

## **Good News For a Bad World - 1**

### **Mark 1:1 (1)**

Nowadays, if we want we can watch 24/7 wall to wall live news broadcasts from all over the globe. There's only one problem. Most of the news we get is nearly always bad news. Bad news followed by even more bad news.

Well, thankfully with so much bad news on the go, I'm glad to be able to tell you that the theme of Mark's Gospel is good news. The word "Gospel" actually means good news. So here we have good news ... good news for a bad and broken world.

In this series we want to look together at Mark's Gospel. And to begin with I want to highlight a few things really by way of introduction. This time Mark's Gospel ... its Hero and its Heartbeat and next time Mark's Gospel ... its Haste and its Hope.

Here we go. To start with MARK'S GOSPEL ... ITS HERO.

Underline 1:1 ... this is the good news of WHO? Of Jesus Christ, the Son of God ...

This good news is all about Jesus Christ. It's His biography, His story.

The name "Jesus" means deliverer, rescuer, Saviour. "Christ" means promised One, anointed One, Messiah. And the title "the Son of God" refers to His deity, His Godship.

And right away that's who Mark directs us to. Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Messiah, the Saviour, God's Son.

From whatever angle we come at this we find that He's the great Hero of this Gospel. And we really shouldn't be shocked or surprised by that. Because after all He's the Hero not just of this Gospel, but He's the Hero of the entire Gospel.

Please, whatever else you do, as we look at these pages of God's Word I don't want you to miss Jesus Christ the Son of God. If you do miss Him you miss it all. You miss forgiveness, salvation, blessing, meaning and purpose for living and you miss heaven.

But thankfully, when you have Him you have everything. Everything you need in this life and the next.

And so there's the first thing. Its Hero.

Next, MARK'S GOSPEL ... ITS HEARTBEAT.

It's important to understand that the 4 Gospels come at Christ from 4 different angles. In Matthew we see Him as the King. That's why the word "Kingdom" is all over the place. And so in Matthew's account the spotlight falls on His Royal Highness King Jesus.

In Luke we see Him as the Son of Man. The One who cares and understands and sympathises and even empathises with us in our times of greatest hurt and pain. That's Luke's focus.

In John of course, we see Him, not as the King or as the Son of Man, BUT as the Son of God. He's Divine. All that He says and does proves that He's God. The different "I AM's." I am the bread of life, I am the door, I am the way, the truth and the life, I am the good Shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life ... All claims to deity. "I Am" has clear divine connotations.

And so, that's the basic thrust and focus of Matthew, Luke and John.

But what about Mark? Well Mark talks about Christ the servant. The selfless servant. And the key verse is chapter 10:45 – "Jesus said, I didn't come to be served, but to serve ..."

Willingly and humbly He became a lowly servant. Sacrificing His own comforts and ambitions and rights even for the sake of others.

Just watch Him as He wraps a towel around his waist and gets down on His knees in front of His disciples and washes their feet.

A task reserved for the most inexperienced household servant. The lowest rank got the horrible, demeaning job of washing the dust from the visitor's feet.

And yet, the One who scooped out the oceans and the One who decided that water should be made up of 2 parts hydrogen and 1 part oxygen took a basin and got down on His hands and knees and washed their feet.

Think of it. He's the King of kings and the Lord of lords and YET He becomes a humble servant. Not living for Himself BUT living for others.

And so as we read this Gospel we're going to learn how to serve like Jesus with humility and dignity. That's the Heartbeat, the heart-throb of this whole book.

Well there we have it. Mark's Gospel ... its Hero is Jesus and its Heartbeat is servanthood.

## Good News For a Bad World - 2

### Mark 1:1 (2)

Last time we began looking at the Gospel of Mark and we basically highlighted two things. Mark's Gospel ... It's Hero - Jesus Christ the Son of God and then It's Heartbeat - servanthood. How to live not selfishly but selflessly.

Today let me talk about Mark's Gospel ... its Haste and its Hope.

Ok, MARK'S GOSPEL ... ITS HASTE.

Mark has 2 favourite words. His first favourite word is the word 'immediately'. It's used no less than 42 times. Jesus does everything immediately. He's full of energy. He's on the move. He's a man on a mission.

He's here to do something, to accomplish something, to impact His generation and every generation not just for now but forever.

That's why from sunrise until sunset, from morning until evening He's going about doing good. Teaching and preaching and healing and helping and ministering and giving of Himself. Always ready, always willing. And so He does everything immediately.

I think we need to take a leaf out of His book don't you? His kind of zeal and enthusiasm and sense of urgency. A desire to work while it's still day because the night's coming when none of us will be able to work.

And so, the word 'immediately'.

His other favourite word is the word 'and'. Again suggesting haste. Yes, Jesus - as we've just said - is a man on a mission, but so is Mark. He just can't wait. There's so much he wants to cover that he tries to say everything he can, all at once, in the shortest possible time.

And so as he picks up his pen he writes with great haste and speed and directness. His quill (pen) almost goes into meltdown.

An article here, an article there. A snippet of information and another snippet of information. A snapshot of this and a photo of that. It's all quick, rapid fire. That's why he uses the word 'and' well over 1000 times. 1331 times to be precise. AND!!!!!!

It's absolutely exhausting at points. It's as if he doesn't even pause long enough to catch his breathe. He can hardly wait to begin a new sentence and off he goes again.

BUT do you know why Mark's in such a rush? Because he's just so desperate to share and spread this marvellous message. He longs for us to quickly catch even a glimpse of this Jesus of his.

He wants us to see Him and love Him and experience the life transformation that only He can bring. That's what he wants. And that's the reason for all the 'immediatlys' and all the 'ands' and all the excitement and all the energy.

Ok Mark its Hero, its Heartbeat and its Haste.

Lastly, MARK'S GOSPEL ... ITS HOPE.

Let me give you some background. Mark's full name was John Mark. The Bible also talks about his mother. Her name was Mary. His uncle's name was Barnabas, a man who always loved to encourage people. His mentor's name was Paul, the missionary who blazed a trail for God right across Europe and beyond.

And guess what? Mark left home and along with his uncle Barnabas and his mentor Paul embarked on a missionary journey.

He must've been a keen young Christian. He wanted to be a missionary. He wanted to serve God & spread the Gospel. And so he went with these two experienced missionaries on a missionary expedition. And of course at first everything goes great.

BUT then it happened. Mark was smitten by a terrible disease. Not a physical disease but a heart disease. The disease of discouragement. And according to Acts 13:13 he heads home. He turns back. He gives the whole thing up.

Now can you imagine for a moment how he must have felt? He must have felt a complete and utter failure. He's failed Paul, Barnabas, his family, his friends, the rest of the disciples and Apostles. Failed himself, his Saviour and his God. He's fit only for the scrapheap. At least that's how he feels.

But listen. Nothing could be further from the truth. Because although Mark had left the work of God, the God of the work hadn't left him. And church history tells us, that God in His fantastic providence, brings him into contact with another failure, another recycled believer.

Guess what his name was? Peter. And now here's Mark and Peter. They meet and become friends. Peter puts his arm around Mark and encourages him.

"It's not the end, (says Peter). Its nowhere near the end. Its only the beginning of something brand new. Your dreams and hopes and plans about serving God there are shattered and lying in shreds. But Mark, leave them behind. Lay down your dreams and discover your destiny.

Here's a quill. I'll dictate. I'll tell you the story and you record it. Write it down. Be my secretary. And Mark, you and I together - two utter failures, two rejects, but two restored rejects - will compile a book and the book will be the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God and we'll give it, we'll give this Gospel, this great news, good news to a bad, broken, bruised and bleeding world". WOW!

Does that encourage you or what? Failure isn't fatal and it isn't final with God. People might write you off but God doesn't. No. God forgives and restores failures. And remember Mark's not even an apostle. Not a big shot or a high flyer. A fearful, fear-filled normal guy. And here he is with Peter, the rough and rugged fisherman. And they're both being used of God to bless the world with the Gospel.

I don't know where you are today But this I do know, when you come to God, you'll find Him to be a God of amazing grace. Grace that's far bigger and better and stronger and higher and wider and deeper than all of your sin and all your faults and all your failures and all your fears and all your past and all your present and all your weaknesses and all your mistakes. And like Mark, you and I can be living 'gospels' in this and to this bad world.

## Good News For a Bad World - 3

### Mark 1:2-14 (1)

Maybe you know the amazing story of the Wright brothers. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 1908, after years of preparing and planning and quite a bit of panicking, these two brave brothers finally defied the laws of gravity and managed to make their very first air born flight.

And so with great excitement that they sent a telegram to Catherine their sister. Here's what it said, "Flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas".

Of course, Catherine rushed to the local newspaper office and handed the telegram to the editor. He looked and said, "Well, it'll be lovely to have your brothers home for Christmas."

Isn't that unbelievable? One of the biggest news stories, one of biggest scoops of the century and yet he completely missed the point.

Whatever we do we daren't make the same mistake. We can miss the greatest news story of the century but I don't want you to miss THE greatest news story of ALL time.

And listen, neither does Mark. That's why he begins where he begins in chapter 1:1, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Here then we have the earliest Gospel account. Dictated by Peter. Written by Mark. Penned in Rome. Sent out to the world. And it's good news for all baddies everywhere. And it all revolves around who? Jesus Christ.

In these next two programmes we want to focus our thoughts on Mark 1:2-14. And basically 4 dramatic scenes begin to unfold.

Scene 1 has to do with A SIGNPOST.

We're introduced in verse 2 to the greatest man who ever lived, who was ever born - John the Baptist.

Crowds from everywhere, we're told, came to see him and see him for themselves. Imagine throngs of people heading out into the desert to listen to and be baptised by this preaching prophet.

If you glance at verse 6 you'll find that John looked rather strange. His dress was strange and his diet was strange.

He wore camel skin. A camel skin coat, tied with a leather belt. And his favourite meal was guess what? Locusts and wild honey.

And what was his message? Verses 7-8 ... he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptised you with water, but He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit".

Do you see that? This great man realised there was One who was far greater than him. He wants to fade into the background. John doesn't want the limelight or the spotlight to

fall on John. No way. He wants it to fall on the One he represents, the one he's preparing the way for. Not the messenger BUT the Messiah.

John then, had the privilege of being nothing more than a signpost. Directing eyes and minds and hearts, directing everyone's attention to Him and Him alone.

Listen. The most amazing privilege we have, apart from knowing Christ ourselves, is to be signposts to Him. Directing others to Jesus, the Messiah. And so we catch a glimpse of Jesus the Messiah.

Scene 1 A Signpost.

Scene 2, A STATEMENT. And what a statement it is!

John's done his job well. He's prepared the way for the Messiah. Now the Messiah comes. He arrives from Nazareth verse 9. I mean Nazareth of all places. It's despised and disdained by everyone. Nothing good ever comes from there. WRONG! Something good did come from there. Goodness personified came from there.

Just in case you didn't realise, God does things quite differently from us. He likes to spring a few surprises just to keep us on our toes and to remind us who's actually God.

And so, Jesus comes from Nazareth. It's unthinkable BUT true. And He goes to the Jordan River and there He's baptised by John.

Now just think about this for just a second. Jesus is 30 years of age. Born in Bethlehem of Judea. Raised in Nazareth. Worked as a carpenter. He's been waiting and waiting for His hour to come and now it has.

His public ministry, His heavenly work on earth is about to commence. A ministry and a work that will shake and shape the whole of history and transform the eternity of all who believe in Him.

And listen, that's what His baptism is about. He lays down His chisel and hammer, wipes the sawdust from His clothes, closes the door of His carpenter's shop, leaves home and family and friends and walks 20 miles, He goes down into the river and He's baptised by John.

And that's when it happens. As He comes out of the water, drenched and dripping, the heavens open, the Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove. And from the excellent glory a voice booms. It's the voice of His heavenly Father. (verse 11) "This is my beloved Son ..."

Listen. How do we know that Jesus was the Son of God? Because Mark says so? Because I say so? Because you say so? Because some Apostle or prophets or pastor or preacher says so? NO! WHY? Because God the Father says so.

And so, a Signpost and a statement.

## **Good News For a Bad World - 4**

### **Mark 1:2-14 (2)**

Last time we began looking at Mark 1:2-14.

There are four scenes. Scene 1, we have a Signpost... his name is John the Baptist. He's directing everyone's attention to Jesus. Scene 2, a Statement... Right at the beginning of the public ministry of Christ, His heavenly Father declares Him to be His beloved Son, the One He's well pleased with.

And so, a signpost and a statement.

Scene 3, has to do with A SIEGE.

Verses 12-13 "And immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him".

Note this if you would. We might call verses 9-11 a mountain top experience. What a blessing. BUT listen. IMMEDIATELY after such a blessing there's a vicious attack.

We go from the mountain top, right down into the valley in a matter of minutes. The baptism and then the battle.

Here's the lesson. We need to be extra careful and watchful and prayerful after times and seasons of blessing. WHY? Because that's when the enemy of our soul is likely to launch his assaults. So it was with Jesus and so it is with us.

Now if you compare what we're told here with the other Gospel writers, you'll find that Satan tried to trip Him and tempt Him from every possible angle.

BUT Jesus resisted every single temptation. He was tempted and tested in all points like us, yet without sin. He never succumbed, never gave in, never yielded. NOT even once. Tempted yes, tried yes, BUT overtaken NO! He was victorious.

You see the Father had just said He was His Son. Now in the conflict of battle, He proves it.

Listen. You want to be better than you are, so you try harder and you turn over a new leaf and make all sorts of resolutions. But you soon blow it AGAIN! Do you know what you need to do? You need to give your life over to the One who NEVER blew it. Ask Him to take charge, take control, take over. And let Him live His life through you.

Only He can break the stranglehold of sin. Only He can set us free. Free from the penalty of sin and free from the power of sin. Isn't that good news for baddies? Of course it is. And its good news for you and good news for me, because I'm afraid we're all baddies.

Well, the curtain lifts for the 4th and final scene - A SERMON

Verses 14-15 "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel".

You say what does all this kingdom stuff mean? Well it means a lot of things. BUT if you boil it all down, basically it means salvation.

To be part of the kingdom of God is to be under His Kingship and to enter into the realm of salvation.

And so here's Jesus preaching all about the kingdom. All about salvation. You want to know how to enter the kingdom, how to be part of God's kingdom, how to enjoy the blessings of salvation? Well here's how. Repent and believe.

Repent, acknowledge your sin and turn from your sin. Recognise your going the wrong way and with God's help turn round and start going the right way.

And believe. What's another word for believe? Trust. Don't trust yourself or your friends or your feelings. Don't trust in a church or in a system of religion. Trust in Him and what He's done for you. Throw yourself on Him.

That's the message Jesus preached and maybe that's the message you need to hear.

Mark 1:2-15 ... a Signpost, a Statement, a Siege and a Sermon. Four dramatic scenes and each one very good news for all baddies everywhere.

## Good News For a Bad World - 5

### Mark 1:15-28 (1)

Some years ago, Billy Graham was on a television talk show. At one point during the interview the evangelist said this: "If all of a sudden Buddha walked into this studio we'd all stand to our feet and applaud. If Gandhi came in, again we'd stand and applaud. If Mohamed appeared we'd do the same. BUT if Jesus Christ walked in right now, every single one of us would fall on the floor prostrate before Him. And here's why? (said Graham). Because when we come face to face with great men we want to acknowledge them. But when we come face to face with God we're forced to worship Him".

Well it's our amazing privilege to come face to face with Jesus in Mark's wonderful Gospel. And do we stand and applaud? No. We fall and worship. WHY? Because He's not just a good man or a great man, He's the God-man.

I guess Mark 1:2-28 are perhaps the busiest verses in all the Bible. Jesus is constantly on the move and on the go. And we see Him in a number of ways and each time we do, we bow and worship.

He's the Messiah, the anointed and promised One. He's the beloved and well pleasing Son of God. He's the victor who triumphs over Satan. And He's the greatest and simplest preacher ever. Today, Jesus the Leader. Next time, Jesus the Teacher.

To begin we see JESUS THE LEADER.

Here He is. He's about to shake and shape history. And so its vitally important that He has the right people around Him. Don't you think that's pretty crucial?

He needs the right team in place. The right team with the right qualifications and the right background and the right pedigree and the right training and the right education and the right look and the right style.

"Ok Jesus, whatever else you do make sure you chose carefully and slowly and wisely. Head up to Jerusalem. Pick the cream of the crop. The cleverest you can find. Born and bred, 'made to measure' team members. The right sort and the more the merrier". That's the advice we'd slip Him for free. True?

But guess where He heads? And guess who He selects? Verses 16-20 "... Simon and Andrew his brother ... James the son of Zebedee and John his brother ... "

It's unbelievable. He flies in the face of everyone's advice. He breaks all the rules. Not Jerusalem, but Galilee. I mean Galilee of all places. It's slap bang, right in the middle of nowhere.

And Simon. That's even worse. Look at him. Listen to him. He's a great big man with a great big loud mouth. He just can't seem to help himself. He opens his mouth before his brain's in gear. He speaks first and thinks later, at least he sometimes thinks later.

You say, "Well, what do you expect. After all, he's a rough and ready fisherman. He hangs out with all his big, brash, boisterous mates. Not Simon Peter Jesus. He's untameable and uncouth and undesirable and unsuitable and unusable".

And Andrew his brother. If Peter's loud, Andrew's the exact opposite. He's lived far too long under his brother's big shadow. He's got an inferiority complex. He's a background man. No leadership potential whatsoever. Too shy and too scared.

And James and John. Not those two. Not them as well. The sons of thunder. You look at them the wrong way and they go ballistic. They lose the rag at the drop of a hat. They're just like rumbling, grumbling, walking, talking human volcanoes.

And what's more, they think they're big shots with a dead pushy mother with dreams of grandeur for her two boys. A nightmare to handle.

"Jesus, if you want our take on it, steer well clear. Yes, they're good at fishing we give you that Jesus. They're good at making nets and mending boats. They're good at swearing and joking and sorting people out for a small fee. If you want some minders or some hit-men or some bodyguards, maybe they'll do the job, BUT forget this disciple thing, forget this Apostle business. It's a none starter! That's our advice. Take it or leave it. BUT we advise you to take it lock, stock and barrel.

BUT NO! Jesus doesn't need our advice. He doesn't need our input or our take on things. He sees past the raw material and sees the God given potential. He knows that it's the ordinary that God touches and takes and transforms.

To me THE key phrase is in verse 17, " ... follow Me and I'll MAKE you ... " I'll shape you, I'll mould you, I'll refine you and channel your strengths and work on your weaknesses. You see this isn't really about Simon or Andrew or James or John. This isn't really about them and what they're going to do. This is really about Jesus and what He's going to do in them and for them and through them and with them.

Isn't that wonderful? Can I say something to you? Our background and history and human abilities or lack of human abilities aren't the issue. THE issue is what He can make of us. Jesus the Leader.

## **Good News For a Bad World - 6**

### **Mark 1:15-28 (2)**

Last time we discovered that Mark chapter 1 was perhaps the busiest passage in all the Bible. We see Jesus in so many different lights. He's the Messiah, the anointed and promised One. He's the beloved and well pleasing Son of God. He's the victor who triumphs over Satan. He's the greatest and simplest preacher ever. And He's the Leader who takes and shapes a most unlikely team to shake and change the world.

To begin with today, it's JESUS THE TEACHER.

Verses 21-23. We find ourselves WHERE? In Capernaum. Capernaum was the headquarters of Christ's whole operation. It was the base for His early ministry.

Ok then, He's now in Capernaum and it's the Sabbath. It's Saturday morning and so He heads off to the Synagogue. And an opportunity comes His way. He's given the opportunity to speak. And He takes it.

Note that. Jesus is on the look out for and responds to God given opportunities.

And as He starts to teach, everyone's mesmerised. They can't believe it. They've never heard anything like it before.

You see they were used, every week, to some boring, rambling Rabbi, expounding what some other Rabbi thought about some other Rabbi's thinking. That was the norm. That was how it was. Week in, week out, month in, month out, for ever and a day.

BUT not this day. It was different. Jesus spoke with power and authority. There was a Divine stamp on this teacher and His teaching. It was as if God Himself was speaking. WOW!

Jesus was a Teacher. He came to declare the Word of God. He came with a message.

Listen. We must not minimise or dilute or lessen the importance of Bible teaching. If we lose sight of that we've lost it and we're in TROUBLE.

Alright. Jesus the Teacher.

Lastly JESUS THE KING.

Verses 24-28. Earlier we discovered that Jesus took on Satan. And there was only one loser and it wasn't Jesus. He won hands down. Now we find there's this confrontation between Jesus and these demons. They're called unclean spirits as opposed to God's HOLY Spirit. These are wicked, unclean, evil spirits.

And here's this poor man. He's possessed with a demon. And whenever he finds himself in the presence of Jesus, the demon inside him reacts. He screams "Leave us alone."

Notice (v24) this demon, or should I say these demons, because there's more than just one. These demons know exactly who Jesus is. "You're the Holy One of God!"

Do you see that? The forces of hell and darkness, when they come face to face with Jesus, understand precisely who He is.

Later on in the Bible we're told that, " ... the devils actually believe and tremble ... " Of course, they don't have saving faith. BUT they certainly believe certain facts about God and about Christ, so much so that they shake and shiver and tremble with fear. And rightly so.

Alright then, Jesus speaks and He speaks with the thunder of command and Kingly authority. Verse 25 "Be quiet! ..." Its the term be muzzled! Silence! Be quiet!"

And immediately Satan's demons have to bow in submission to the Sovereign voice of Jesus.

Well, there's a final wrestling (Verse 26). The few final tokens of struggle. The demons give one last wail. It's their swan song and then they leave.

And the people are dumbstruck and dumbfounded. They're amazed (verse 27). Jesus proves He has power over demons and devils and Satan. He's the King.

I don't know if you're like me. BUT if I'm reading a book I just can't wait to find out what happens in the end and so sometimes I take a sneaky look at the last page. Have you ever done that?

I want to remind you that if you take a look at the end of the book you'll find that Jesus is not only the Messiah and the Son and the Victor and the greatest preacher and teacher ever and the best ever leader. Best of all He's the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords. And we bow before Him and worship.

## Good News For a Bad World - 7

### Mark 2:1-14 (1)

Christopher Reeve was born on the 25 September 1952 in New York. As a child he learned piano. As a teenager he played in an orchestra. As a student he studied drama. And then he got his big break. This 6 foot 4 giant of a man became Superman. There he was, a massive 'S' on his chest always ready to save the universe from imminent disaster.

Well, after his Superman days he found a new passion. A passion for horses and horse-riding. And then he had his terrible accident. In 1995 he fell off his horse snapped his spinal cord and was left completely paralysed from the neck down.

Nine years later, at the age of 52, Christopher died of a heart-attack. The sad story of Christopher Reeve.

Here in Mark we have another sad story. The story of someone who might very well have been left paralysed, like Christopher Reeve, as a result of some tragic accident.

Thankfully though, this sad story has a much happier ending, because Jesus appears on the scene and this man's life is never the same again.

Alright let's come at Mark 2 from a number of different angles. To start with, we'll use the word FAME.

According to v1 we find ourselves in the town of Capernaum. Capernaum has become the headquarters of Jesus' early ministry. That's where He is. In a house in Capernaum. Peter's house. And this house was crammed to the door. Full to capacity (v2).

We need to understand, that at first Jesus was extremely popular. Actually, the first year of His ministry is known as the year of His popularity. People came from far and near to hear Him and see Him for themselves. Everywhere He went He was surrounded by throngs and throngs of people. Thousands of people.

Of course it didn't last long. Once they heard what He had to say they left. They enjoyed the miracles BUT they balked at the message.

So much so, that many of them left. And Jesus even asked His disciples on one occasion. "Are you going to leave as well?"

Listen. In case you didn't realise, people are very unpredictable. One minute they're for you and singing your praises and the next you can't see them for dust. They're gone.

That's why the Bible warns us not to put our trust in others and not to pin our hopes on any human. WHY? Because that's all they are. Human. The only One we can trust and depend on and pin all our hopes on is who? The unchanging, unchangeable God.

Well that's the story before us. Here's Jesus. He's the latest big thing in town. BUT not for very long. Soon He's history. Very quickly they're away looking for the next celebrity. So there's the first word, FAME.

Let me give a second word. FRUSTRATION.

We're introduced now to a paralytic. The man can't move. His whole body's gripped with paralysis.

Possibly the paralysis has even affected his speech because there's no mention here in Mark or any of the other Gospels that he ever said a single thing. So maybe he wasn't able to speak as well as not being able to move.

Here he is then. He's trapped. He's totally at the mercy of those around him. He can't do anything for himself.

Just for a moment put yourself in his shoes or should I say put yourself on his mat. Because that's where he's lying. On a mat.

He can't walk or run or work. He can't do anything. Someone has to feed him. Someone has to carry him. Someone has to clothe him. Someone has to clean him. Someone has to wash him. Someone has to care for his every need. And remember, there's no medical assistance to speak of.

He wakens up in the morning and hopes it's all just been a horrible, horrendous nightmare. And then, it hits him. It's not a dream. It's not even a nightmare. This is for real. His whole life, day in day out, week in week out, month in month out, year in year out for however long, his whole entire life has been this bed, this mattress. Everything just revolves around this measly mat. That's his world. This is it.

BUT it's even more tragic. Because I want you to understand the mentality of that day and generation. This man wasn't just stricken by physical paralysis, he's also crippled with emotional paralysis, which is a million times worse.

You see, most folk thought that sickness and illness was the result of sin. That's what the vast majority of people in that culture thought.

You remember John 9. Jesus passed someone who was blind and the disciples - get that - the disciples said, "Who sinned? This guy or his parents? Whose fault is it. This must be some kind of punishment".

Listen. Of course, we understand that as a result of the fall, as a result of sin, sickness and suffering has come into the world. We know that. BUT not all sickness is the direct result of sin. BUT the people back then didn't understand that.

And so he's in a right mess. He's stigmatised. Physically he's struggling and emotionally he's struggling big time, with the cruel, callous, cold, caustic attitudes of those around him. Their misconceptions and ignorance must've caused him such, such pain of mind and heart.

Listen. I'm afraid to tell you it still happens. We can make judgements and before we know it, we hurt a lot of people and make their situations far worse.

Well, that's certainly what happened to this man. Years and years and years of misery, all combined and compounded by insensitivity and stigma and pain. Marred and scarred in every possible way. How terribly frustrating!

Thankful that's not the end of the story. Because after Fame and Frustration we have two more words. Friendship and Forgiveness. This man is blessed by having some great friends and he encounters Jesus Christ and he enjoys His forgiveness. And that's what we'll think about next time.

## Good News For a Bad World - 8

### Mark 2:1-14 (2)

Last time we began looking at the second chapter of Mark's Gospel. We found ourselves in the town of Capernaum. And guess what? Jesus is in town. And people have come from all over the place to see Him and hear for themselves. And we used the word Fame. We're right in the middle of what's called the year of popularity as far as the ministry of Christ is concerned.

And then, we come across a poor paralysed man. He can't move. You see, his whole existence is a little mat. A tiny mattress. That's his life. That's his entire world. And the word we used was the word Frustration.

And so Fame and Friendship. We pick up the story again today and the next word is FRIENDSHIP.

This poor paralytic had a group of friends. Wonderful friends. Thoughtful friends. Faithful friends. And these friends take him to Jesus. And Mark tells us that as they approach the house, they can't get anywhere near the place. It's bulging and bursting at the seams. There's hardly room to move.

And so, they come up with an idea. They climb onto the flat roof and they start to chip away at the tiles. These are good friends and kind friends but they are also persistent and determined friends. They don't give up easily.

Imagine the scene from inside. Now there's a great big gap in the ceiling and slowly but surely they lower this guy down through the hole. And finally, the mat drops onto the floor, right in front of Jesus.

Listen. The Bible tells us that friendship, true friendship, Christian friendship is a wonderful blessing from God. In fact, it says we should treasure and cherish such friendship.

And of course, friends can help us in a whole host of ways, but the best help they can be to us, is to bring us closer to Jesus.

I wonder what kind of friend are you? Are you a mat carrying friend? Do you lift those who're in need and take them in the direction of Christ?

Let me give you another word. FORGIVENESS.

In the midst of all of this Jesus speaks some wonderful words of hope. He's surrounded by a crowd of people and lots of activity but still He speaks lovingly and caringly and tenderly and PERSONALLY. Isn't that just so typical of Jesus.

You see, Jesus is a personal Saviour. Would you remember that you're not just a number to Him or a statistic, but a person. He knows you and cares for you as an individual. Well, this man certainly was a precious person to Jesus.

And according to verse 5 Jesus then pronounces a Royal pardon. "... Son, your sins are forgiven you".

If you read the Old Testament you'll discover that the promised One, the Messiah who was to come would have power and authority.

In fact, He'd demonstrate His power and authority over death and over demons and over nature and over the elements.

And of course Jesus had such power and such authority. The reason? He was the Messiah, the promised One, the One who was to come.

Well, here again we see His power and authority this time over disease and sickness and paralysis.

BUT there's something else. According to the prophet Isaiah and the prophet Ezekiel, the promised One, the coming One, the Messiah would also have saving power and authority. He'd be able to forgive sin and grant salvation.

And once more, Jesus does just that. He gives this man that which he needs more than anything else. Forgiveness of sins.

Ok, Fame, Frustration, Friendship and Forgiveness.

Lastly, FOCUS.

At first the focus is very much on this man and his four friends. Now the focus shifts to who? To Jesus Himself. He takes centre stage. And those who witness what was going on (verse 12) " ... were amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'"

"WOW! We've never seen the likes of this before in our entire lives".

In fact, if you go through the different Gospel accounts you'll discover several statements where we catch a little glimpse of people's amazement of Jesus.

You remember, after His sermon in the Synagogue they couldn't believe how He taught. Unlike the Scribes and Pharisees. His ministry was altogether different. It was accompanied by a sense of heaven and the hush of eternity. And they were amazed.

And then, He calmed the raging storm and spoke to the wind and the waves. And once more they were amazed.

Here and elsewhere, they were amazed at His healing power. And even more than that, they were amazed at His forgiving and saving power.

Aren't you glad to know, that Jesus has forgiving and saving power. It was certainly good news for the guy in these verses.

Well, there we have a summary of this wonderful episode in the life and times of Jesus:

Fame, Frustration, Friendship, Forgiveness and Focus.

## **Good News For a Bad World - 9**

### **Mark 2:13-28 (1)**

Maybe you remember what happened on July 21 1969. That was when Apollo 11 landed on the moon. And as Neil Armstrong climbed down the ladder he spoke those now famous words, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind". And of course, we all marvelled at what was happening.

In fact, a newspaper reporter at the time said this, "It's the greatest event in human history."

Well, it certainly was a great event, but it wasn't THE greatest event in human history.

THE greatest event in human history wasn't the day man walked on the moon, but the day God walked on the earth. That WAS THE greatest event in human history. Everything else pales into insignificance in comparison. It really does.

Well it's been our privilege to walk beside Jesus, as He walked on earth.

OK, today we're going to find Jesus bursting through all the barriers and breaking all the rules. Not God's barriers or God's rules, BUT men's barriers and men's rules. You see with Him there are no 'no go' areas.

In Mark 2:13-28 Jesus does something that's totally unbelievable and unthinkable and He even says something that's totally unpalatable as far as those around Him are concerned. And that's how we'll approach this passage.

Alright, to begin with here's JESUS DOING SOMETHING TOTALLY UNBELIEVABLE.

As per usual great crowds of people are coming to hear Him preach and teach. And suddenly, as He passes by the receipt of custom, He fixes His gaze on someone by the name of Levi. And Jesus stops and speaks. Notice what it says in verse 2:14: "As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him."

Now let me say a few things about Levi. Levi was just one of his names. He had another name. His other name was Matthew.

And we're told that he was sitting, working in the tax office. You say, "What does that mean?" Well, it simply means he was a high flying, leading tax collector.

Now remember Israel was under Roman occupation. So that means, Levi is a Jew who's working for the Roman authorities. He's collecting taxes from his fellow Jews to give to this occupying force. Do you see the difficult dynamics of that?

Now then, how do you think people felt about Levi? Do you think he was popular? No way. Being a tax collector was bad enough. Nobody likes tax collectors. Of course not.

BUT being a tax collector, for the hated, dreaded Romans was a million times worse. You see, he was a traitor. A turn-coat. He'd sold himself out to the enemy. He'd sided with the oppressor of his very own nation and that just wasn't acceptable.

And so, things aren't looking all that great for Levi, are they? And then, add to that the real possibility of Levi being a right cheat. A crook. A deceiver.

Most tax collectors were. They charged far more than the Romans demanded and the Romans never saw it. They just kept it for themselves. That was the norm.

And no doubt, Levi was like that. And the people knew exactly what he was up to and so they hated him. Here then is this scoundrel.

He's a man consumed with a love for money and material things. The material man.

But listen. When Jesus speaks with a voice of command, "Follow Me." Levi gets up and he leaves it all behind and he starts to follow Jesus.

As a bit of a footnote let me say that this encounter with Jesus marked a drastic, radical change in Levi's attitude to things.

I think it's wonderful to read through his Gospel and see how often he talks about the danger of materialism and the danger of getting caught up with money.

In fact it seems that every time Jesus spoke about the danger of money, he was the one who latched onto it immediately and made sure he got it down for all of us to learn from his lifetime of mistakes.

He never forgot the trap he fell into and the danger he succumbed to. And so he flashes the red light of warning as often as he possibly can.

So here he is. He gets up and he goes with Jesus. He becomes a follower of Christ. He holds nothing back. It's all or nothing.

OK, the main point I want you to grasp, is this. Jesus not only stopped and spoke to this despised tax collector, He had dealings with him and He even called him to be an intricate part of His team.

Rough and ready fishermen and now a tax-collector. He goes to the reject, reaches out to the cheat, draws near to the traitor, challenges the thief and calls the sinner.

I wonder, are we respecter of persons. Jesus wasn't. He had a heart for people, whoever they were and wherever they were from. And so must we. Jesus does something unbelievable.

## Good News For a Bad World - 10

### Mark 2:13-28 (2)

I read recently the story of a young person who became a Christian. The friend who led her Christ suggested that she started to read through the Gospel of Mark.

A couple of weeks later she came back and asked her friend for a book on Church history. "Why do you want a book on church history?" "Because (she said) I want to find out when Christians stopped being like Jesus.

Before you do anything or say anything that would be good to ask ourselves. What would Jesus do? What would He say? How would He act and react in this kind of situation?

We're looking today at Mark chapter 2. Last time we noticed that Jesus did something Unbelievable. He called a tax collector to be part of His leadership team.

Now JESUS DOES SOMETHING UNTHINKABLE.

Jesus not only stops and speaks and calls Levi to follow Him. Get this. He then goes with Levi to his home and sits down and eats with him and all his tax collecting friends. And that's totally and absolutely unthinkable.

And the Scribes and Pharisees, when they get wind of it, they're mad.

Verses 15-17 " ... it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, 'How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?'"

Remember if you would, that in their culture eating and drinking was THE thing to do with friends. That's where relationships were built and established and strengthened.

So when we read that Jesus was eating with sinners that was it! They saw red right away. They were so possessed with suspicion and driven by pride that they just can't stomach this.

Now let me highlight an important lesson very quickly. Don't you admire Levi's witnessing technique here? He invites his friends for a meal to introduce them to Jesus. You see, he longs for them to meet Him and make contact with Him. And it happens in the context of hospitality.

Isn't that a wonderful pattern for us to take on board.

Alright, here's Jesus in the presence of these tax collectors and sinners. And of course, it really riled the religious leaders.

BUT Jesus was prepared for that. Misunderstood, misrepresented and mistreated even, BUT still He put Himself in amongst these sinners.

He didn't withdraw or opt out or shut Himself away somewhere. He didn't keep everyone at arms-length just in case He got contaminated. No. He engaged people. Very much so. He never compromised as we'll see in just a second, BUT still He engaged people.

Ok, No 'no go' areas with Jesus. He does something unbelievable and unthinkable.

Lastly, SOMETHING UNPALATABLE.

Now I want you to notice what Jesus says to these leaders. He doesn't beat about the bush or water things down or tickle their ears or try to be politically correct. NO! He's tender BUT He's also extremely truthful.

Verse 17. "When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Please underline the fact that Jesus isn't afraid to use the S word and the R word. He talks about sin and repentance.

Listen. Whenever we present the Gospel, we always need to be truthful. Hard though that is at times. We must gulp and go for it.

Jesus was truthful.

Now then, can you imagine the reaction? They're tut tutting about these SINNERS. And from no-where, Jesus takes the rug out from under them. He pulls no punches.

"I've come not for the righteous BUT to sinners. Not you, BUT them. If you think you're alright. If you think you're spiritually healthy. If you think you're fine you'll never come to Me. BUT if you see yourself in need, if you see yourself to be spiritually sick, if you see yourself a sinner, you'll run to ME. And when you run to Me I'll be here waiting."

Listen. Do you realise that you were made by God and made for God and until you have a relationship with God, there's a vacuum inside that nothing and no-one else can fill. And when you feel your emptiness, then you'll find that Jesus is just exactly for you. He's the missing piece. Can I invite you, to come by faith to Jesus Christ and ask Him to take charge? Trust Him as the Saviour of your soul and make Him Lord of your life. And then, Levi's story will be your story.

Something Unbelievable ... He invites a tax collector to join His discipleship team.  
Something Unthinkable ... He sits down and eats and makes friends with sinners.  
Something Unpalatable ... He calls on us to acknowledge our sin and repent of our sin.

## Good News For a Bad World - 11

### Mark 3:13-35

Let me tell you what happened on 15th February 1921. In a New York hospital a doctor by the name of Evan O'Neil Kane diagnosed an enflamed appendix.

He'd performed this operation well over 4 thousand times in his 37 years as a surgeon. But this time was different. This time he'd use a local anaesthetic.

And so the patient was prepared for surgery, the local anaesthetic was given, the operation began, the appendix were removed and the wound was stitched up and bandaged over.

And amazingly, during the whole procedure the patient felt only minor discomfort. He recovered quickly and was discharged in just 2 days.

Dr Kane had managed THE very first ever operation under local anaesthetic.

Well, what I didn't tell you was, that the patient he operated on was himself.

You see, no-one else wanted to chance being the guinea pig. And so he was left with no other alternative, the doctor became the patient and he went for it. Isn't that some story?

But listen. There's an even better story than that. There's something far more wonderful than the doctor becoming the patient and its this. God becoming man. That really was an all time first. And of course, that's Mark's fantastic theme

I want you to notice at least four things from Mark 3:13-35.

To begin, notice THERE'S SOMETHING HOPEFUL HERE. Very much so.

Verses 13-19. Jesus calls His twelve Apostles. And we have the list of names: Peter, James and John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Thadaeus, Simon and of course Judas. A twelve man team.

We're told HE CALLED the twelve to Him (verse 13). Do you see that? They didn't, off their own bat come to Him. NO! He selected them. He chose, He called, He appointed them.

In actual fact, later on, Jesus looked them straight in the eye, He eyeballed them and said: John 15:16 " ... You didn't choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you ...".

It's absolutely amazing to me, just how diverse the Apostles of Jesus were. It's mind blowing.

Peter was possibly the oldest of them all. He was extremely impulsive. Rugged, brash, speak first think later Peter. Open mouth insert foot. He talked before his brain was in gear constantly.

Whereas John was young. Just a teenager and he was quiet and contemplative and cautious and sensitive. The apostle of tenderness and love. Both contrasting characters. Opposite ends of the spectrum.

Nathaniel or Bartholomew was always ready to believe. He simply accepts what Jesus says, as fact from the very word go. Full of faith. Whereas, Thomas was constantly filled with doubt. Mr Pessimist. Again two contrasting characters. Faithful and fearful.

Matthew was a tax collector. He worked for the Roman authorities. He's seen by the Jews as an arch traitor to the cause of Judaism.

Whereas, Simon the zealot was a radical political thinker. He wanted to overthrow the Roman occupying forces at all costs. He'd stop at nothing. He was a terrorist.

And yet, just let this sink in, despite these glaring, unbelievable, stark differences, Jesus took them wonderfully and beautifully blended them together and used them to His own praise and glory.

What a fantastic thought. Doesn't that inspire hope in your heart? We're all different. Different personalities and backgrounds and tastes and gifts and abilities. None of us are the same. We're completely different. And yet, we're all essential parts of the body of Christ and God has a specific niche for us and a special role for us to play. That's hopeful isn't it?

Again, think of the Apostles. They lacked so much understanding. Time and time again they came to Jesus, and Jesus has to repeatedly explain what He said, and break it down into tiny little chunks and still they couldn't get it.

They lacked humility. They were constantly fighting, and bickering among themselves. And the argument always seemed to centre around one single issue. Can you believe this? Who was the greatest? Who was the best? Who was number one?

And then, they lacked faith. How often does Jesus say to them, "O you of little faith ...".

And of course, they lacked commitment. At the moment of crisis, they all forsook Him and fled. BUT still Jesus persevered with them. He bore with them. He persisted with them. He was patient with them.

Please don't ever fall into the trap of thinking the people in the Bible were spiritual super-saints, because they weren't. Not by any stretch of the imagination. BUT God over-ruled and proved Himself to BE bigger than them and stuck with them.

There's definitely something hopeful here.

And listen the key to it all is what? According to Mark 3:14 Jesus appointed twelve disciples that they might, " ... BE WITH HIM ... ".

That was the key to everything. Intimacy with Him. It wasn't what they knew, it was who they were with. He rubbed off on them and everything flowed from that.

Whatever else you do, cultivate and nurture your walk with Christ. Put that at the very top of the list.

You get like the company you keep, don't you? Well the more time you spend in His company, the more like Him you'll become and that's what we want isn't it? That's what matters at the end of the day.

Ok, something Hopeful. Very hopeful.

## **Good News For a Bad World - 12**

### **Mark 3:13-35 (2)**

Apparently Shakespeare is THE most quoted Englishman. Well, that being so, let me quote what THE most quoted Englishman said. Once upon a time, he was asked a question. The question was this, "Who do you think was the greatest person who ever lived?" Without any hesitation he gave his response, "The greatest person who ever lived, was Jesus Christ, my Saviour."

Well, whether you're into Shakespeare or not, I hope you're conclusion's the same as his.

The Gospel of Mark is all about the greatest person who ever lived. Jesus Christ, the Saviour. It all revolves around Him. Who He is and what He has done and what He can still do.

Last time we looked at Mark chapter 3:13-19 which was all about something Hopeful. Jesus persevering with such a mixed bunch of disciples.

Today we come to Mark 3:20-35.

To begin with, there's SOMETHING AWFUL.

The religious leaders had all they could take of Jesus. The people had plenty of time for Him at least at this point in His ministry (verse 20). Crowds and crowds went to wherever He was. But the religious crowd had no time for Him whatsoever. In fact, they're out now, to get rid of Him once and for all.

And notice what they do? Here's their tack. Let's attack His credibility. And that's exactly what happens. They start a whispering campaign against Him. Well, it's not really much of a whispering campaign. More like a tannoy announcement.

They accuse Him of being in league with, in partnership business with Satan. He's not on God's side or on our side at all. He's actually an enemy in disguise.

Isn't that some accusation? Here's the Son of the Living God. God Himself has already declared He's well pleased with Him. He has the stamp of heaven's approval on all that He's doing.

The only crime He's guilty of is healing the sick. Opening blinded eyes and deafened ears and touching crippled bodies and raising the dead.

BUT they don't want to know. They reject Him and hate Him and attack Him and lump Him with Satan. How Awful.

The Apostles hear the call and they immediately commit themselves. Whereas, they see what He's doing and hear what He's saying and they remove themselves.

Their heckles rise and their ears close and they turn away. They decide to go down the road of rejection.

Something Hopeful. Jesus takes and uses those we'd least expect.

Something Awful. To witness for yourself all the claims and miracles of Christ and turn away from Him.

Next, SOMETHING FEARFUL.

To those who have just rejected Him, Jesus utters some very solemn and fearful words.

Verses 28-30. "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation", because they said, "He has an unclean spirit."

Please notice where the stress is. All sins will be forgiven!

That's good news isn't it? There's forgiveness with God. God loves to forgive. He loves to show mercy. He loves to display His grace.

Can I say to you, there's no sin you could imagine that's stronger than His love. If we confess our sin, whatever it may be, then He will forgive and cleanse from all unrighteousness.

Jealousy can be forgiven. Anger and bitterness and envy can be forgiven. Every sin of omission can be forgiven. Every sin of commission can be forgiven.

Every sin bar one! One single exception. Listen. There's one sin God cannot and will not forgive and only one. One sin the blood of Jesus can't cleanse and only one. Do you know what it is? It's the sin of Christ rejection.

Alright. Something Hopeful. Jesus takes and uses those we'd least expect.

Something Awful. To witness for yourself all the claims and miracles of Christ and turn away from Him.

Something Fearful. Rejection of Jesus is unforgivable.

Lastly. Something WONDERFUL. We can be part of His family.

Verses 31-35. "Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

Have you ever wondered what it must've been like to live in the same home as Jesus. To watch Him and talk with Him and touch Him and play with Him and grow up with Him. Just to be part of His earthly family. What a privilege.

And yet, according to Jesus Himself, those of us who trust Him and obey Him and are part of His spiritual family are even closer than those who were in His earthly family.

Isn't that wonderful. They knew Him for a few years. They belonged to that Galilean home and household for a short time. We know Him. We belong to Him forever.

I mean, how much closer to Jesus can you get than His mother. He was part of her. Yes conceived by the Holy Spirit. BUT Mary's virgin born child.

No-one could be any closer. WRONG! We're closer. That's what He says here. Isn't that fantastic? The spiritual connection is infinitely closer and stronger and more intimate than any earthly tie.

Something Hopeful. Jesus takes and uses those we'd least expect. A good job for that!

Something Awful. To witness for yourself all the claims and miracles of Christ and turn away from Him.

Something Fearful. Rejection of Jesus is unforgivable.

Something wonderful. We can be part of His family.