

THE SURPRISING ARRIVAL OF THE KING

MARK 1:9-13

It was 1875 and in a British hospital infirmary a 27-year old English journalist and poet named William Henley lay recovering from surgery. Henley had just undergone another operation on one of his legs to keep it from being amputated. For most of his life, he had battled tuberculosis of the bone, and it had already resulted in the amputation of one of his legs. There was hope that his other leg could be saved, but so far it had required three years in and out of the hospital for multiple surgeries.

Confined to his hospital bed, Henley began to pen what would become his most famous piece of writing. He titled the four-verse poem "Invictus", Latin for "unconquerable".

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

How many of you have heard Henley's words before? The lyrics from Invictus have been quoted many, many times over the past century by a spectrum of figures from Nelson Mandela to Timothy McVeigh. The words are a manifesto of cosmic independence. They reflect this perspective that my future, my destiny, my hope in life depends ultimately on *who I am*. My personal identity, my unconquerable soul, who I am, is the ultimate determiner of my fate.

Well, when we open the Gospel of Mark, what Mark's writing presses on us is that the conquering of night, the overcoming of fear, the mastery of the horror of the shade - all these things that Henley writes about - our future, our hope - Mark says that those things don't

depend on *your* identity, but on the identity of Jesus. In other words, in contrast to Henley, Mark says that the key to your future isn't who you are, but who Jesus is.

But we don't always get Jesus, do we? We misunderstand, both in Scripture and in our own lives, who he is and what he's doing. As Christians, we'd rather not admit it because the essence of our faith is that we've trusted in Jesus, but if we're honest, in our street level faith, if someone really pressed us, we don't always trust him do we? There are times when we feel like he's silent, like he's distant, when it seems like he's pulled back from our lives. And often we box Jesus in, don't we. We want Jesus and we want him to act in our lives, but we want him on our own terms - we want him to act in line with our agenda, do things the way we would do it. And when life doesn't unfold in line with our expectation we fail at trusting him.

Well, be encouraged this morning because the stark reality that we don't fully get who Jesus is, and much of the time we don't respond to who he is in with the obedience and faith that we should? That's the story of Mark.

Almost everybody in Mark misses Jesus. Whether it's the Pharisees, or the scribes, or the crowds, or the disciples - no one is tracking with him. They all either misunderstand who he is, or what he has come to do, or how they should act in response to those things. All of them! But what's interesting is there are two people that fully get Jesus in Mark's story: God the Father and the demons.

And there are two times in Mark's Gospel that the Father steps onto the stage to make this declaration about the identity of Jesus - one is at Jesus' transfiguration where the Father says, "listen to him." And the other is right here in this passage in Mark 1.

And so here, at the end of what is really Mark's introduction to the gospel, in many ways Mark is pulling the curtain back for us on who Jesus is. He's giving us a privileged position to see something that no one else in the story sees. You see everyone else is going to interpret and understand and respond to Jesus from an earthly perspective, but for a brief moment here in these five verses we are going to get a behind the scenes glimpse of who Jesus really is and what he's really come to do. And for us sitting here this morning, what God shows us through Mark changes everything. Because when we start getting Jesus - when we begin to understand Jesus' person and mission - we start living in the glorious reality that our hope doesn't rest in who we are, but who he is.

And so this morning we're going to see three things unfolding through these two scenes at the river and in the desert. Namely, we're going to see that God is not silent, but in Jesus has radically acted, by anointing Jesus as King to rule and reign, but that rule and reign comes in a

surprising way. So if you're a note taker we're going to unpack the text under those three headings: God is not silent, (he's acted) in King Jesus' rule and reign, but there's a surprise to the way that rule and reign is established.

1. God is not silent.

READ vv. 9-11

Right here is Jesus entrance on to the stage of Mark. Mark has been setting this up in the first eight verses already, right? John the Baptizer has been out in the wilderness, in a place that harkens back to Israel's experience in the Exodus - a place where God had rescued his people and provided for them, and was preparing them for his promises that were to come in the Land he'd set apart for them.

And here John is, out in the wilderness, preparing God's people for a new Exodus. John's announcing to Israel that there is a rescue, there's a salvation, there's a greater promise coming that God's rescue of Israel out of Egypt only foreshadowed, only pointed to. There's a mightier one coming - one mightier not only than John, but than anyone that has come before.

In other words, Jesus appearance on the stage of Mark is part of a bigger, broader story that has been going on for a long time. From the time humanity fell in the Garden, the Triune God has been carrying out his plan of redemption. God could have abandoned us right out of the gate when Adam and Eve betrayed him, but His promise in Gen. 3:15 was for a second Adam who would succeed where the first Adam failed. There would be one coming who would conquer the serpent, and set everything back to the way it was meant to be.

And that plan unfolded as God called Abraham, and as he called and rescued Israel for, and as he gave them a King, David, to rule over them, and even through the failure of Israel's Kings, and their exile to Babylon, and their return to the land to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, in God's sovereign grace and goodness, throughout the entire Old Testament God has been working out his rescue plan, through Israel, for all of Creation.

But for Israel it didn't always feel that way. You just have read the Psalms or the prophets to see that there were many times that God felt distant. That he felt silent. That it seemed like God was never going to act on behalf of his people. Where God's people started to wonder about his goodness and love and care for them.

Even after God had brought his people back from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem, they wondered if God had forgotten about them. The kingdom and the temple were nothing like they once were and life didn't look like they had expected. And they wondered if God had gone

silent. Listen to this prayer from Isaiah from this post-exilic period. Is. 63 starting at v. 15:

(Is. 63:15-19)

Do you hear the cry here? God - where are you?

Most of us know some of that lament right? You know the dull ache when heaven feels closed off and dark. When God seems cold and distant. You know the emptiness when God feels silent. When suffering and hardship come and God seems aloof. When you open up his Word for consolation and find none. Some of you showed up this morning wondering why you even bothered. You haven't heard God's voice or felt his presence in months, maybe years. He feels silent. You know what Isaiah is crying for here.

And then his prayer continues in 64:1 - "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down..." (2x)

Then listen to Mark's description of this moment in the river again. v. 10.

Mark is trying to tell us something incredibly profound here. Mark isn't so much concerned with telling us why Jesus gets baptized - you can go to Matthew for that - he's concerned with what happens when Jesus gets baptized. And so when Jesus comes up out of the water, and we're given this behind the scenes glimpse of the tearing of the heavens, Mark is pointing backwards and saying "that prayer of Isaiah? In Jesus all that Isaiah prayed for is being answered."

"Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence... (and reading on from v. 1) to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence.... Behold you were angry and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? But now O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay and you are our potter. Be not so terribly angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all your people... will you keep silent?

And in Mark 1:10, God's answer to that question CHURCH is a resounding NO. You see, in the arrival of Jesus, Mark is saying that God has radically acted. He has proven that he has not forgotten his plans, that he is not distant or aloof, that he is not uncaring, that he will not remain angry forever but that Jesus is his plan to save his people.

And do you see what this means for you? It means that whatever state you came here in this morning. Whatever brokenness your heart is feeling. Whatever bitterness toward God you're holding onto. Whatever selfish agenda you've been bringing to God. Whatever ways you've been acting to build your own kingdom. Whatever sin has passed through your mind this week, or been acted out by your hands. God has not abandoned you! In fact, though God would

have every right to turn his back on you, in his love he has ripped open the very fabric of heaven to come near and rescue you.

And this is no half-hearted side project on God's part. Look at the way the story unfolds. As he comes up out of the water, Jesus sees two things and hears another. "Immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

This is one of just a handful of passages in Scripture where we see all three persons of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, appear together. But it's significant that right here, at the declaration that Jesus is at the very heart of God's cosmic redemptive plan, that we see each member of the Trinity acting. It's like God is declaring, "I'm all in."

Christian, you need to know that it's not as if the Father has stood back with arms crossed, and sent the Son to do the dirty work in you that he'd rather not soil his hands with. Jesus isn't the administrative assistant coming to earth to do tasks the CEO would rather not do. In bringing his rescuing and redeeming love into your life through the gospel, God is all in. This is a work planned by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and applied by the Spirit. God hasn't given you just part of himself, withholding the rest until the end of some trial period. Right here in the river, Father, Son and Spirit together say to you, "This is not some halfway salvation, I'm not holding back, I am giving you all of me."

God has not withheld any of himself, he is not silent, just like at Creation his voice ripped through the cosmos creating worlds from nothing, we see in the river that God has torn open the heavens, invading earth and invading your life in the person of Jesus.

2. Second: The centerpiece of God's acting is in his anointing of Jesus as King to rule and reign.

So we've gotten this behind-the-scenes look at the heavens being torn open, and the presence of the Triune God, but something else is going on here. Only Mark can pack so much stuff into so few words. Look at what happens. The Spirit of God descends on Jesus and the Father makes this declaration from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Let's deal with these two pieces one of these at a time.

First, the Spirit descends. If you've read your Bible you'll know that the Holy Spirit is not just this character that suddenly shows up when you open the New Testament. He's at work throughout the Old Testament but his work is selective and temporary. This is why the glorious

fulfillment of God's New Covenant promise is that the Spirit will not just come upon certain people for certain purposes, but will actually dwell in God's people. So in the OT we see the Spirit active at creation, we see him empowering people for service in the temple, but where his work is especially shown is in coming upon and anointing Israel's kings and prophets. And this anointing of the Holy Spirit, this calling of a particular man to this office of King, was inaugurated by the actual physical act of anointing his head with oil - representing the spiritual anointing that he was given.

So when the Spirit descends on to Jesus - there is something real going on, Jesus is actually being empowered by the Holy Spirit, but there is also something symbolic. God is anointing and declaring that Jesus as the rightful King over every other authority and every other kingdom.

Second, the Father's proclamation. As Jesus comes out of the water, the Spirit descends and a voice resounds from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Again, as glorious and wonderful as it is to see the unity and mutual honor and love within the Trinity - there is something even deeper going on here than just shared affection.

Turn with me to Psalm 2. Psalm 2 is this royal psalm that announces and prays for the rule of God's Anointed King. Ps. 2 is first looking at David as King over God's people, then those who would follow in ruling from David's throne. Let's read it together: (read Ps. 2:1-7)

Do you see that this is pointing not just to David, but beyond David and beyond the Kings of Israel and Judah, to a mightier one, to another King? God announces this coming King through Isaiah when he says in Isaiah 42:1 - "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations."

What's happening in the river brothers and sisters, is the announcement of the arrival of the King. The King has come.

And throughout Mark we're going to see that this King and his kingdom come into conflict with every other kingdom that sets itself up. Whether it's political leaders or the religious elite, or the demonic powers, King Jesus and his Kingdom have come to bring his rightful rule and reign.

And this is what King Jesus wants to do in you as well. The God who has torn through the heavens to come near you, also wants to rule in you. This is scary to us. Because it means that Jesus wants to overthrow everything in my life that has authority above him. Where people and ideas and ambitions and possessions rule my life rather than Jesus, the King will come in direct conflict with them.

Do you feel like your life right now is in upheaval? Do you feel like things in you and around you are falling apart? Are out of your control? Are not going the ways that you want? Are there areas in you that feel like they're crumbling? Is it possible that King Jesus is slowly and graciously toppling the kingdom that you've set up so that he can establish his? Might it be possible that the turmoil and disorder you feel is actually Jesus setting up his good and loving rule and reign in areas you haven't surrendered to him?

You know the terrifying thing about Jesus being King? It's that he comes with his own agenda. He comes to rule as King with his own program and prerogatives that we don't control. His plan, his timetable for things, his work in us isn't always what we'd choose. Actually, most of the time isn't what we'd choose.

But what settles our fearful hearts is that the one who wants to be King is the same as the one who has rent the heavens to come down. The one who wants to rule your life is the one who loves you beyond what anyone or anything else could.

And we start to see the extent of that love in the second scene here in the desert.

3. And so point 3 is this: Jesus establishes his rule and reign in an unexpected, surprising, even shocking way.

//Read Mark 1:12-13//

Notice that there is no lavish inauguration banquet for this King. There's no grand enthronement ceremony. There are no gifts of tribute or lengthy speeches. Immediately after the declaration of the Father, the Spirit, God himself, immediately drives Jesus out to the wilderness.

And there's much more brevity to Mark's description of this scene than what we see in the other gospels, but Jesus is in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. And the unique language that Mark uses here, mentioning even the wild animals, is almost an allusion to the demonic powers that are there as well, opposing the King.

And at the end of these forty days - Mark makes no victory pronouncement, there no sense that Jesus just put on his Superman cape and tossed Satan aside. In fact, the picture we get of Jesus is that at the end of forty days in the wilderness he is so weak and spent and worn out that angels have to come and take care of him.

And in this scene in the desert, we wake up to something. Jesus' kingdom isn't going to be established by might and power, but in weakness and suffering.

I don't know if you've noticed it yet, but there's another arrow here pointing backward to Israel's story in the Old Testament. Do you see it? In these two stories Jesus has passed through the river into the desert for forty days. Jesus is re-enacting Israel's story.

You remember in the Exodus Israel passed through the Red Sea only to find themselves in the desert for 40 years. Israel, who God also called his beloved Son, in that desert failed over and over at obeying the voice of God. God had rescued his people, but because their hearts were still hard and selfish and sinful, in the wilderness they were just repeating the same failures as Adam in the garden. But here, in the desert we see one mightier than Adam, one stronger than Israel, the representative of the people of God, going through the same temptations they faced and succeeding where they had failed.

And this Jesus is not just their representative, he's ours. This is what the author of Hebrews is talking about in Hebrews chapter 4 when he encourages us with this fact: "Since then we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect was tempted as we are, yet without sin."

Brothers and sisters, you might not always get Jesus, but he gets you. You misunderstand him, but he understands and knows you. And what Adam failed at, what Israel failed at, what Jesus' disciples in Mark failed at, what *you* fail at - responding and submitting to and obeying the Father - Jesus succeeded at for you.

And as we look at these two scenes in these five verses, behind the river and the desert we see what stands in the background of everything in Mark, the shadow of the glorious cross. The entire story of Mark is leaning forward toward that reality.

You see, at the cross Jesus didn't just venture for 40 days into a God-forsaken place, but for three hours was himself forsaken by the Father. The Father whose voice had reverberated from the heavens, in that moment on the cross, became silent. In his account of the crucifixion, Mark even points us back here to the desert when he describes the women who had ministered to Jesus gathered around the foot of the cross.

And on the cross, as Jesus voice cried out from earth to heaven - another tearing happened that the tearing of heaven here looks forward to. You see, as Jesus breathed his last, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The curtain was what blocked the way into the holy of holies, this place of the very presence of God, the place where the high

priest went only once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people, it was in a special way God's dwelling place on earth.

And in that moment on the cross as the anointed King suffered and died there was a great exchange that happened. Jesus took on himself your sin, your failures, your betrayal of him, your refusals to surrender your own kingdom, your bitterness, your selfishness, your contempt, your brokenness... so that you could enter the place of God's lavish grace and goodness. The Father whose voice in the river had echoed over the Son, silently turned his back to Him and turned his face to you. And for those whose identity through belief in the gospel is now wrapped up in Christ, he says of you - "you are my Beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

Your future, your hope, doesn't depend on who you are, but who Jesus is.

Do you remember William Henley and his poem, Invictus? Well, in the early part of the 20th century, a woman named Dorothy Day, responded to Henley's manifesto of self-sufficiency with this poem of utter dependence on the identity of Jesus. Instead of Henley's title Invictus, Unconquered, she titled hers: Conquered.

Out of the light that dazzles me,
Bright as the sun from pole to pole,
I thank the God I know to be,
For Christ - the Conqueror of my soul.

Since His the sway of circumstance,
I would not wince nor cry aloud.
Under the rule which men call chance,
My head, with joy, is humbly bowed.

Beyond this place of sin and tears,
That Life with Him and His the Aid,
That, spite the menace of the years,
Keeps, and will keep me unafraid.

I have no fear though straight the gate:
He cleared from punishment the scroll.
Christ is the Master of my fate!
Christ is the Captain of my soul!

BENEDICTION: 2 COR. 13:14