

Message Transcript

**CLEAR THE WAY | THE KINGDOM BREAKS IN
AARON BROCKETT | JANUARY 10 & 11, 2026**

Amen. Amen.

Hey. So, so good to be with you in the house of the Lord kicking off a brand-new year. Would you just join me at all of our locations right now as we come before God today and just ready our hearts for what it is that He has for us?

Father, we come to You today and we are grateful as we gather together. And whatever we may have brought in here with us, whatever we may be going through, it always so, so good to be able to put together song and lyric, truths that we know to be true, even if we don't always feel that they are true. There is something powerful about lifting up voices together to sing these truths.

So, Father, we declare with one voice how great You are. That in the midst of a world where things aren't so great, when circumstances aren't so great, You are a great God. And in You we put our trust. So, we thank You. We ask that You would meet us in this time in this space and place. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen and Amen and Amen.

Hey, feel free to grab a seat across all of our locations. As you do, turn to your neighbor and say, "Hey, you're looking pretty good." Who doesn't want to hear that?

Guys, it really, really good to be with you today for the very first time in 2026, for me anyway. And before we jump into our content today, I just want to put a bow on 2025 and I don't want to move too quickly past that because God did some amazing, amazing things in 2025, not just in our church but really around the world.

Can I just say this? I've been in fulltime ministry (not all of those years at our church but in fulltime ministry) for 25 years. Guys, I have never experienced a year of ministry like last year. And I don't want to move past that too quickly because there have been some years that have been really, really hard. And so, on the years when it was such a joy and we had the wind to our backs, I want to give glory to God for that and I want celebrate it. God did some amazing things last year.



And if we look at a lot of the things that we could highlight, it could really be summed up in the word growth. But not growth in just the sense that you might think. I'm not just trying to highlight people who show up on the weekends. That did happen. But there was growth in all of the other ways.

God did more in and through our church last year alone than in our 192 year history as a church. And so we just give God the glory for that. It was an amazing thing, man. So, just a couple of things I'll place in front of you since this is the first time we have been together since Christmas services.

24K at Christmas

Guys, we had over 24,000 people join us for Christmas services, many for the first time that they'd ever been here. Incredible.

2100 + baptisms

The number that I'm really, really excited about, we had over 2,100 baptisms last year. Now, if you were here a year ago on this weekend, I stood before you somewhat trembling and I decided to vocalize our prayerful goal (which is the first time I'd ever done that). Our prayerful goal for 2025 was that we would see 1,001 baptisms. Why 1,001? To remind us that there is always one more. And I think God laughed at that goal, because He more than doubled it. Guys, it was just amazing to see that happen.

Carmel's 10 year anniversary

Then I just want to acknowledge this. Our Carmel campus is celebrating its 10-year anniversary today. So, happy birthday Carmel. It's incredible to see all that God has done. When we sent, I don't know, 200 or 300 people to Creekside Middle School 10 years ago—a set up and tear down—it was our first campus. We didn't know what we were doing and today there are more people at the Carmel location than were in our entire church 12 years ago. Pastor Bart Shaw and the whole team, you are doing an incredible job.

Awaken — December 2023–2025

Last thing before we jump in, I just want to put a bow on Awaken. Awaken was our two-year generosity/discipleship initiative. If you are a part of our church then you know all about it. The goal was 100 percent participation—that we would all lean in. It was a discipleship journey, "What does God want to do in me? What does He want to do through me?" There was a financial number attached to that, because we always have more vision and more need than resources.



So, really what this was is it was designed to accelerate our church into the future coming out of COVID. And we have more people to reach and more needs to meet. So, we were like: What if we doubled our annual budget two years in a row? That's essentially what we were sort of after. The initial goal, just to remind you, and for those of you who were not here, was:

84 million

The initial goal, just to remind you, and for those of you who were not here, was 84 million dollars across two years.

87 million then 98 million

The church committed 87 million and then a year ago, because you were outgiving that we moved it to 98 million.

101 million

Guys, I just want to celebrate the final number with you. It was over 100 million. It was just shy of 101 million. Thank you. I know those are big numbers. They are big numbers, which means we steward those, really, with a sober mind. We are like, "Okay, we have been trusted with this, and we want to maximize this for Kingdom impact to reach more people and meet more needs." Thank you. Thank you for being a part of that. There is still more to accomplish together as a church.

Well, today I'm really, really excited and I'm glad you are here because today we're kicking off our year-long study in the gospel of Mark. And what I mean is that we are going to spend the vast majority, like 85 or 90 percent of this year 2026 just going verse by verse through Mark's gospel, reading the text, explaining the text, and applying the text.

And we're calling the study together The Urgent Kingdom. And you are going to see why here in just a minute. Now, we're going to divide the series up—there are 16 chapters in Mark—so we're going to divide up the 16 chapters throughout the year into six or seven parts.

And part one begins today. We will wrap it up February 22. We'll cover the first 3 chapters of Mark. And so, we're calling the first part of this:

"The Kingdom Breaks In"



Now, with each part we'll change up the graphics, give you something different to look at so that way, you know, it will keep your attention. But we're going to go through this verse by verse.

Now, here's what I want to challenge you with at the beginning of this series. I want to challenge you to just be here as often as you can. Maybe even make this challenge, "If I'm in town and I am able to come, I'm going to be at a campus in person."

I'm really grateful for online. I know life happens. Sickness happens. Travel happens. All of that kind of stuff. If you physically can't be here, join us there. But please don't use online as an excuse to say home and in bed. And I know that none of you would ever do this. This is the 11:15 service. You guys don't do this. It's the other ones.

So, just be here because there is something powerful about this gathering together. And you say, "You know what? I'm going to lean in this year with some consistency and some intentionality in this series to see what God might do."

I cannot guarantee you that every sermon is going to be a home run, I cannot guarantee that you're going to walk out of here every week and go, "Man, that was just like the most amazing sermon I've ever heard." I can't promise that your circumstances will change at the end of this series. But I will promise that if you'll lean in, you'll change. I can promise that.

Here's the other thing that I want to encourage you to do. I'm going to go a little bit old school. I want to encourage you to bring, every week, a real paper Bible like this with you. I am not throwing any shade on electronic Bibles. I love my electronic Bible. I love our church app, YouVersion Bible app. Bring a real paper Bible with you.

Here's why. Try this as an experiment for this series of Mark. I want you to... When I say turn to Mark, I don't want you to do this (point at a screen) I want you to do this (flip open your Bible). There is a difference. I want you to know how to navigate around the Scriptures.

As your pastor, I don't want to be your Bible Uber driver. I want you to get behind the wheel. I want to teach in such a way to give you confidence that you can read this on your own. So, bring it with you every week.

I also think it would be kind of cool that every week when I say, "Hey, turn to Mark 2," I hear rustling of pages in the room across all of our locations. I just think that would be so cool. Me and four of you. Alright?



So, here's the next one. Bring a journal with you. Now, the journal doesn't have to be a paper journal. It could be an electronic one. Just bring something. Make it your Mark file or your Mark journal and bring it with you every weekend with your Bible, in person, and just jot down a few notes.

Now, I know some of you are pushing back on me. You are like, "Aaron, I am not a note taker. I don't learn that way." I'm not asking you to take down copious notes to study for an exam. I'm not asking you to do that. I'm ask you just to write three things down every single week.

Three things:

One thing I learned

One thing that challenged me

One thing God is asking me to do

Number one: What did I learn out of this text that I didn't know. What's God challenging me with? What is He asking me to do? Man, if you just write down those three simple things every single week, you will maximize our study in the gospel of Mark.

Now, what I love about just going verse by verse through a book of the Bible like this is that it forces us to cover some things that we might be tempted to skip for whatever reason. But we're not going to skip it because God knows what we need to hear.

You might come to a passage, especially if you've been a Christian for a while and you've been attending church for a while, and you've been through the Bible recap like five or six years in a row, you might be tempted to think, as you come across a passage that is familiar, to tune out. To say, "There is nothing more there to glean. I've already got it."

Please don't do that. Here's why. The Bible describes itself in the book of Hebrews as living and active. It is not a static, dead book. It is living and active, meaning that you go to the Bible sometimes to question it and analyze it, when in reality it needs to question and analyze you. That's what it means to be living and active.

And God will use passages that might be difficult to understand or that you might be familiar with to convict and encourage and reveal some things to you that you need right now.



2 Timothy, chapter 3, verse 16 says that all Scripture, even the Old Testament, all Scripture, even the parts that are kind of difficult to understand or difficult to swallow, is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and here's the word training in righteousness.

And that's the word that I want you to grab ahold of today. This book is here not for you to read so that you can just get it all into your head and memorize the Scriptures and say, "I've been in the Bible every single day, so God is going to give me a gold star." That's not what this is about. This is a training tool similar to the training tools, the equipment that is in a gym.

Guys, how silly would it be if you walked into a gym and you walked past a treadmill and you were like, "Yeah, I did that one time. Check." No, that's silly. You go back to the barbell. You go back to the treadmill. You go back to the thing over and over again to continue to train in it. That's the reason why you come back to the Bible every day to train in righteousness. You don't read to earn your salvation; you are reading to be trained up.

Charles Spurgeon one time compared the Bible to a lion in a cage. And he goes, "If you come across a lion in a cage the lion doesn't need to be defended, you just need to let it out of the cage." The Bible doesn't need a PR team. It needs to be unleashed in our lives. And I don't just want you to believe that the Bible is the Word of the Lord, I want you to have a personal encounter with Lord of the Word.

Now, a few key characteristics of who Mark was, things about his gospel, then we're going to jump in. Mark is also known as John Mark. So if you've heard of John Mark—same guy. And he was the cousin of a guy by the name of Barnabas.

Barnabas and Paul would go on these missionary journeys together. And Mark joined them on their first missionary journey. And somewhere along the way things got difficult. We don't really know fully why or all of the reasons why, but Mark decides to tap out and he bails on them. He breaks his commitment. And we are never told why. No explanation. No exit interview. No two-week notice. He just bailed.

And it really hacked Paul off. Paul was like, "You made a commitment, you didn't follow through with it." And it causes a big rift between him and Paul and Paul just kind of writes him off. Now, Barnabas, being the encourager that he was, he was like, "Paul, calm down. I'll go with the kid. I'll work with him." And that's what he does.



Later though, Paul and Mark reconcile and he refers to Mark, get this, as a faithful servant. Now, the reason why I'm pointing that out is because I want to encourage some of you today. Because there is somebody, you walked in here with a fair amount of shame or regret.

Maybe you broke some commitment. Maybe you were here a year ago and you said, "I'm going to give God a shot," and this is the first time that you've been back. Maybe you just can't follow through with consistency.

This should really, really encourage you. God uses a guy with commitment issues to write a whole book in the New Testament. So, even if you've had lots of pits and starts and stops, God has not given up on you. He didn't give up on Mark. He's not giving up on you. That's what is going on, man.

The gospel of Mark is the transcription of the story from Peter. Peter was a disciple of Jesus, and an eyewitness to all that Jesus said and did. So, Mark is just writing down everything Peter tells him that he experienced. And, as a result, Peter has been proportionally more present in Mark's gospel than in the others. We know that they got really close, possibly because they spent so much time together doing this, so that later Peter refers to Mark as his son in 1 Peter 5.

One of the primary characteristics of Mark's gospel is that it is the shortest one. He doesn't waste much time at all. It is gritty. It is fast paced. He is furiously writing down everything that Peter is describing that he experienced with Jesus.

So, get this picture in your mind. I don't know where they were. Maybe they were hanging out around the fire, and Peter is just talking and Mark is writing it down. And Peter is going, "Then this happened. Then that happened. And Jesus healed this person. And then He went over here."

That's the reason why one of Mark's favorite words is suddenly or immediately. It's like a middle schooler hyped up on Red Bull telling you about his day at Kings Island, "Then we rode this ride. And then we ate that thing. And then we puked over here."

And it's moving so fast all the way through. Mark is moving so fast (I love this) he doesn't even have time to tell the Christmas story. He's like, "Matthew and Luke will do that. We're going to jump right into Jesus as an adult right at the beginning of His ministry. We've got to go."



And while the gospels focus a lot on Jesus' words, Mark focuses a lot on His actions. Jesus is a man of action. He's moving quickly and decisively from event to event. And so, if you have concentration issues or you find it challenging to pay attention like I do, you are going to love Mark. If you are an achiever like I am, you're going to love Mark. He just goes from one achievement to the next—one action to the next.

Here's the implication for you and me. When it comes to Jesus, you cannot remain neutral. You've got to respond actively. There is something that He's actively asking you to do.

One final word here before we jump in verse 1. Mark is writing this to a group of Christians whose lives have fallen apart. The world was in utter chaos at the moment. This was around 65 A.D. A really bad dude named Nero just got voted into office making their lives miserable.

Christians were being persecuted, tortured, and executed. They were underground and hiding, tempted to give up, waive the white flag to give up. They were like, "This is not what we thought we signed up for in following Jesus. And Mark writes to boldly declare that Jesus is King and His Kingdom is urgently arriving so, "Do not give up."

And maybe there is somebody who needs that encouragement right now. Maybe already, 11 days into a brand-new year, you are like, "Yep. Same as last year. Not any better. I've already broken my resolutions." Maybe your life is feeling a little bit chaotic and confusing right now. Maybe that relationship that you had high hopes for, you thought was going to fulfill you, has already broken up. Maybe you started following Jesus last year, but your circumstances have not changed, at least not in the way that you thought that they would. And maybe you're thinking, you haven't even said it out loud, you've been toying with the thought, "I thought following Jesus was supposed to fix this. And if it won't fix this, then what good is following Jesus?" And if you've ever had that thought, Mark has got a word for you.

So, let's jump into verse 1. You guys ready? That's not very convincing. Alright, here we go. Verse 1:

"This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." (NLT)



The first sentence of Mark's gospel... Can I just tell you this? The rest of the gospel, all 678 verses that we will study together, are written to support that one sentence. He wastes no time. Right out of the gate he's like, "Man, I'm cutting right to the chase. I am telling you that God broke into human history in the person of Jesus. And he abruptly and bluntly calls Jesus the Messiah or maybe in your translation Christ, which are really the same word.

And, by the way, Christ was not His last name. It wasn't like Jesus Smith or Jesus Thomas, "I guess it was Jesus Christ. He came from a long line of Christs." No, this is a title. And it simply means: Anointed One. That's what it means.

He goes even further than that and he calls Him the Son of God, which probably doesn't sound all that strange to you and me because we hear that all of the time. But to them it would have been brand-new information. And it would have kind of been astonishing to hear that.

Now, Mark is not saying that Jesus is like God. He's not even saying that Jesus is from God. He's saying:

Jesus is God

He is God in the flesh. He is much more than a historical or mythical figure. He is not just a good teacher. He is the Son of God who has come to be with us: fully alive and present. He is the fulfillment of all of the biblical prophet's longings and visions. He is the One who has come and will return one day soon to rule and to reign and to renew the entire universe. And that same God desires a seat upon the throne of your heart.

And Mark rightly calls this Good News, or in many translations, the word gospel, which is what that means.

Gospel — Euangelion

Understand that in the Greek the word gospel is euangelion. And the Jews and the Gentiles would have been very, very familiar with this word because it was a very common word that they would have read in the daily news.

In fact, archeologists came across this inscription in 9 B.C. on a secular document, it's not a religious document at all. This is a picture of what they found from the Berean calendar. And it is announcing that Caesar Augustus, the Caesar of the time, had been sort of like, in their vernacular, voted into office and the word euangelion is in that document. It says, "This is the good news that Caesar is now the savior of the world." It uses that word euangelion.



Now, it's very clear that Mark is familiar with that document because he's borrowing the language to actually introduce Jesus. And I love this. What he is simply doing is going, "Whoa, whoa. Hold up. Caesar is not savior. Rome is not the kingdom. Jesus is. And His Kingdom is coming." This is the real euangelion. This is the real Good News.

And the prefix of that word eu means joyful. So really, here's what gospel means. When you hear the word gospel it's not referring to a type of music, it's saying this is:

"News that brings joy"

Why joy? Here's why. Listen. Because it is an announcement not a suggestion. It is something that has happened in history, something that has been done for you and now being in Christ changes your eternal status forever.

Can I just tell you this? There is a big difference between Christianity and all other religions, including no religion or non-belief. Here's the difference:

The essence of other religions and worldviews is advice; Christianity is news!

The essence of other religions and worldviews, including atheism, is advice; Christianity is news. Other philosophies and worldviews will say, "Well, you know, this is what you have to do. These are the reparations you need to make. This the effort that you need to give to pay for your wrongs, to connect to a deity, or a god, or karma, or whatever. This is what you have to do to live a good life so you can be a good person to go to heaven or whatever we think is on the other side of this.

The gospel is fundamentally different. It says, "This is what has been done in history on your behalf. This is how Jesus lived. This is the way He died. This is how He resurrected to earn the way to God for you because you could never earn it."

That is the fundamental difference. And here's the result of it. Once you not just believe it but grasp it and own it and submit to it, it's a relief. It's a relief that brings joy because it's joyful news.

How many of you have ever received news in your life that was a burden? Nobody? Just me? Come on man. Like 11 days into the year you are like, "Yeah, man."



How many of you have ever gotten a text message from somebody saying, "Hey, we need to talk." And immediately you are like, "Oh, no." Because usually people who give you good news never start with, "We need to talk."

How many of you have ever gotten a phone call from a supervisor or a boss, "Hey, man. We're making some cutbacks and your job is one of them."? It's news that is a burden, "Now what am I going to do?"

Or, maybe you get a phone call from the doctor, "Hey, the test results came back. It looking like..." news that brings a burden.

Several years ago, right around tax time, I gave all of my stuff to my tax lady. She was doing all of the taxes and she emailed me and she said, "Hey, it's looking like you're going to owe thousands of dollars in taxes." It was a burden. Immediately the rest of my day felt heavy. And then, two or three days later, she emailed me back and said, "No, I overlooked this thing, I overlooked this document, and actually you're going to get a return." Lifted!

This is what I'm talking about. It's like news that comes into our life that weighs us down, news that comes and it is a relief that brings joy. And this is how Mark describes this news. He says, "It is a relief."

Now, the reason why I'm bringing this up is that some of us, we believe the gospel with our minds, maybe we've given our lives with our lips, still living with a burden, still living weighed down. Why? Because you know that Jesus is your Savior but you're still living like you are your savior. You are still trying to earn it. You are still trying to pay it off.

Many of us, including me... Sometimes I've got to remind my face that my heart has been redeemed. It's Good News that is a relief and a joy. And if it's not a relief to you then you haven't fully grasped it yet. Some of you are living burdened down with a weight that Jesus already lifted.

You're weighed down, not by the gospel, but by advice, do betters, and ought tos. And it's killing you. You keep thinking, "I've still got to earn this. It's too good. I mean, God would never just... Because I know what I've done."

Every now and then I'll have people say, "Is it enough for me?" And the reason why you say this is because you know what you've done. You don't know what other people have done. Just in general you think, "Well, God can save them. I don't think He can save me." Because you know your computer history. You know your mindset. You know the commandments that you have broken and you are like, "I don't know if it's good enough for me." Yes it is good enough for you.



You are exhausted right now not because you're a sinner, but because you're still trying to be your own savior. The gospel is Good News. God connects to you, not based upon what you've done through good behavior, or your record. No, based upon what Jesus has done and His record and His love for you. That is what sets it apart. That is what makes all of the difference. And it's Good News.

Alright, verse 2. I've got to move much faster or we are not making it through this book. Alright?

"It began," verse 2, "just as the prophet Isaiah had written: 'Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will,'" underline this, "prepare your way. He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,'" underline it again, ""Prepare the way for the Lord's coming! Clear the road for him."" (NLT)

Now, all four of the gospels mention this prophecy. When that happens you need to sit up and take notice because that's intentional. They all want us to hear this. What this is saying is, "Hey, guys. The story of Jesus is not a fairy tale. This is not a myth. This is history. And he's referencing the words of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 40, written 700 years before this, showing us there is a much bigger story unfolding here.

This is part of God's plan of redemption. A plan that was set into motion before the foundation of the world. And the Old Testament is prophesying, not just the coming of Jesus, it's even getting down to the details of prophesying the announcer of the coming of Jesus. And it calls the announcer the messenger.

So, here's what is going on. Historically if a king was coming to town, they would send a herald to go days before to announce the arrival of the king to make sure that everybody was ready. It's kind of like the first century version of Bruce Buffer. It's like at the MMA fights, "It's time!" Right? Bruce Buffer is not the main event. He's announcing the main event. And that's what is going on here.

If a king or a dignitary was coming to visit your town, you would make sure, before they got there, that the roads were clear. You would go around 465 and make sure all of the potholes from winter were filled in. You'd remove the tree that had fallen across the path. You'd build a bridge to make sure there were straight paths into town.

Right before Christmas we got all of that snow, everything was covered. And we were having some people over to our house, so I went out and I shoveled the sidewalk. I cleared the way because I knew people were coming over. I did not stand on the front porch and say, "Well, the sidewalk is out there somewhere, just trapse around. You'll figure it out. No, that would be dishonoring our guests. I cleared the way, preparing the way for them.



If you ever see lights in your rearview mirror, you hear emergency sounds; if it's not the police, you're relieved. If it's an ambulance or an emergency vehicle. What do you do? You clear the way. You get out of the road. Same word.

Now, this should sound really familiar. In the passage when it says prepare the way or clear the way it's because this is the verse of our Mission Statement as a church. We are here to:

Clear the Way
Equip for Battle
Deploy for Impact

Can I just tell you this? We did not come up with our Mission Statement in a conference room thinking, "Oh, man. Clear the way would be cool." It comes out of Mark 1, man. And this isn't a one time announcement. Do you know why? Because Jesus is still arriving in people's lives today and He wants a clear path into yours.

Can I say this lovingly, pastorally, but directly? Listen. Do whatever you have to do to give Jesus a straight path into your heart. He wants to come into your life. The question is, is there anything in the way? Remove any obstacles that would hinder His approach.

For some of you, that means getting rid of an addiction, a habit, or a hobby that isn't sinful in and of itself but it's cluttering the path of Jesus getting to you.

Some of you, it's a relationship and it is blocking the way. And I know you don't want to be alone. And I know that maybe he or she may not be tracking with God the way you want them to. And you are like, "Well, I'll do some missionary dating. I'll get them to God." But you know, in reality, they actually pull you away from God and it's blocking the path. Clear the way.

Maybe it's pride. Maybe it's anger. Maybe it's bitterness. Maybe it's questions and doubts. Nothing wrong with questions and doubts. We all have them. The Scriptures say that we would. In fact, faith implies questions and doubts.

Here's the problem. Are you using questions and doubts to block the way to Jesus. What I mean by that is that you may have questions and doubts—totally understandable. But if they are the same questions and doubts you had a year ago, or three years ago, or five years ago, or 10 years ago and you haven't moved—problem.



Here's my observation as a pastor. Sometimes people carry objections or questions that they could get answers to, but they don't really want to get an answer to them. I'm not saying that you are doing this. I'm saying that it is possible that you are not getting an answer to it as an excuse not to heal from your pain or not to fully surrender your life to Jesus because you know that if you got an answer to that question, it would require whole devotion and you're not ready for that.

Sometimes people come to me and they are like, "I don't know, man. I've got questions about the authenticity or the trustworthiness of the Bible. I saw this YouTube video and somebody was bringing up all kinds of questions, poking holes in the reliability of Scripture." Or, "Why would a good God allow suffering?"

And I always will say, "You know what? Those are great questions. They really are. You know what? There are solid answers. Have you gone after trustworthy resources to arrive at solid answers? Because believe me there are brilliant minds through the centuries who have asked every question under the sun.

"Do you really think that your question is a novel idea to God? Do you really think you're stumping God? Where God is like, 'Oh, Myself. I've never thought of that question? You got Me.'" No, man. Come on, man. There are solid answers to them if you would study and go after the right resources.

And I know that you can study because some of you guys will spend hours preparing for your fantasy football league. Some of you can rattle off all of the metrics that your Oura Ring has given you, man: MacroFactor, your stats, your sleep cycle—you can explain all of it. But you'll say theology is too complicated. Listen, man. It is not that we are incapable of studying. It's just that we are often selective about what we're motivated to study. Clear the Way. Get out of your way, man. And make straight the path for Jesus in your life.

You want to know why? Because you are not guaranteed another second of life. Life is screaming past us. And eternity is upon us. I'm at the age now when I'm realizing I've got more in the rearview mirror than in the windshield. And it's sobering. It's like eternity is upon us. Prioritize this into your life. There is too much at stake. Clear the way.

He goes on in verse 4 and he says:

"This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River." (NLT)



So, Mark tells us who this prophesied messenger is. A guy by the name of John the Baptist, which, once again, I always grew up thinking that was his denomination: John the Baptist, Bill the Methodist, Tim the Presbyterian. No. Baptist is a description of what he did. And John, what he was doing was he was calling people to baptism. It was a baptism of repentance. He's leading this national revival.

All of these people are coming out of the woodwork to hear what it is that he has to say and what he is doing. And what he was doing is he was calling people to get their lives right with God. Why? Because the King is coming. Same deal today. I'm calling you to get your life right with God. Why? Because the King is coming. It is urgent upon us.

So, they are all coming out to see what he has to say and they are not in some cushy venue somewhere—air conditioned and padded seats. They are out in the sticks, man. They are in the wilderness. Like one port-a-potty for every 50 people kind of a deal. And what he is doing is not only unconventional, it's really unpopular and even offensive for several reasons.

He is calling Jewish people to baptism, which would have been highly offensive because they were the ancestors of Abraham. And he's baptizing them in the Jordan River. Now, I don't know what you think about when you think of the Jordan River but it's not like our nice clean baptistries today. It's not even like a nice, clear water, mountain spring.

Whatever your vision of the Jordan River is, it's probably much worse. Several years ago when I went to Israel I got to visit the place where John was doing the baptizing and it's kind of muddy and murky, like, "I don't know that I want to get in there because I might get a rash kind of a thing."

So, they are in the desert, which was a connection with the Israelites being in desert slavery for forty years. And John is baptizing people near the place where the Israelites would have crossed over into the Promised Land. I don't think that's an accident.

The most offensive thing that he is calling them to is not necessarily baptism, it's repentance. And it always is. If the gospel is news, then this is not a suggestion to turn from sin, it's a requirement.

Repent — Metanoia

The Greek word repent is the word metanoia. And what it means is not like, "Oh, man. I'm really, really sorry." What it means is a metamorphosis, that is rooted in the word metanoia. It means a complete change or transformation. It means a change of mind and of heart and direction.



Like when you get lost and on your way to a destination somewhere and you realize that you are heading in the wrong direction. You have to repent and turn around and go in the right direction. It's the same word. It's a coming to your senses. You're not going to get to where it is that God wants you to go by heading in the same direction.

Guys, can I just say this?

The call to repent starts with a confrontation of sin.

A call to repent always starts with a facing of and a confrontation of sin in our lives. Listen. I just don't want people in my life who will constantly just tell me how great I am and everything that I do is perfect. I don't want people in my life who just always affirm me and my actions, behaviors, and choices. The people who I love the most in my life love me enough to directly confront me with the things that I need to see that maybe I'm not seeing. That's actually true love.

The people in my life who just tell me how great I am all of the time don't really love me. They have an agenda. And many of us have been conditioned, in this society, to trust our feelings. We elevate our feelings over God's Word. So, our feelings are up here and we put God's words down here. And what God wants us to do is He wants us to flip those things.

Your feelings are valid. I'm not saying to disregard feelings. I'm saying to put them underneath the authority of Scripture, not the other way around. We want Scripture to adjust itself to how we feel instead of allowing our feelings to be shaped by what God has said.

And listen. I am not here as your pastor to... Every now and then I'll have somebody come up to me, they'll bump into me out in public somewhere, "Oh, man. I really, really appreciate your preaching. Now I don't agree with everything you say." And I'm like, "I wouldn't think you would. And if you did, one of us probably isn't thinking, and I'm probably not doing it right, and I'm probably not calling you to repentance."

Because we don't like it. I don't like it when people tell me that I'm wrong. I don't like it when people show me something I've got to change. And I wouldn't suspect that you would either. So, don't just think, "Well, I'm just going to go because he says everything I already agree with." But actually what Scripture will do is lovingly confront you so that you can change.



I take this really seriously. I never want to be abrasive. I never want to be mean. I never want to be holier than thou. I never, ever want you to think that I've got this figured out and one day you'll figure it out like me. My favorite definition of preaching is: one beggar just telling other beggars where to find food. I'm in just as much need of this as anyone here in this room. I love what Paul said, "I'm the worst of all sinners."

And I just need you to know that I take this really seriously because the Bible warns teachers of this—telling people with itching ears what they want to hear. And I never, ever want to do that.

I take it really seriously because one day, on Judgment Day, I've got to stand in two lines. Most of you all just get to stand in one. That's not going to be very fun. But you've just got to stand in one. You've got to give an account. By the way, the answer on Judgment Day is, "I'm a sinner. Jesus paid for my sin." That's the answer. Don't try to earn it or pay it off.

But after I go through that line, I've got to get into another line and that's how I pastored you, how I rightly handled the Word of God. And God is going to say, "Did you tell them the truth in love? Or, because you were fearful of negative emails or nasty comments, you cowed a little bit." Guys, my job is to tell you the truth with grace, not replace the truth with affirmation.

Conviction – Condemnation

Now, with that said, can I just point out to you the difference between conviction and condemnation? Because oftentimes, at least initially, they will feel kind of the same but they are very, very different.

Every now and then, after I get done preaching a sermon I'll have someone come up to me and they will look as white as a sheet. A guy will walk up to me and go, "Dude, did my wife email you? Did she tell you...?" And I am like, "No, dude. I have no idea, man. That's the Holy Spirit, bro, taking my words and convicting you. Now you've got to do something with that."

Sometimes we stop going to church because we don't like that heavy feeling. Can I just say this to you? Man, that heavy feeling is why you come to church. That is the Holy Spirit lovingly weighing down on you, confronting you to change out of love. Because the most unloving thing would be to just let you continue to go on your way in rebellion away from God.



Guys, do not confuse the difference between conviction and condemnation. Here's the difference. Conviction points you to Jesus. Condemnation pushes you into isolation and bitterness. Conviction invites you into God's grace, which sets you free. Condemnation produces shame. Conviction says, "Yes, you are messed up. But you know what? You can come home over and over and over again." Condemnation says, "You are messed up. You better run and hide."

Man, the minute you realize you are a sinner, is the moment that you are ready to realize your need for forgiveness. Romans 2 says that it is God's kindness that leads you to repentance. It is not your repentance that earns His kindness. Understand the difference.

Verse 6 says:

"His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey." (NLT)

I don't know why this is in here. John is a weird dude. It's like he's got a weird fashion sense, he's got a funky diet, and it's like: why in the world did he put this in here? I don't think we need to make too much of it other than to say this: John did not care what other people thought of him. I think that's safe to say. He's got locust in his teeth. He's wearing this camel hair stuff. John's a humble dude and he's not trying to draw attention to himself. He's just trying to point the way to Jesus.

And then in verse 7 it says:

"John announced: 'Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!'" (NLT)

What's going on here is that in the first century they didn't go in cars, they went by foot or camel. And the roads were very dusty and dirty and camel and donkey excrement was on the road. So, your feet would be covered in that stuff.

And when you went into somebody's house you didn't sit down at a table, you would recline on one's elbow, which means that your stinky, nasty feet would be in your neighbor's face. So, that's why they washed feet. And it was beneath a dignitary to untie his own sandals, servants did that.

Here's what John says. John's going, "Hey, man. Somebody is coming who is so much greater than me, I'm not even worthy to untie His sandals. That's how big of a deal that He is."



Now, understand that crowds of people are flocking into the wilderness to be baptized by John. And it might have been tempting to think that he was kind of a big deal. But he says, "No, man. Somebody greater than me is coming." That's what John thinks of Jesus.

Do you know what Jesus thinks of John? Well, Mark doesn't tell us, but Matthew does. If you go over to Matthew, Matthew 11:11, get this. Here's what Jesus says about John. He says:

"I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. (NLT)

That's an amazing statement. Think about that for a minute. Of all of the people who could be up for that award, greatest in the Bible, think about that for a minute: Moses, Abraham, Elijah, Ruth, Daniel, Mary—all of these people who could be up for that award and Jesus goes, "Nope. There is nobody greater than My boy with locust and honey in his teeth, John the Baptist."

How do you stay humble and grounded when Jesus calls you the GOAT? Why in the world did Jesus say that? Well there are a couple of things that we could point to, unique things about John the Baptist. Luke tells us that he was filled with the Holy Spirit before his birth.

He's the last of the Old Testament prophets to speak for God. The first prophet to speak in 430 years of silence between the two Testaments. Maybe that's one of the reasons why. The Bible tells us that John the Baptist preached in the spirit and the power of Elijah. Maybe that's why. He called a nation to repent. He rebuked a king and he persevered. Maybe that's why.

I actually think the reason why, and maybe these are just a few words of application for us, is that John was crystal clear about who he was and who he wasn't:

He knew his identity.

He knew who Jesus was and he said, "Man, I am not the one. I am just a voice. I am just a voice in the wilderness pointing to Jesus."

Are you putting unnecessary pressure on yourself?



And oftentimes when we find ourselves in a funk is because we've been putting too much pressure on ourselves. Can I just ask you this? Is too much of it riding on you? Then you need to be reminded of who you are in Christ like John.

Number two:

He knew his mission.

He was like, "You know what? Don't look at me. Look at Jesus. I'm just here to point the way, clear the way."

Do people see Jesus in me?

This brings up an interesting question in the beginning of a brand-new year. Do people see Jesus in you? I want to invent this new word at the beginning of the new year. Are we looking more Jesus(y) than last year? When people look at you are they like, "Man, that person is not perfect but I see something different in him." And it's the Spirit of Jesus.

He knew how to stay humble.

And then John knew how to stay humble. John 3:30:

More of Jesus, less of me until it is Christ alone.

I'm going to get low. I'm going to let Jesus get high in my life. I think that is why Jesus calls him the GOAT.

And then in verse 9. This is where Jesus first shows up in the gospel. It says:

"One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove." (NLT)

A couple of things I want to point out here. Number one: Jesus just kind of shows up in a very understated way. And it tells us where He was from. It says He was from Nazareth, which is back woods, Smallville. Nobody famous came from Nazareth. And Nazareth is in Galilee, which is up north and that was considered unspiritual territory due to all of the Gentiles who lived there. That is where the Son of God is coming from. And Mark wants us to know that.

And then Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River and a lot of Rabbis would have considered the Jordan to be unclean and not pure enough for such things. God just shows up in the least expected way.



But here's really the primary question that maybe you are asking when you come to this text, or at least I ask. When we read this it's like, "Why in the world would Jesus need to be baptized? Why is it that this is one of the first things that Mark tells us that He does?"

Well, I want to rule out the forgiveness of sin because Jesus did not have any sin. So, He doesn't need to be forgiven of sin. So, His baptism wasn't for His salvation. He's God. So why did Jesus get baptized? I think a couple of reasons. Number one: He is publicly identifying with God. This is the inauguration of His ministry. And I think, even more than that, He is modeling for us the things that we should do.

In fact, in Matthew 3 (we're kind of going back and forth) John was like, "Man, I shouldn't baptize you, You should baptize me." Jesus said, "No, baptize Me." And here is what He says, "This is necessary," He didn't say for salvation, He said, "This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness."

Guys, can I just tell you this? If you believe in Jesus, you're following after God, you're desiring to have Him in your heart and you have not been baptized, you've been holding out thinking, "I don't really think it's necessary," right there is enough reason for you to be baptized because Jesus said, "this is necessary to fulfill all righteousness."

The other thing that we see is that Mark tells us that Jesus came up out of the water, which implies that He was immersed, He wasn't sprinkled. It was a death, a burial, and a resurrection. He was fully immersed and then He comes up out of the water.

Now, once again, I know that we have a lot of people from various traditions and backgrounds and maybe you were sprinkled as an infant and you're saying, "I don't think I need to be immersed because I already was sprinkled. Or, here's the biggest thing I hear, "I don't want my family to be offended thinking that I'm dishonoring what they did for me." And I totally would understand that. I get that.

Can I just very loving place this in front of you? Your decision to be immersed as an adult should not be a slight or dishonoring toward your family. It is an expression of honor and gratitude, saying, "Thank you for the foundation that you laid."



You know what they were doing? They were saying, "We desire that you be raised in Jesus Christ." What an incredible gift. What an amazing spiritual heritage. And you should be thankful for that. And I would affirm that. And I don't think there is anything wrong with it. You want to know what I think a big problem is, though? It's that they have a memory of your baptism, and you don't because you were a baby. And I want you to have a memory of it.

Jesus was baptized at 30 years old. And He did so because He said it was necessary to fulfill... Once again, take all of the theology out of it. If you have no other reason, that's a good enough one for me. So, if you've never been immersed, maybe you need to do that for yourself today.

And it says that Jesus came up out of the water and He saw the heavens tearing apart. You know that word tearing apart that Mark uses shows up again at the crucifixion scene. When Jesus breaths His last on the cross, something else tore. And it wasn't heaven. It was the curtain in the Temple from the Holy of Holies. What was happening is that as He was being baptized, heaven tears apart so God could come down. At the cross the curtain is torn apart so that we can go up.

And the Spirit is pictured here. I'm sorry I didn't give you enough time to clap but I'm two minutes beyond my time. The Spirit is pictured here as a dove. And that's no mistake. Because, as you know, the creation of the world is a Trinitarian event. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit were there at creation. And it says that the Spirit hovered above the waters. And when you look at the original languages it doesn't say hovered, it says fluttered.

Here's what Mark is doing. I think he's brilliant. Mark is connecting Jesus' baptism with the creation event, tying it all together to say this is God's plan to redeem, to rescue, and renew all things.

I want to end with this. I want to go back to Matthew 11:11 because Jesus said something really, really amazing when He said:

"I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is!" (NLT)

And from the time that John the Baptist began until now the Kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing.

Here's what Jesus said. He said, "There is nobody that is as great as John the Baptist." But He said, "There is someone who is greater than him." And He says, "The person who is least in the Kingdom of God."



Now, who would that be? Go home and look in the mirror. That's you and that's me. We are the least in the Kingdom of God. And if you think what Jesus said about John the Baptist was astounding, that's really astounding. Jesus said, "There is nobody greater than John the Baptist. But you know what? There is somebody who can be greater than him." And that is the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. How in the world can that be?

Here's what Jesus is saying, "By faith we are recipients of the New Covenant made available through the blood of Jesus Christ." You are part of the redeemed now that you have the Holy Spirit living in you. That makes you greater than John the Baptist.

This is my fourth service and every time I've said that nobody has clapped. And I think part of the reason why—don't do it now—I think part of the reason why is because number one: we don't hear that nearly enough. Number two: we still don't believe it.

I don't know about you guys, but imposter syndrome is like a real deal, man. It's one thing to have imposter syndrome just as a man or a woman trying to follow after God, "Man, I'm not worthy of this."

Try being a pastor with thousands of people listening to you and you know your crap; you know your junk. And there are so many times I'll be up here preaching a sermon in the power of the Holy Spirit and unholy spirits are just as present because I'll hear the voice of an accuser saying, "Who do you think you are standing up there declaring that? You are just a sinner."

And it's in those moments when I have to go backstage and fall on my knees and say, "Yeah, I am. I'm not worthy. I don't deserve to be up here." But it's by the Spirit of the living God that makes me who I am.

Guys, you are a saint. Not because you've done saintly things, but because Jesus died to set you free. And I think so many of us, the reason why we say, "Well, I tried church and it didn't work. I tried religion and it didn't work." No, you didn't try Jesus, man. You didn't embrace everything that He died for you to have. And right now He has declared that you are a son or a daughter of the King.

And Jesus does not waste His words, especially in Mark. He says, "The least in the Kingdom can be greater than John," He's talking about you. He's talking about me. And maybe some of you, you need to exchange the worthless rags of your own works and behaviors and good intentions, you need to exchange the rags of your religion, and you need to step into who Jesus made you to be. And that begins with a full surrender and obedience. And Jesus would say, "Hey, do this to show..." What's that? Baptism.



Guys, I don't understand how it works. I don't why He would ask us to do this. I just know that He did. And He said, "This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness."

Can I just say this? If you've never been baptized, if you've been sprinkled, if you've been baptized but you were in a really funky place when you did it, you didn't understand what was going on, maybe right now you're just feeling this heaviness and conviction of the Spirit. Maybe right now you need to be baptized.

And so, I'm going to pull a John the Baptist today. I did not wear my camel. Sorry. But I'm going to pull a John the Baptist and say, "Man, just confess your sins, have a change of mind, surrender to King Jesus and come down front and be baptized." Now, I'm not going to ask you to be baptized down at Eagle Creek. We've got clean baptistries for you.

Father, we come to You today and we pray that through the study of Mark You'd change us. We can see that Jesus is a man of action. And maybe what You are asking of us is, not more contemplation, but maybe a little more action to take steps on the things that we say we believe, but maybe we've never tested or tried.

And, Father, there are many of us who feel that imposter syndrome, "I'm just not worthy enough. I've just got my own junk in my life." Can I pray that you would quiet, and I was going to say minimize—would you just shut up the voice of the accuser where the voice of the Holy Spirit reigns supreme. To know that there is this offer of royalty that Jesus died for us to have.

And I pray that it would not just be advice, but news. Not just news, but Good News. Not just Good News but Good News that would bring joy. That we would feel the weight lifted from us to know that You have done everything that is required for us to be with You.

So, Father, would You please for whoever needs You today to enter into their life, transform them from the inside out, clean them up, change them radically, in the name of King Jesus because we know that Your Kingdom is the Kingdom that is coming. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody says: Amen.

