

Mark 1:21-28 - Amazing Jesus

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Date: 26 January 2025

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[0 : 00] We're grateful for Jen and the work she does, and she's going to come and read God's word for us. Jen, over to you. Good morning. Turn to Mark chapter 1, and if you've closed your Bible, it's on page 1002.

Verse 21. They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

Just then, a man in the synagogue, who was possessed by an impure spirit, cried out, What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.

Be quiet, said Jesus sternly. Come out of him. The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were so amazed that they asked each other, What is this, a new teaching, and with authority?

He even gives orders to the impure spirits, and they obey him. News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. Amen.

[1 : 16] Thank you, Jen. Let's pray as we come to God's word. Let's pray. Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we pray now, please, that you might just quieten our hearts and our minds.

We pray that we might be good at listening to your words. We know that your Holy Spirit, who inspired these scriptures, is now at work in our hearts and lives, and we pray, therefore, that we might hear your voice, and that you might challenge us, rebuke us, correct us, equip us to live lives for your praise and glory.

In Jesus' name. Amen. I don't know whether you saw in the news this week, but Alex Rudakabana was sentenced this week to 52 years in prison for the murder of three young girls and the attempted murder of 10 more in the Southport stabbings.

You might remember the story from August this year. Axel burst into a summer dance club, and he was armed with a kitchen knife, and he brutally stabbed 13 people.

According to the reports, one of his victims, he stabbed 122 times as he bludgeoned them to death. He pleaded guilty in court, but he showed absolutely no remorse.

[2 : 49] In fact, he was removed from the courtroom for calling out that he was glad he did it. You see, and I start there. I know it's a terrible story, but I start there because the uncomfortable truth, for anybody who wants to think seriously about life and its purpose, the uncomfortable truth is that we live in a world where there is a thread of unspeakable evil.

A thread that no matter what we do, we can never quite conquer it. So whether that's the horrors of the Southport stabbings in the summer, whether it's the terrors of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, whether it's the gang violence in our own city, goodness has an enemy, and we never defeat him. Over the last three weeks, we've been looking at the beginning of Mark's gospel, and we've found that Mark is making an outrageous claim. He claims that this man that he knew, Jesus, is the Christ, the Messiah.

He is none other than the divine Son of God in human flesh, and that the arrival of this man he knew, he met, he walked with, that man, his arrival is the beginning of a new creation, a new world, a new beginning, as he puts it in verse 1.

The kingdom of heaven is near, says Jesus in chapter 1, verse 15. But, and here's the thing for us this morning, this is our territory for us this morning, if that's true about Jesus, if Jesus really is the person bringing in a new creation, the person who's bringing in the kingdom of God, then the question for us this morning is, can he conquer evil?

[4 : 33] Can he conquer evil? He has to be able to do something about this thread of evil that runs through our world that no one has been able to conquer, to be the person that we are longing for and crying out for.

You know, for Jesus to be good news, he has to be able to defeat the bad news. We can be more specific than that, can't we? If we are Bible readers, we know the location of this thread of evil that runs through the world.

We know that it doesn't just run through the world out there, it also runs through our hearts in here, that none of us are the people that we would like to be, or could have been.

The Bible says that that finds its source in a person, a spiritual being called Satan or the devil. The Bible doesn't give us much detail about the origins of the devil, he is a created being, a fallen angel, but how and when and why we can only speculate.

But Satan bursts onto the scene of human history in Genesis 3 as an enemy of all that is good. And in sort of act one, scene one of this creation, Satan turns up and persuades Adam and Eve that God is not good, his word is not to be trusted, and they should rebel against him.

[5 : 54] And so since that moment, Satan's hatred of God, his opposition to God's glory, his desire to ruin creation, to destroy people and remove joy from the world, has been writ large across human history.

Murder, adultery, war, genocide, selfishness, all their roots come back to this point in Genesis 3. Now, all of that is really important, because what you think the problem is, right, determines the solution that you look for, doesn't it?

That just works at a really simple level, doesn't it? If you think you've got a problem with your teeth, you don't go to the optician, you go to the dentist. If you've got a problem with your car, you don't drive it to the vets, you take it to a garage. So what you think the problem is in the world determines the kind of solution that you're looking for.

A couple of weeks ago, I had a visit from Brent Council. The lady who came to visit me, there were a couple of them. One of them was Brent Council's Climate Action Partnership Manager, a very grand title.

We were chatting, it was a nice chat. She was talking about some of the work that they were doing, and she was offering me help with my sermons and with the youth ministry in the church. I thought I was very kind of you, and I was wondering what kind of help she was offering.

[7 : 09] She goes, well, I've got some good ideas for your sermons. And as we talked, it became clear to me that she was making an assumption that we both agreed what the big problem was in the world.

Climate change. That was the big problem as far as she was concerned. And my job was to teach you guys how to deal with that problem. I said, no, I actually don't think that's my job.

Because actually the big problem in the world is not climate change, is it? The big problem in the world is that there is a thread of evil spinning out of the devil's lies leading to sin, death, and hell itself.

Those are the enemies, aren't they? And so the solution cannot be education. It cannot be a better government. It cannot be better healthcare, even though all of those things are great.

The solution can't be, you know, smarten up, pull your act together. We need someone, don't we? We need someone who has power. Power over sin. We need someone who is able to rise from the dead and conquer death itself.

[8 : 13] We need someone who has the power to crush Satan. Mark says, I've met that guy. His name is Jesus. Let me tell you his story.

So come with me to the passage that we read this morning and let me try and show you these things about Jesus. Notice that Mark claims that Jesus is amazing. If you look at verse 22, everyone is amazed at him.

In verse 27, the people were all so amazed. They're asking, what is this? As they listen to him. And then at the very center of the passage in verse 25, Jesus gives an instruction to an unclean demonic spirit and that spirit obeys instantly.

You see, in Mark 1, if you want these verses in four words, amazing Jesus defeats Satan. That's the four words of the passage. Amazing Jesus defeats Satan, which makes him just the kind of savior we need.

Look at it in a bit more detail with me. If you look down at the passage, it starts, doesn't it, in verse 21, on a Saturday in a synagogue in Capernaum. Capernaum is a small city in the north of Israel. [9 : 21] And like a lot of Jewish settlements, it contained a synagogue, literally a meeting place. They were designed as a place for the dispersed Jews to gather, to come, to listen to the Old Testament, being read, taught, to pray, set prayers, and to appeal to God for the restoration of Jerusalem.

It's worth knowing, as we get into it, that synagogues are developed in the exile and then continued as the nation sort of spread around the region. And they were built wherever there were more than 10 male Jews, adult males.

This particular synagogue, we're told by Luke, was paid for and built by a sympathetic Roman centurion. They didn't build them to look like the temple. They were built as sort of halls or meeting spaces.

They were facing Jerusalem and they had a sort of a loft, not unlike our balcony here, where probably the women sat. What happened was there was a box or a cupboard which contained the Old Testament scrolls.

And as they gathered, the synagogue ruler presiding over things would lead the synagogue in the saying of the Shema. The Lord our God, the Lord is one, they would say. And then he would hand a Old Testament scroll to someone who was qualified to read and teach that week, a teacher of the law or a scribe.

[10 : 42] It's not hard, as you imagine, is it, to see some of the similarities between how local church developed. In fact, attending synagogues and preaching the gospel from the Old Testament was Paul's pattern of church planting at first.

Although often he got kicked out and had to find somewhere else to meet. Now, I don't know what it was exactly like, but I can imagine that the experience of being in the synagogue on a Saturday was mixed, right?

Some weeks, the attendant handed the scroll to someone and he thought, oh my goodness, no. Please not them. We're going to be here all afternoon. You know you're in for a late dinner for the child moaning next to you.

Last time he spoke, I didn't understand a word. And this week, when it happens, in Mark chapter one, verse 22, today it's different. Because today, the attendant takes the scroll out of the box and hands it to Jesus.

And Jesus is the one teaching. And Jesus is amazing, amazing Jesus. The people, verse 22, were amazed at his teaching because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

[11 : 49] Verse 27, the people were so amazed at this, they were asking each other, what is this? A new teaching and with authority. It's fascinating, isn't it? Mark doesn't tell you really what Jesus said.

I think his summary in verse 15 is still what he is leading us to think is the message of Jesus. But Mark is not giving you any detail here. He's not telling you what scroll was handed to Jesus. He's not telling you how long he spoke for. He's not telling you whether he gave any pithy stories or illustrations. Instead, what he wants you to notice is that Jesus' message came with an authority. Jesus commanded attention. You knew when Jesus spoke, you had to listen. In other words, it's not so much just what Jesus said as who it was saying it that made him stand out.

That's what made it so different. I don't know whether this was the case for you, and maybe it's the case for you today if you're still in school. You have school assemblies, right? And my experience of school assemblies at secondary school was that you were gathered into this hall, you were sat on the floor, and you were made to look up to a stage which is impossibly high, and you were to listen to a senior teacher who it looked like they didn't really want to be there, talking about something that they had absolutely no idea about, and you were forced to listen, not because of anything engaging that they were saying, but because the hall was lined by other teachers who were looking not at the person on the stage, but were looking at you, and if you weren't listening, they pulled you out and you were in trouble.

[13 : 20] That was my experience. Is that still what happens today? Is that still what it's like? Maybe they let you sit on a chair nowadays because we're so modern. But one week, it was different in our school, because for this particular assembly, they asked Peter Shilton to come.

Now I know that hardly any of you in this room know who Peter Shilton is. Put your hand up if you know who Peter Shilton is. Yes, about four or five of you, the rest of you.

I want to suggest to you, you Google it now, but I'm not going to suggest that because you'll get on your phones. Peter Shilton, I can't believe I'm telling you this. Peter Shilton was England's goalkeeper in the 1980s.

I don't know how you didn't even know that. He was the guy with the hand of God with Maradona, yeah? Maradona scored a goal with his hand, pushed it over Peter Shilton's head. And he came to our assembly.

And we were in awe as he kind of took to the stage. And it was because of who he was. It was like, finally, someone is coming to speak who might actually be worth listening to.

[14:28] His identity backed up his message so we were going to listen. Now, in a sense, but in a more profound way, that's exactly what's going on here. Amazing Jesus is speaking and it's his identity which gives power to what he's saying.

Now, you know that because the word amazing or astounding is for Mark a code word for the identity of Jesus. In Mark's book, you know when somebody has got who Jesus is because they are amazed or astounded or even sometimes fearful or terrified.

They stand back in wonder. Come with me on a bit of a paper chase. It will keep you awake. Turn to chapter two, verse 12. And you notice that everyone is amazed when they see the lame man walk. This is, oh, who is this? This is someone we've never met before. This is like no one else. Who is he? We're amazed. Over the page in chapter four, verse 41, the disciples are with Jesus in the boat and he calms the storm and they are terrified.

They are in awe of this man. Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him. In chapter five, verse 20, Jesus restores the demon-possessed man and we are told in chapter five, verse 20, that all the people were amazed.

[15:48] Who is this guy? In chapter six, verse 51, the disciples are completely amazed when Jesus walks on the water towards them, climbs in the boat and calms the sea.

This is astonishing. Who walks on the waves? Who calms the sea? In chapter seven, verse 37, the people, we're told in chapter seven, verse 37, are overwhelmed with amazement.

He has done everything well, they said. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. It explains why, and maybe you've wondered this, at the end of Mark's gospel, it ends in a very strange way.

Mark ends his gospel with the women running from the tomb, terrified and afraid, trembling and bewildered. Chapter 16, verse eight, trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb.

Mark's ending is so strange that they've added another ending to it to try and make it make more sense. But actually he ends in chapter 16, verse eight, because that is his code word.

[16:56] They've got it. They understand who Jesus is. They understand that this is God in flesh. And back in Mark chapter one, verse 22, that's exactly what's going on as he preaches in the synagogue.

The people are suddenly conscious that the person addressing them is not just another teacher.

This is God in a body, his identity backing up what he's saying.

And we know we have to listen. You know, they've been praying, you imagine, can't you? They've been praying these prayers for the restoration of Jerusalem, for the coming of God's kingdom. And all of a sudden Jesus is there and he's going, I am he.

The kingdom of heaven is near. Repent and believe the good news. The thing that you're longing for, the thing that we've been praying for, it's me, it's me, says Jesus. We're going to see this focus on Jesus' words several times in Mark's book.

But the way that these verses are arranged here are to point you to the power of Jesus' speech. I want to try and show you, and this is quite complicated, so stay with me, that the passage works, if you like, in concentric circles out from verse 25.

[18:05] It's a chiasm, if you want the fancy word for it, but it really means that the beginning and the end mirror one another so that verse 25 is right at the centre. So if you work your way out from verse 25, you'll notice that in verse 24 and 26, you've got the unclean spirit speaking and shrieking.

Then in verse 22 and verse 27, you've got the amazement of the people. And in verse 21 and 28, you've got details about the geography. So it goes, geography, amazement, demons screeching

and speaking, and Jesus' words right in the very middle, verse 25.

And the point is this, Jesus speaks with the power of God, and stuff happens when he speaks. Now, perhaps you're like me, and you hear that, and you think, that must have been incredible. I would have loved to be there. In fact, I can't imagine anything like that. I would have longed to be there. And there is a sense in that, isn't there?

There is something really unique about this. God in flesh. Jesus is the unique preacher of God's words. But what's fascinating, as you read on in the New Testament, is that the disciples don't go on to sort of bemoan the absence of Jesus in the church.

[19 : 28] They don't complain that they don't get this kind of Mark 1 experience anymore. In fact, actually, they seem to suggest that our experience, even together this morning, should be like this as we open God's word.

The apostle Peter, who is certainly one of those listening, he's Mark's primary witness, he says in his letter to the church, in 1 Peter 4 verse 11, he says this, if you're speaking in church, if you're preaching in church, you should speak as one who speaks the very word of God, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

It's the same when the apostle Paul tells Timothy to preach the word in 2 Timothy 4, in season and out of season, in the power of the spirit, you're to declare the word of God.

Because the word of God is breathed out by God himself, so much so that in a sense, even though this preacher is very, very, very much less than Jesus, right?

You know that. I am a weak, frail man who sins. But still our experience this morning should be that we are hearing God speak to us by his spirit.

[20 : 37] And you have to listen. Not because of me. And not because of my goodness or my words, but because as you open the word of God by the spirit of God, Jesus is addressing you.

And he is saying to you and me this morning, I am here. Repent and believe the good news. The kingdom of heaven is near. I am bringing the solution to sin and death and Satan.

Will you trust me? Will you listen to me? It means, doesn't it, that the primary application to us this morning is, will you listen?

Will you listen to Jesus? So important for us, isn't it? That the Lord Jesus Christ, he addresses the church, not so much in that like kind of fuzzy feeling that you've got in the back of your head or that little voice.

The primary means of Jesus addressing his church is in the gatherings of his church under the word of God. And the application is, listen.

[21 : 41] You know, preaching is a really weird thing. I know it's weird for you to sit and listen. We don't really do it in any other context, do we? It's weird for me, preaching. But Jesus uses the preaching of his word to address us, the author of life, speaking with the voice of God's words.

Amazing Jesus. Secondly then, defeats Satan. I think what happens next is probably the strangest part to our ears. Look down at verse 23. I'll read it to you again. Just then, a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, what do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. Amazingly, it's this impure spirit who seems to know exactly who Jesus is, both in his humanity, Jesus is the Jesus of Nazareth, but also in his divinity, he is the Holy One of God.

And there's something sort of involuntary, isn't there, about his declaration. It's as if he just kind of cries out just then. The presence of Jesus draws out the yelling of the impure spirit. Now in the story of the Bible, there is an intensity to demonic activity around the ministry of Jesus.

Demon possession is in the Gospels more than it is anywhere else in the Old or New Testament, which is exactly what you would expect, isn't it? Given that the mission of Satan in the Bible is to destroy God's world and rob him of glory, with the arrival then of the new creation in the Lord Jesus Christ, you can see this is the front line for Satan, can't you?

[23 : 10] So Satan throws his tanks, his missiles, his bravest soldiers into the fray. And over and over and over, Mark will tell you, it's to no avail. Jesus will not be defeated.

Now we need to be clear, don't we, the intensity of the action of Satan in the Gospels is not meant to mean that there is no such thing as demon possession, or that Satan has given up today.

But it does mean, doesn't it, that this is not mental illness that Mark is talking about. This is not a psychotic episode. This is not something that could be resolved by medication or by a good holiday.

Rather, rather this is an expression of Satan's personal hostility to Jesus Christ, through the sending of a spirit into an individual to seek to undermine Jesus and his mission.

So today, Satan's attack is, you know, it's not so much in cupboard doors swinging open, Satan has no truck in spooking you, right? He doesn't want to just make you jump.

[24 : 07] Instead, he wants to destroy all that is good. Satan longs to rob your confidence in Jesus. You see it behind the unspeakable events like Southport.

You see it in the lies that we are drawn to believe. Lies about where joy is found. Lies about where rest will be enjoyed. Lies about God's goodness, about his glory.

In Mark chapter three, which we're going to be looking at in a few weeks time, Satan is pictured as a strong man who owns a house, and he's locked everybody up in it. Right? And that's his picture of us. We are locked in to Satan's house.

We're sort of willing captives though. It's not like he's holding us against our will. We sort of want to be there. And so for us to be released from the house, not only does the Lord Jesus have to effectively call us in a way that we want to come out of the house, and we were looking at that last week, but also Jesus needs to bind the strong man who owns the house so that we can come out of the house.

And that's what's going on here. Jesus is the stronger man who binds Satan and robs him of people. And that's what's going on in verse 25.

[25 : 18] Be quiet, says Jesus sternly. Come out of him. And the impure spirit shakes the man violently, and he comes out with a shriek. Amazing Jesus defeats Satan.

I think it's worth slowing down just to make sure that we're understanding what's going on here. Sometimes people picture this battle between good and evil, between God and Satan, as if it's some kind of, you know, great cosmic powers slugging it out, and we're never quite sure what the outcome's going to be.

It's like kind of Tyson Fury versus Anthony Joshua, and you can work out which one's which if you'd like to. But, you know, that's not what's going on here, right? Right. Jesus Christ speaks, and he commands the defeat of the forces of evil.

Notice that Jesus speaks to the impure spirit, and it instantly, even against its own will, has to obey Jesus.

So that Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God, is able to give orders to the unclean spirits, and they do exactly what he says. You know, this isn't a battle. This is completely one-sided.

[26 : 24] This is a crushing defeat. So that this Jesus, this Jesus who addresses us now through the preaching of his word, this Jesus is able to bring in a new creation kingdom, a place of peace and joy.

Because not only can Jesus defeat your sin on the cross and provide for your forgiveness, not only has he risen from the dead to conquer death, but also he is victorious over Satan and his forces, saying the word and driving them out.

When Peter Shilton came to our assembly at school, I was probably in year eight or nine, and there was a kind of like, I don't know what you call it, like in a hustle at school when he arrived, you know, he pulled up in like a fancy car.

So we were all sort of in awe, wondering who it was, kind of pushing around to try and get a glimpse of him. And as he walked up onto the stage, I remember thinking, this guy's a giant, right?

He's a huge, ginormous guy. And we're all sort of listening with bated breath. What's he going to say? And the first thing he did is he called up the football team, and we all got to shake his hand, and we got given a certificate from Peter Shilton, which means nothing to most of you, but it was important to me at the time.

[27 : 47] And then he gave a speech, and he stood there, and we were there with open mouths. What's he going to say? Is he going to tell us something about Maradona, about what happened in Mexico 1984, wasn't it?

It was rubbish. The guy couldn't string a sentence together. It was terrible, and we were bored. It was like, oh my goodness, this guy might be able to play football, but he is terrible at public speaking.

And we were all sort of muttering to each other, what a waste of time this is. Who is this guy? What a useless speaker. And there was a terrible sense of disappointment. You know, that's often what it's like, isn't it, if we listen to people and we're in awe of them.

But let me say Jesus is never like that. You come to listen to Jesus in his authority, in his power, in his glory. And he opens his mouth, and he never disappoints you.

He speaks words of grace and mercy, forgiveness, resurrection life, defeat over Satan and evil. He looks you in the eye and he says, listen, this broken world that you live in, I can fix it.

[29 : 02] Come and trust in me. Put your hope in me. I will wash you clean of your sin. I will defeat your death. I have conquered Satan.

Come into my new heavenly kingdom. Love me and live for me. I don't know of any better news than that. Won't you trust in Jesus? Won't you love him?

Won't you live for him? Let me pray as I close, and then we'll sing a couple of songs as we respond.

Let's pray. Dear Lord Jesus, thank you that you speak to us words of grace and mercy.

Thank you that you love us and gave yourself for us. And thank you even more this morning that we have seen that you are victorious over Satan. All the forces of evil are nothing compared to you.

Oh, praise your name. Amen. Amen. Amen.