

**On the move  
with Jesus  
in  
MARK  
(chapters 1-4)**

**A unique, verse-by-verse,  
life-application commentary  
by Terran Williams**

## You may own a Bible, but does your Bible own you?

- It's not enough to own a Bible. Our Bible should own us. After all, it is the main way God speaks to us.
- Did you know that God put every verse in the Bible so that your mind could be totally renewed, so that your life could be deeply changed, and so that your calling could be fulfilled? (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17 if you're not persuaded.) That's why reading the whole Bible again and again is one of the most important things we can do.
- Sometimes, however, the Bible is hard to understand. That's why commentaries are so useful. Most commentaries help you understand the *technical* meaning of each verse. These commentaries do a little of that too, but more than that, they focus on the meaning of each verse *for our lives now*.

## What's unique about this commentary?

- Most importantly, it helps you to find *the meaning for your life now* in every single verse of the Gospel of Mark.
- It is written with 21<sup>st</sup> century everyday people in mind.
- It builds on the scholarship of brilliant theologians and commentaries, but doesn't focus on the exhausting technicalities that fill most commentaries.
- It comes with a Group Guide so that you can explore Mark along with others.

## A suggested approach to going through Mark

- Make time every day. Allocate as much time as you need to really hear from God for your life. Read until you are full - don't just *snack* on the Bible, rather enjoy a *solid meal*.
- Take your time as you go through Mark, starting at chapter one. It doesn't matter if you do the whole Bible in a year, or in five years, just as long as you're *steadily* moving through it.
- Trust God to speak to you every time you read the Bible. Expect to receive just what you need for each day. Invite the Holy Spirit to be your primary teacher as you read.
- Keep two questions in your mind as you read: 1) What do these verses mean? 2) What do they mean for my life now? ***If you can't find solid answers to either of these two important questions then refer to this commentary.***
- Carry into your day what you sense God saying to you. Perhaps write down the main things you sense God telling you each day. Pray to God about what he has just said to you. Make any needed adjustments in your heart and life as God reveals more and more of his Word, will and ways to you.

## Main sources used

Special thanks to (and warm commendations of) ...

- *The 'Today's New International Version' Bible (which is the updated version of the NIV)*
- Michael Eaton's *Preaching through the Bible: Mark*
- Tom Wright's *Mark for Everyone*
- Donald Guthrie's *New Bible Commentary: Third Edition*
- David Guzik's online commentary ([www.enduringword.com](http://www.enduringword.com))

## About the Gospel of Mark

God has given us four windows into the earthly life of Jesus. They are the Gospels. Each author captures a different aspect of Jesus. Mark's Gospel is the shortest, and was also the one written first. It appears that the Gospels of Luke and Matthew used Mark as a major source in the writing of their own Gospels.

“Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). That means that though Mark describes the life of Jesus 2000 years ago, his character and wisdom and power are still available to us. His earthly disciples knew him physically, but we get to know Jesus with the help of the Spirit. Though we don't know everything we'd like to know about Jesus' life on earth, God made sure we'd know enough for the Holy Spirit to give us insight into, so that we too can say that we “know” Jesus.

The Gospel is written by Mark. Mark was the son of a widow named Mary whose home was used by the earliest Christians (see Acts 12:12). Mark was friends with the apostle Peter, from whom he no doubt drew most of his information. He wrote it fairly soon after the events described, probably in the AD50s.

One thing that sticks out in the Gospel of Mark is its pace. Again and again, the word “immediately” is used. We see Jesus packing a whole bunch of travel, ministry and teaching into short periods of time. Jesus is a man on the move. That's why this commentary is titled, *On the move with Jesus in Mark*.

## Outline of the Gospel of Mark

*1:1-20 - The beginning of Jesus' ministry*

*1:21-3:6 - Jesus' authority begins to arouse opposition*

*3:7-6:13 - Jesus withdraws to teach his disciples*

*6:14-8:26 - A further outreach with even greater rejection*

*8:27-10:52 - Jesus teaches his disciples while travelling to Jerusalem*

*11:1-15:47 - Entry into Jerusalem and the events that lead to his death*

*16:1-8 - Jesus rises from the dead*

*16:9-20 - A later addition to the Gospel*

# Experiencing Jesus in blue, green, red and orange

There are four main ways that God seems to speak to us through the Gospels.

1) In some parts of Mark, God highlights to us the wonderful and awesome uniqueness of Christ as Lord and Saviour. When we read these sections, we realize that we certainly can't imitate him in these regards. All we can do is bow down in humility, trust and surrender. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded blue.

2) In other parts of this Gospel, God reveals aspects of Jesus' character and ministry that we can imitate. We can literally be inspired to follow his example. And amazingly, we have the Spirit of Christ in us making it possible to actually do just that. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded green.

3) In yet other parts of this book, God reveals to us pure wisdom through the recorded teachings of Jesus to his disciples, and to the crowds, and to us. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded red.

4) Lastly, the Gospels at times allow us to see Christ through the eyes of people, whether friends or foes. By looking at how these people responded to Christ, we can learn both how and how not to respond to Jesus ourselves. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded orange.

**Colour-code summary: the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...**

*Blue* = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

*Green* = something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate

*Red* = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

*Orange* = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

# Mark Chapter One

**Colour-code summary:** the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

*Blue* = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

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## JESUS PREPARES FOR MINISTRY (1:1-9)

*John the Baptist prepares the way*

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

- **A new day dawned on this planet when Jesus arrived.**
  - This verse tells us where the story begins (and in the verses to come we will see it begins with John the Baptist's prophetic preparation of the people for his soon-to-come arrival.
  - The phrase "the good news" can also be translated "the Gospel". The Gospel essentially is that Jesus is the Messiah! It's the news that God has acted decisively in the coming of Jesus, and that since his coming everything is different.
  - That's where it begins for all of us: we hear the "good news" that God has done something to change the world, and to change us in unimaginable ways. It already has been done. All we need to do is believe it. It's not a philosophy, which we have to study. It's not a challenge, which we have to strive to do. It's not an experience, which we have to feel. It's news - great news - and all we have to do is believe it.

2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way" [Malachi 3:1]—

3 "a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him'." [Isaiah 40:3]

4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

- **God woke the world up to the anticipation of the soon-to-come Messiah.**
  - Sometimes a new day starts very gently. Other times, a striking shaft of light or a frightening alarm clock wake us up. That captures John the Baptist's ministry - he "woke people up" to the reality that the Messiah was coming soon, and that they'd better get ready.
  - Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 are two verses that prophesied that a special prophet would usher in the Messiah. It turns out that Jesus' own cousin, John, was that man.
  - For centuries the Jews had been waiting for the Messiah to come. They didn't really know what to expect, although the majority of them assumed that the Messiah would be a political one, who would deliver them from their long history of political oppression at the hands of the Romans. There was much curiosity about the Messiah - would he be an ordinary person, or would it be God himself coming (see v3)? John the Baptist was not totally sure either, but one thing he knew for sure: the Messiah was interested in changing their hearts and lifestyles. In other words, he was going to be a *spiritual* Messiah. John called Jewish people to be baptized as a way of turning their lives away from sin and towards God. But why was John telling them to be baptized? The probable answer is that, in the mind of Jews at that time, baptism was a symbol of how the Jews historically had fled from Egypt and had crossed through the Red Sea and, in so doing, had turned toward God and the promised land. As they got baptized they would turn their backs on all the competing attractions in life, and would turn toward God and the promised Messiah with fresh devotion.
  - In verse 6 we see that John was an eccentric prophet - much like the travelling Elijah of old. His life was totally devoted to calling people to get ready for the coming Messiah. Jesus was soon to come - first to the Jews - and then to the whole world. God was getting them ready, waking them up. As John preached his message, it "rang true" in their hearts. They sensed he was telling the truth, and they freshly turned away from their sins, and turned towards God in anticipation. A revival seemed to break out in the countryside (v5). The "red carpet" was being laid in the hearts of people, so that when Jesus came, they would be ready.
  - To this day, God is often at work in individual people, and in groups of people, to get them ready for his coming - so that when the message about Jesus is preached they respond wholeheartedly.
  - To this day, we also get to be like John the Baptist, pointing them toward Christ who is ready to come into their lives.

7 And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with [or ‘in’] water, but he will baptize you with [or ‘in’] the Holy Spirit.”

- **Jesus desires to plunge you into the Spirit’s presence and power.**
  - John was an impressive figure who spoke powerfully in the Spirit and was able to cut people to the heart with his words, turning lives around. But he emphasized that he was nothing compared to the one who was far more powerful than him, the one who was deserving of far more honour and respect than himself.
  - As John plunged people into water it symbolized two things - one in the past, and one in the future. In the past, it spoke of the leaving of Egypt for the Promised Land. In the future, it spoke of how the Messiah would plunge people, not just in water, but in his Holy Spirit.
  - The fascinating thing is that Jesus never baptized (or plunged) anyone in the Spirit during his earthly life. It was only when he was exalted to the right hand of God that he began to pour out his Spirit, plunging believers into an experience of the Spirit’s presence and power. This happened at Pentecost first (see Acts 2:1-4). Although the audience who heard John promise this plunging of the Spirit would have to wait for years to experience this for themselves, we - in the 21<sup>st</sup> century - have the amazing privilege of experiencing the Holy Spirit’s immediate, empowering presence.

## THE BAPTISM AND TESTING OF JESUS (1:9-14)

### *The baptism and testing of Jesus*

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

- **Jesus’ water baptism carries at least three meanings for your life.**
  - Why did Jesus submit to John’s baptism “of repentance for the forgiveness of sin” (see verse 4)? He didn’t need to repent of any sin. There are three main reasons he did this. First, he was setting an example for us to follow. Jesus and his disciples would baptize many people during his life. He would then instruct that all his followers throughout the centuries get baptized in his name (Matthew 28:19) as a form of initiation into the community of his disciples, and into the adventure of following him. Second, he was endorsing John’s ministry. It was his way of saying, “Yes, this man who baptizes me really is the front-runner of the Messiah (see 1:2)”. Third, he was identifying with the very human people he intended to save. Jesus wasn’t aloof when he came to this planet;

he was fully human, one of us. Although he didn't sin like us, he deeply empathized with our weaknesses and temptations.

- We can learn three things for ourselves from Jesus' baptism: First, and most importantly, we need to get baptized in water as a form of obedience to him. Second, we need to submit ourselves to God-given leaders before we can expect a ministry of our own (in which case we would still be wise to submit ourselves to God-given leaders). Third, we need to identify with the people we serve. We don't serve them from afar, but we 'get in there' and experience life alongside them.

10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

- **You desperately need to be filled with the Spirit.**
  - When the Bible speaks of heaven it doesn't speak of a far-off realm. It speaks of God being right here, right now. It speaks of God's spiritual reality hidden behind the curtain of physical reality. Heaven therefore speaks of the spiritual realm that immediately surrounds us. As Jesus came out of the water, the curtain between physical and spiritual reality was torn, and God made himself tangibly present to Jesus.
  - The Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. Luke says that the Spirit literally took on the form of a dove (Luke 3:22). Doves speak of purity, innocence, peacefulness and gentleness. The Spirit is pure, innocent, peaceful and gentle.
  - In verse 8, we read that Jesus would one day "baptize people with the Holy Spirit". The word "baptism" can be translated "engulf, saturate, plunge and dunk". It speaks of an experience. Interestingly, two verses later, Jesus himself has a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit. It's not hard to see that the experience of the Spirit that Jesus would one day lead people into was connected to his own experience of the Spirit.
  - Why do we need to be filled with the Spirit? First, it's the Spirit's infilling *that allows us to experience the Father's undeserved love and affirmation*. Ephesians 1:5 tells us that when we put our trust in Christ we are adopted as his children. And John 17:26 tells us that the same love the Father gave to Jesus his son, he also gives to us as his adopted children. Think about that - it is as though the words, "This is my son / daughter whom I love" are spoken over us at the moment of our salvation. But it is not enough for us to just know this in our heads. God wants us to experience it in our hearts too. That's why Paul, in Galatians 4:6, connects Jesus' *experience* of the Father's love and affirmation with our *experience* of the Father's love and affirmation: "Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father'." Jesus in this sense is setting an

example for us of enjoying the Father's love and affirmation. If he needed this then how much more do we need it? Second, it's the Spirit's infilling *that empowers us for ministry*. Jesus was being empowered for his ministry. Only once he was filled with the Spirit's power, did he dare launch into public ministry. If he, the all-powerful Son of God, needed the Spirit's power in ministry, how much more do we need the Spirit's power?

- Luke captures a little detail about Jesus' baptism that the other Gospels don't: it says "and as he was praying ... the Spirit descended." In other words, Jesus seemed to specifically *asking* for the Spirit's power. If he asked, how much more should we ask God?
- **At his baptism, God anointed and announced Jesus to be the promised Messiah-king.**
  - Although there are similarities between Jesus' experience of the Spirit and ours, we must remember that his is unique in that his baptism was God's announcing him and anointing him as the earth's true king.
  - To understand this, we need to go back to king David. God did something interesting with him: he anointed (with oil, which also represented the Spirit's empowering) and announced him king in front of a few witnesses (who didn't understand fully what was happening), long before he actually ruled over the nation (see 1 Samuel 16:1,13). God had decided that he was Israel's true king and let him know. It took years before David eventually ruled the whole of Israel. In the same way, God was announcing Jesus as heaven and earth's true king, in front of a few witnesses (who didn't understand what was happening) and anointing him with the Spirit's power, before he would actually start ruling.
  - The main reason we know that this was Jesus' anointing as king is because of the words that came from heaven (or from "the spiritual realm"): "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." Why did God speak these words over Jesus? The most likely reason is that, other than describing the eternal love between the Father and the Son, it was a moment of kingly inauguration. Jesus was being made king. We can be sure of this, because the words strongly echo two well-known, ancient prophecies about the coming Messiah-king:
    - Psalm 2:6-8: "I have installed my King on Zion ... You are my Son, today I have become your Father. Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance ... You will rule them."
    - Isaiah 42:1: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations."
  - The main ministry of Jesus was to launch his kingdom (as we will see in verse 14 and 15), but it all started at this moment when God announced him as king.
  - Interestingly, eventually the disciples would understand that he really was the Christ (which is Greek for the "anointed Messiah-

king”) and their message to the world would be: “Jesus is Christ and Lord”, which really is a way of saying, “Jesus is heaven and earth’s true king. Bow down to him. Entrust your life to him. Give him your total allegiance.”

12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted [or tested] by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

- God allows you to go through difficult and tempting times as a way of preparing you for ministry.
  - The Spirit of God would soon lead Jesus into public ministry (see Luke 4:14) but before he was ready, he needed to go through some testing, so the Spirit first led him into the desert where he would experience the difficult circumstances of hunger, loneliness and danger (being surrounded by wild animals (v13)). In this vulnerable state he would also experience Satan tempting and taunting him.
  - Notice that it was not God tempting Jesus. James 1:13 makes it clear that God does not tempt us. However, God does *allow* us to be tempted. For example, God allows Job to be tested by the devil (see Job 2:1-6) and Jesus allows Peter to be tested by the devil (see Luke 22:31), but always for a greater purpose.
  - But why did God want Jesus to experience this difficulty and testing? There are two reasons: First, it was because he was showing us, the followers of Jesus, a very important insight: *secret victory over temptations precedes God releasing us into public ministry*. If we cannot be trusted in secret to do the will of God, then we cannot be trusted in public to do the will of God. Second, it was because he was showing us that *to the degree we are dependent on him to that degree we are also usable by him*. In the desert Jesus was hungry, endangered and tempted yet God gave him everything he needed to survive: God provided the Scriptures he needed to overcome the lies (as the Gospels of Matthew and Luke show), God provided the angels to protect him from the wild animals (much like he provided animals to protect Daniel in the lion’s den). Probably more than anything else, it was his Father’s words of love and promise (in verse 11) that carried him through this difficult time.

## GOD IS DOING SOMETHING NEW! (1:14-15)

*Jesus announces the good news*

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

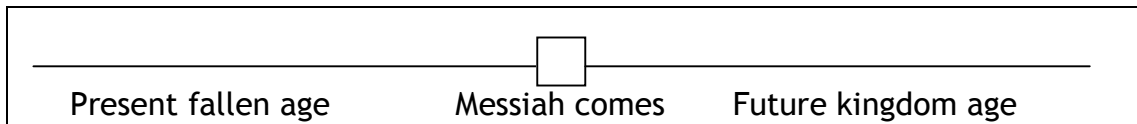
- Be open to God guiding you through both the Spirit *and* through circumstances.
  - Jesus knew that when John's ministry of announcing the coming Messiah was over (and the moment he was put in prison it was over), it was time for him to go public, which he did (v14). It's interesting to see that Jesus made decisions based on the Spirit leading him (verse 12), but also he discerned the hand of God in circumstances, such as John's arrest. God still speaks to us, Jesus' followers, in the same way. We need to be open to God guiding us through both the still, small voice of the Spirit and through discerning his timing and his leading through changes in circumstances.
  
- God is doing something new, and it's just so wonderful!
  - Jesus came as a messenger of "good news" (mentioned twice - v14,15) of God. In other words, he was delivering a message from God. This was his message: "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"
  - What does it mean that "the time has come"? It means that there had been a long history of expectation in Israel that God will act in a new way for the good of Israel and for the good of the world. They had, through the prophecies of the Old Testament, an expectation that God would one day overthrow the kingdoms of this world that were doing great harm to the people and would himself begin to rule with justice, peace, mercy and power. Jesus was saying, "This is the moment of fulfilment. Finally, and how privileged you are to be alive in this day, God is bringing in a new day."
  - CS Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia* describes the effect on Narnia when Aslan (who represents Christ) comes. Before he comes, Narnia is frozen over with winter and ice and fear. But then, as Aslan comes, suddenly the sun comes up, the ice begins to thaw and flowers begin to blossom. CS Lewis writes this: *'Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight. At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more. And when he bares his teeth, winter meets its death. And when he shakes his mane, we have spring again.'* CS Lewis catches the mood of Christ's coming - it's a spring-time.
  - Fascinatingly, Jesus announces his kingdom in Galilee (v14). Is this significant? Absolutely. Isaiah, chapter 9, connects the reign of the coming king (see v7) with "Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea" (v1). It's significant because these verses show Jesus fulfilling yet another prophesy.
  
- God is doing something new, and he's doing it through Jesus.
  - What does he mean when he speaks about the arrival of the kingdom of God?
  - God had always been king of the universe and the world. But he had promised through the prophets that there would come a day

when he would send to this world his Messiah-king (see Psalm 2:6-12, and Isaiah 9:2-7 for example) who would usher in a new age of justice, righteousness, healing, peace, joy and more. In this sense, God would *intensify* his rule in the world. He would become a far more hands-on king who would not only carry the title of king, would actually start turning the world around. The coming of the Messiah would signify the coming of God himself to the planet. The Messiah-king on earth would both represent and partner closely with the God-king in heaven (for example, see Psalm 2:11 and 12 for an example of how people are called to both serve the LORD (that is God) and the Messiah-king at the same time.

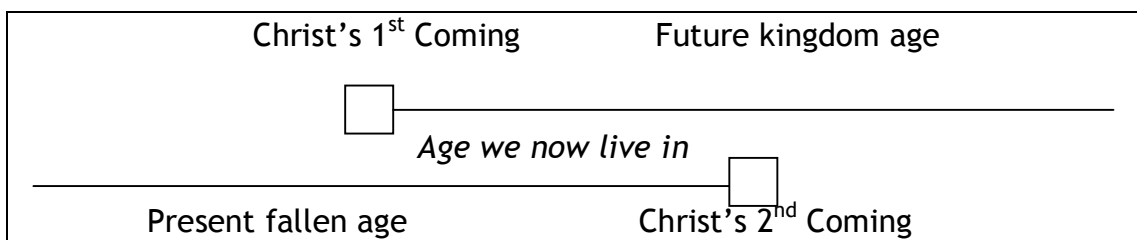
- Jesus was *directly* saying, “God is doing something new. The new age has arrived. God is beginning to rule. The world will never be the same again.” But he was also *indirectly* saying something, and it would take time for people to figure out that this is what he meant: “The Messiah-king has arrived, *and I am he*. God is ushering in this new age *through me*. My kingdom is God’s kingdom, and God’s kingdom is my kingdom.”
- **God is doing something new, but it will only be completed in the future.**
  - Note that Jesus didn’t say, “The kingdom of God has fully arrived.” By using the phrase “at hand” he implies that it has only started to come, but much more is still coming. Let’s explore this thought.
  - Through a study of the Scriptures the Jews would have understood that there were two main phases or ages in history: 1) the present age and 2) the future age.
  - 1) ***The present fallen age*** is marked by rebellion against God, brokenness in every area of life, and by promise.
    - By “rebellion against God” I mean that people and cultures everywhere don’t know who God really is and, if religious, they merely have a “form of religion but deny its true power”. Therefore, through ignorance about God they live in sin in every aspect of life.
    - By “brokenness in every area of life” I mean that there is injustice and corruption politically, divisiveness and hatred socially, sickness and addiction physically, despair and anxiety emotionally, warped ideas and negativity mentally, indifference or deception spiritually, abuse and neglect ecologically and the list goes on.
    - By “promise” I mean that since the coming of Abraham God began to speak of a better day for the world, a day when his kingdom would be ushered in. And even before the coming of Jesus this brought the Jewish nation hope when their circumstances were dire.
  - 2) ***The future kingdom age*** is marked by true worship of God, wholeness in every area of life, and by fulfilment.
    - By “true worship of God” I mean that people and cultures everywhere would come to know who God really is, and

that they would live for his glory, and according to his direction.

- By “wholeness in every area of life” I mean that there would be justice and integrity politically, unity and love socially, health and freedom from addiction physically, joy and peace emotionally, clarity and hope mentally, passion and reality spiritually, service and compassion ecologically - and so much more!
  - By “fulfilment” I mean that all the promises would be fulfilled, and instead of having to look to the future for a better day, people would be able to enjoy all God had for them in the present.
- But here is where the Jews of Jesus’ time went wrong: they thought that the Messiah would immediately end the present fallen age, and would immediately replace it with the future kingdom age. Their understanding looked something like this...



- But this isn’t what happened. This was the surprise “twist” in God’s working in the world: *Jesus, at his first coming, started the future kingdom age in the midst of the present fallen age. But only at his second coming will he totally end the present age, and fully bring in the future age.* In other words, between the first and second comings of Jesus (the time we now live in) we live in an age of overlap. So what really has happened looks like this...



- That is why as Christians we are “caught between the ages”. Through passionate and persevering faith in and obedience to Christ, we already experience “in breakings” of the kingdom in the forms of changed lives, answered prayer, miraculously healed bodies, impacted political systems, renewed minds, renewed cultures and more. But we still live in a world full of sin and brokenness. Not all are healed. Not all prayers are answered. To use Paul’s words, we experience the apparent contradiction of having “access to the treasure of God’s power” even while we live

“in jars made of clay” (i.e. in fragile, tempt-able bodies and minds). To use the words of the writer of Hebrews, even though we do not experience *all* of the coming age, we get to “taste” *some* of the powers of the coming age.

- But the Jews of Jesus’ day didn’t understand that there would be two comings, and an overlap of ages. So when Jesus eventually declared himself to be the Messiah, they couldn’t believe it because they had put all their hopes in a Messiah who would liberate them politically from the oppression of Rome. Their wrong expectations blinded them to the fact that the Messiah would come, first as a personal and spiritual Messiah (in his first coming) and then as a political Messiah (in his second coming).
- **God is doing something new, and you’re urgently invited to get in on it.**
  - Jesus doesn’t just announce the arrival of the kingdom. He makes it clear that a person doesn’t automatically connect to this kingdom. He says the kingdom is “at hand” meaning “within reach” which is a strong invitation to intentionally and thoughtfully take hold of it, to connect to it. And he tells us how. *First, we must repent.* In this context, this means “a transfer of allegiance from whatever else we were clinging, to a new allegiance to God and his rule’. Jesus was in effect saying, “Give God your wholehearted loyalty. Bow down before him - and his Messiah-king - as your king. Yield yourself to his will. Entrust yourself to his care.” *Second, we must believe the good news.* Such great news could easily be rejected as a fairytale. Or it could be embraced as the truth. Jesus insists that a new age really has arrived on this planet - and it has happened with his own coming - and that we should believe this.
  - Here are two analogies of what I mean by “get in on what God is doing in this world through Jesus”.  
**Analogy one:** Electricity had always been present in this world in the form of lightning, for example, but it had also been beyond our reach. Similarly, God has always been king but in some ways his kingdom had been distant from us because of our sinfulness. But then a way was found for electricity to become available to us, and power-lines began to be built through towns. Similarly, Jesus came to make the kingdom of God accessible and available to us. When power-lines were first built in ancient towns, people had a choice to connect their homes to it or not. The choice was theirs. In the same way, we have a choice to connect to God’s royal power or not. And, in the same way that life with electricity is way superior to life without it, so life connected to the leadership and royal power of God is superior to life without it.  
**Analogy two:** David was God’s chosen man to be king over the Israelites. God chose him as king in 1 Samuel 16:1. But he was first recognized as king by a minority of Israelites in Judah (see 2 Samuel 2:4), whereas the rest of Israel didn’t recognize him as king yet. However, his subjects made it clear to the rest of Israel that the time would come when he would rule them too, and that

the sooner everyone aligned themselves to him the better. This was their good news: “The kingdom of David is at hand. Give your allegiance to him.” They were sure that he would be the best king Israel ever had, and that submitting to him would bring national blessing. People were invited to get in on David’s leadership. Just like they said, seven years later he ruled over the whole of Israel (see 2 Samuel 5:3-5). And he ushered them into a golden age. In the same way Christ one day - in the new heavens and the new earth - will rule without rival. But already now his kingdom grows as every new life submits to his leadership and is entrusted to his care. And the message goes out, “The kingdom of God and Christ is advancing. They will eventually rule completely. The sooner you align yourself the better.”

- What does this mean for us? Firstly, we need to bow down before Christ, heaven and earth’s true king. We need to entrust our lives to his leadership and care. But, once we’re happily surrendered to him, our goal as Christians is to so co-operate with Christ that we experience as much of the future kingdom age as we can now, and that we “advance” his kingdom in our times and in our part of the world by bringing heaven to earth. Jesus taught us to live our lives in such a way that “God’s kingdom comes, and God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven.” Let’s plug into his kingdom electricity. Let’s spread the word of Christ’s inevitable and ultimate reign of the universe. Let’s taste the powers of the coming age. Let’s not miss out on what God is doing in the world through Jesus, partly and progressively now but fully and climactically when he returns!

## **FOLLOWING JESUS (1:16-20)**

### *Jesus calls his first disciples*

16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.

19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

- **Following Jesus begins when Jesus calls you personally.**
  - Jesus called these two sets of brothers. To Simon and Andrew he said, “Come, follow me.” And he called James and John and they followed him.
  - Christians are described as those who have received a calling (see Ephesians 4:1) from Christ to trust him. To this day, Christ calls

people to trust him and to follow him. He does this through the Spirit. Without this call to salvation, we cannot even respond to Christ. Which is why every salvation is far more than a choice of a person; it's the result of a miraculous call of God to the heart.

- However, God usually repeats and deepens his call in our lives to trust in and follow Jesus, and the call can become more defined over time.
- **Following Jesus means you define yourself as his disciple.**
  - Although Jesus never described himself as a rabbi, people seemed to recognize that he was one (see John 3:2). But was he really a rabbi of sorts? The answer seems to be yes.
  - The most learned Jewish men would often, at the age of 30, become rabbis, which was a title of honour to the most respected teachers of the Jewish faith. Jesus had just turned 30. And, although we don't know his level of learning accurately, he was clearly brilliant at age 12 already (see Luke 2:46,47). Most likely he had continued in his diligent study of the Scriptures. We must remember that Jesus, although being fully God, was fully human which means that his profound knowledge of the Old Testament, and his rich interpretation of it, came through years of diligent study. His insight into Scripture was not all supernaturally "uploaded" into him. Most of it came through diligent study.
  - There were two main kinds of rabbis. There were the Torah rabbis, who would simply teach text-book style the information that was passed on to them. And then there were the exceptionally rare and gifted Authority rabbis. These rabbis did not only pass on the information passed on to them, but would teach new teachings, offer new interpretations. They would say things like, "You have heard it said, but I say to you..." Jesus was clearly an Authority rabbi because about 20 times in the Gospels he says the words, "You have heard it said, but I say to you." In Matthew 7:28,29 we read that "the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."
  - These rabbis would then take on some disciples whom they would live their lives with and teach. The goal of a disciple was not only to know what their rabbi knew, but to learn how to be like their rabbi through sustained exposure to their teaching and example. It appears that these young Jewish men (probably around or under the age of 20) agreed to "follow Jesus" as their rabbi. They gave themselves to become like him through sustained exposure to his teachings and his example. During this time these young men would literally define themselves as "disciples" of so-and-so.
  - *(For more insight into what it means that Jesus was a rabbi, click on the data file on this site:*  
[www.followtherabbi.com/Brix?pageID=1499](http://www.followtherabbi.com/Brix?pageID=1499))
  - The most commonly used name for Christians in the New Testament is "disciples". A disciple of Jesus is someone who gives themselves - through sustained exposure to his presence, words

and example - to becoming more like him in character, insight and ministry. And it comes through entrusting our lives totally to his leadership as the dominant priority of our lives.

- Following Jesus means you're learning how to live in and demonstrate the kingdom of God.
  - In a sense, any expert in any field (e.g. academic, sport, art, business etc) could train up some “disciples” in order to mentor them in the same level of insight and competence in that field. When Jesus calls people to be his disciples, what field is he the expert in? The answer is: *he is the expert in living in and demonstrating God's kingdom*. That is what he seeks to impart to his disciples.
  - Jesus had just made it clear that he was coming to make God's kingdom accessible to all (verse 14,15). Through his example and teachings, he would show us how to *live in* his kingdom. And through his ministry to people, he would show us how to *demonstrate* the kingdom of God.
  - As disciples of Jesus, we need to give ourselves to prayerfully reading and re-reading the Gospels with the two questions in mind:
    - 1) *As I look at his life example and teachings, what can I learn about living in God's kingdom?*
    - 2) *As I look at the way he ministered to people, what can I learn about demonstrating God's kingdom to others?*
- Following Jesus usually involves a cost.
  - In Jesus' time, every family had a trade, and the father would raise his sons in the same trade. A trade could stay in the family for centuries. So when these men left the family business to become full-time disciples of Jesus they were paying a great price. It was a real step of faith.
  - This echoes God's original call to Abraham in Genesis 12:1, “Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.”
  - Whenever we choose to follow Jesus it means that we will have to leave something behind. And what empowers us to make this decision is the trustworthiness and authority of the One who calls us.
- Following Jesus is embracing Christ's call to adventure and mission.
  - Probably Simon and Andrew, as well as James and John, had been in a crowd that would have already heard Jesus' invitation: “The time has come. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news.” If this is so, it would have been clear to these men that Jesus believed he was launching something amazing and new on this planet and that God was with him. And it means that they believed that Jesus was right and that they were the first ones “to get in on what God was doing in the world through Jesus”.

- Jesus' words, "Come follow me ... and I will send you out to fish for people" were in every way a call to mission and adventure. Jesus was not saying following him would be easy, but he was insisting that it would be worth it.
- These disciples made a decision to join Jesus in the most exciting thing happening in the history of the world: the launch of God's kingdom on earth which would then also lead to the birth of the church. They didn't know where their lives were going, but they chose to entrust their lives to the leadership of Christ. And what an adventure it turned out to be.
- To this day, that invitation to join Christ in what he is doing in this world goes out to us.
- We should also note that this mission and adventure is also a mission and adventure in community with other disciples. Interestingly, these twelve disciples following Jesus were the church in embryonic form. Later they would lead churches themselves, and would invite others to experience what they were experiencing here. When we look at what they experienced we realize that church is essentially a community of disciples of Jesus on an adventurous mission. There is no higher privilege than joining the ranks of Christ-followers.
- **Following Jesus is a journey of discovery.**
  - When the disciples started following Jesus they probably saw him as a rabbi who was on the edge of something new that God was doing. They had no idea at the time that he was the Messiah-king, nor that he was God visiting this planet, nor that his mission on earth would climax with a terrible death and a stunning resurrection. They had no idea that they would be trained to lead the church in its first few decades, and would travel far and wide as the name of Jesus would spread across the then-known world. Those revelations would only come later.
  - Similarly, when we start to follow Jesus we don't necessarily know that much about him nor precisely where he is taking us, but we do know enough to trust him with our lives anyway, confident that all these insights will unfold in due time.

## THE KINGDOM COMES (1:21-45)

- **Jesus seeks to train you to live in and advance God's kingdom.**
  - Jesus had announced the presence of God's kingdom (in verse 14,15). Then, before he started his public ministry, he recruited some disciples whom he could train to live in and minister God's kingdom (v16-20). From this point on, he starts the training of his disciples.
  - We must not miss this. All the time Jesus was doing his teaching, his healing, his socializing, his planning, his praying, his relaxing, his teaming, he was modelling to the disciples what life in the kingdom looks like. On the one hand, he was ministering to the

crowds and on the other hand, he was training his disciples. This means that if we want to be his disciples too, need to prayerfully read and re-read the Gospels and catch the same lessons and insights that they were catching.

*Jesus drives out an evil spirit*

21 They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. 22 The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

- **The kingdom comes in authoritative teaching.**
  - Jesus spoke in the power of the Spirit. He spoke God's truth. He taught in a way that was life-changing and life-giving. People were "arrested" by the sheer force of his words. This was very different to the "teachers of the law" who would speak intellectually and would have to back up what they were saying with quotations from famous rabbis and well-known Scriptures. Jesus would say things like, "You have heard it said, but I say to you..." In the Gospels there are 80 times when Jesus says, "I tell you the truth..." He spoke with profound conviction.
  - As Jesus' disciples, we need to allow God's kingdom to advance in our own lives by receiving Spirit-empowered teaching. But we also, especially those so gifted, need to learn to advance God's kingdom in others through Spirit-empowered, life-giving teaching. There are two differences between Jesus' teaching and ours though: 1) Jesus had authority in himself, whereas our authority is in Jesus. 2) Jesus could teach new truth, whereas we are bound to re-teach his truths. The only spiritual truth we have is the truth handed down to us by Jesus and his apostles.

23 Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 24 "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

25 "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" 26 The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." 28 News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

- **The kingdom comes in authority over the realm of evil spirits.**
  - This reminds us of Acts 10:38, which says, "God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power, and he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil."

- As Jesus' disciples, we too are given authority over the realm of evil spirits. Jesus' authority was in himself, whereas our authority over darkness is in Jesus. We too can move in the power of the Spirit to set people free from the power of the evil one.
- Interestingly, the people did not yet recognize that Jesus was the Messiah, but the demons did: "I know who you are - the Holy One of God!" Similarly, Acts 19:15 makes it clear that evil spirits are able to discern not just Jesus' authority, but also any God-given authority we have.

### *Jesus heals many*

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. 30 Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. 31 So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

32 That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. 33 The whole town gathered at the door, 34 and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

- **The kingdom comes in the healing of the sick.**
  - Obviously Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law (which interestingly reveals that Simon Peter was married) because he cared. But there are two other reasons that he did: 1) He healed her because Simon and Andrew seemed to ask him to do it (v30). Jesus still responds to prayer with healing power. 2) He healed her so that she could get back to work (v31). As God's servants we should trust him to restore us to the health we need to fruitfully serve him.
  - We see that Jesus healed individuals that he seemed to approach. But also many approached him (v32,33).
  - Today, we need to demonstrate the presence of the kingdom through praying for the sick. Jesus had authority in himself to heal, whereas our authority to heal is in Jesus.

### *Jesus prays in a solitary place*

35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

- **The kingdom comes through your prayerful dependence on the Spirit.**
  - The busier Jesus got, the more he prayed. The more demands that were being made on his life, the greater demand he put on his Father and the Spirit to guide, strengthen and empower him.

- This verse reminds us that, in the main, Jesus' ministry didn't flow out of the fact that he was God-on-earth. We must remember that he had "emptied himself" of the privileges of his divinity (see Philippians 2:6,7). Instead, most of his ministry he operated as a man filled with the Spirit. Although he had experienced a powerful baptism of power many weeks before (see 1:11) and had spent 40 days in the desert praying (see 1:12,13), he still needed to keep coming back to his power source. And he did this through getting up early in the morning, and going to pray on his own.
- If Jesus, though he was the Son of God, needed to pray, how much more do we need to pray? It's in the secret place of prayer that we will find the wisdom, the strength and the power we need to live in and demonstrate God's kingdom.

36 Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

38 Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." 39 So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

- **The kingdom comes as you put God's whispered leadings above the thundering demands of people.**
  - We've already seen the voice of the devil trying to take Jesus off course (1:12,13), but now we see the voice of people trying to take Jesus off course. The temptation for Jesus would be to set up his ministry in Capernaum - and just revel in the glory of the success and popularity he was experiencing. The crowds were demanding that he minister to them. And even Peter assumed that Jesus should do as they wanted. But Jesus has been in the secret place of prayer. He had obviously freshly experienced his Father instructing him to move on. So when Peter makes the demand Jesus can say a firm but gentle "no".
  - Today, we desperately need to learn to put God's whispered leadings above the thundering demands of people. It's the way the kingdom advances in and through our lives.
- **The kingdom seems to come in waves of varying intensity.**
  - Fascinatingly, verses 21-39 capture a single 24-hour period in the ministry of Jesus. It's as though the author, Mark, is showing us just how much Jesus was on the move in his public ministry. We too need to be willing to work hard as we see Christ's kingdom come.
  - No doubt there were periods of time when his ministry intensity and pace really slowed down. But these verses seem to show that the kingdom advanced through the ministry of Jesus in waves with lulls in between. We too need to discern the intensity of the season we're in - and be ready to ride waves of ministry

opportunity and wait out the lulls that help us recover and prepare for the next wave.

*Jesus heals a man with leprosy*

40 A man with leprosy [or “an infectious skin disease”] came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

41 Jesus was indignant (or “filled with compassion”). He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

43 Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 44 “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” 45 Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

- The advancement of the kingdom can experience setbacks through your disobedience.
  - Many people are full of compassion, but don’t have the authority to do anything about it. Other people have the authority to set people free, but don’t have the compassion to motivate them. Jesus, as we see in this story, has both!
  - Interestingly, we see that Jesus ministers healing in different ways at different times. Here we see that he combines touch with a command of healing (see v41).
  - Why did Jesus give this man the strong warning to be silent about his miracle? The first reason is that he was thinking of the welfare of the man. Once you were branded a leper it would be difficult for people to see you differently, so Jesus counselled him to go through the proper Jewish system that would show everyone that he was really healed (v44). The second reason is that Jesus did not want to draw too much public attention, especially from the Jewish authorities (which is why he chose Galilee not Jerusalem as the starting point for his ministry).
  - But sadly the man ignored his instruction. As a result for a while Jesus’ ministry faced the setback that came from the unhelpful levels of popularity and from attracting the eye of the religious authorities. All because of this man’s disobedience to him. This story sadly shows how at times we can experience the *benefits* of the kingdom (in healing, for example) without submitting to the *authority* of the kingdom. Jesus is interested in our full obedience to him.