesus the right to say the kingdom of God has come near? How can he prove the kingdom of God has come near? At the sound of his footsteps, the demons run and flee. Everything that Satan has torn apart, Jesus comes to put back together. When the people saw that with their own eyes, they knew it was important to listen to what he had to say...and when they listened, they heard him speak with an authority no one had ever encountered before.

After the church service in the synagogue, Jesus went back to Peter's house. Peter's mother-in-law was sick. Jesus healed her. Word began to spread and all the sick people in the town were brought to Jesus, and he healed them, too. No one had ever seen anything like this before.

The next morning, everyone came back to Peter's house looking for Jesus. They wanted to see more miracles, hear more teaching, just be near him...but when they got there, they couldn't find him. They looked in every room, he was nowhere to be found. Why, right as his popularity and notoriety were beginning to peak, would he sneak away? Look at 1:35, **Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.** Jesus wanted to be with his Father. He needed to be with his Father. It was in those quiet moments, those alone moments with his Father, that he got perspective he so desperately needed. And let me ask you this: if it was essential for Jesus to be alone with his Father to begin a day, if it was important for the Son of God to make some time to get alone with this Father, how important should it be for us?

Think about your life like a compass with an arrow that points true north. I don't know if you are anything like me, but as I go through life, all the interactions, bumps, conversations, illnesses, relational tension, you name it...they tend to knock that compass off true north, not by 90 degrees or 180 degrees, but by 3 degrees here, or 5 degrees there. That happens enough times and you're heading 25 degrees in the wrong direction. You walk 25 degrees in the wrong direction for long enough, and you end up in the wrong state. Being in solitude, spending time alone with God, praying to begin the day, or even taking an extended time to be with God is like a reorientation, where the compass can get readjusted and reset back to true north. You can be priority-driven, not crisis-driven.

That's the power of what Jesus did in this passage. He gets alone with God and take a look at what happens next: **36 Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"** If Jesus was crisis-driven, if he didn't have his priorities in line, if his compass was off balance, he might have said: "Well, if that's what the people want, let's give them what they want! I can't say no. I can't disappoint someone." But instead, look at what he said: **38 Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."** Jesus was glad to be able to serve the people in Capernaum but being in prayer reminded him he had a mission far beyond just one town, so many more people needed him. So, he went to preach the good news of the kingdom to those who had not yet heard.

And as Jesus is on his way, a man with leprosy came up to him. I think we can appreciate the situation a leper was in now more than ever. In Jesus' day, a person with leprosy had to be guaranteed because they could infect other people. When they went along the road they had to shout out, "Unclean, unclean!" so others knew to stay away from them. A lot of people with COVID have felt that way. But leprosy wasn't for a few weeks or a few months, it was for life. Imagine having the COVID-19 virus for your entire life. Not only are you sick and in pain, your entire life is a quarantine. No visitors, no personal touch. The pain, the isolation, the loneliness, the depression, the despair...almost incomprehensible.

1:40 A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” He’s throwing himself on the mercy of Jesus. He’s heard of all his miracles. He has every reason to believe that he can do it, his main question is whether or not Jesus is willing to do it. For so long, everyone in that society believed that you didn’t get leprosy by accident, but you got it because of the judgment of God. So, in his mind, he wasn’t just sick, he was condemned. Why would this Messiah, this man sent from God, have mercy on him? This king is unlike any king anyone has ever met before. He not only has the power to heal, he has the heart to heal. **1:41. He reached out his hand and touched the man.** Remember, he’s a leper! No one would ever, ever touch him. It has been years since he felt the warmth of human contact. And when Jesus touched him, he said: **“I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!”** **42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.**

What an unexpected beginning to Jesus’ ministry!! John the Baptist prepares the way for him, Jesus declares that the kingdom of God has come because of him, he teaches like no one has ever taught before, he casts out demons, heals the sick, prioritizes prayer, then he stops along the road and makes a personal touch with a man in great need. Whenever I read this last story, I place myself in the position of the leper. As far as I know my skin is just fine, I don’t have any illnesses I’m aware of, but I am still a man in great need. I’ve made more mistakes than I can count. In my heart there is pride, greed, and selfishness lurking around every corner. I am in desperate need of the healing touch of Jesus. Maybe you find yourself in a position like that, too. Aware of your sin, aware of your mistakes, your shortcomings, mindful that on your own, like this leper, you have no hope and there is nothing you can do. All we have to do is cry out to Jesus. “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Every time we say those words, every time, his response is the same: “I am willing! Be clean.”

We are going to learn so much about Jesus as we study this book together...this is just the beginning.

We come to the time when we get to receive communion together, at home and here on our campus. And as we come to the table, I want to encourage you to imagine yourself as that leper, in desperate need of Jesus. Be aware the ultimate way he said he was willing to make you clean wasn’t just to reach out and touch you, it was to be nailed to a cross and shed his blood and die for you. He paid the ultimate price so that we could be forgiven and restored. Let’s spend some time right now and thank him for all he’s done for us.