Ryan Graetz

Following the Christ / Leadership; Trust / Mark 1:9–15
Series Number: 2
Readings:
Psalm 2
Mark 1:9-15
Hebrews 2:5–18

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®
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Introduction

Introduction Proper

This week a historic event took place! In the bustling, cutting-edge city of Shanghai, Xijinping, Vladimir Putin, and Donald Trump had a short meeting together (BBC News 2026). Now just raise your hand if you already knew about this event. Ok, now keep it raised if you *cared* about this event. Ok, now raise your hand if you see any of those leaders as a beacon of hope, unity, and future world peace

Just as I suspected.

So the three most powerful leaders in the world get together, and most of us just feel cynical and apathetic. We just don’t trust them.

Its the same in history. How often do we see leaders who actually cared for their people and consistently made good decisions on their behalf?

My wife and I watch a lot of historical documentaries, and we find even the best leaders make grave mistakes. They *seem* trustworthy at first, but eventually they reveal the corruption inside.

Well just imagine if we had a leader who could *actually* lead with love? Someone really fit for the job who could bring real change - peace, prosperity, justice, and human flourishing?

Well there *is* such a leader - Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee. And this morning I want to soothe your cynicism, and help you see that Jesus is the *ultimate* leader, and *he* can be trusted. Because Jesus is the ultimate leader, he’s worthy of your trust.

Review

Now last week we started a new series on Mark's Gospel, *Following the Christ*. The Gospel of Mark is a biography of Jesus' ministry written by an early Christian evangelist, John Mark (Black 2023, 3-5; Garland 2015, 47-67).

Last week we looked at chapter 1, verses 1-8. And we saw how John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, like an ancient king or queen would send messengers ahead to prepare a city for their arrival.

Now to prepare their hearts for Jesus, John would baptise people; he was helping them repent and become sincere in their faith. But he spoke about the one that would arrive after him, "the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie."

Today, let's learn why John thought so highly of Jesus, why Jesus is the ultimate leader worthy of our trust.

Divine Approval (v9-11)

State the Point

Firstly, Jesus is the ultimate leader because he brings divine approval. Jesus brings divine approval.

Show from the Bible

In Mark chapter 1 v9, John baptises Jesus in the Jordan river. And as Jesus is coming up out of water, he looks up and sees this supernatural vision of the heavens being torn open. And he sees the Holy Spirit "descending on him like a dove". And a voice from heaven says "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Explain

What's this all about?

Well, before Jesus starts his public ministry, Mark shows us his close relationship with God, a deep, father/son bond. God the Father calls Jesus his Son. He loves him. He *delights* in him. Jesus has God's *full* approval.

And this teaches us something about the Trinity. See God the Father speaks from heaven, God the Son is standing in the water, and God the Holy Spirit is descending on Jesus. The Father, Son, and Spirit aren't just God appearing in different forms or personas at different times. That's called "modalism", and its an ancient heresy.

Here we see modalism can't be true, because all three persons of God are here together, all at once, and each of them does something distinct from the others. God *always* exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three in one, eternally.

Jesus is God the Father's beloved Son, and he has the Father's full approval and delight. Why is that so important?

Because no other human has God's approval. In Romans 1:18-21, the apostle Paul writes:

Romans 1:18–21 NIV

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

You see, all other humans face God's anger and his judgment! We spend much of our lives pretending he's not there, ignoring what he says in the Bible, and falling short of his perfect benchmark of love.

The famous preacher Tim Keller once said something like this: imagine if you were judged only by what you said *other* people should do. Would you pass that judgement? Probably none of us would (Keller 2019)! And God's standards are much, much higher than ours.

But God the Father approves of *Jesus*. Yes, there is *one* human God delights in!

Now, let's think for a moment: why does Jesus get baptised? John's baptism is all about repenting from evil and choosing to obey God. But Jesus has no evil in him! He doesn't *need* to repent! So why does he get baptised?

Probably because he wants to identify with those that do. He's associating himself with them (Garland 2015, 212-213). They're the ones he came to help! That gives us hope that through Jesus, God may somehow approve of us too!

Illustrate

> There's a famous video on the internet a few years old now, where a university professor tells a lecture theatre full of students, "if that guy riiight up the back can throw a piece of paper into this bin up the front, the whole class automatically gets 100 on the first quiz.
>
> And up the back this cocky student starts bunching the paper up, the eyes of the whole class, eyes locked onto the paper, hoping against hope.
>
> And he hurls it into the air. Time stands still. The small wad of hope sails slowly past. It hits the wall, then bounces…straight into the bin! Instantly the whole class is on their feet, cheering and clapping!
>
> They didn't have to take the quiz! Many of them might have failed, right? But they pass because someone *else* earned the professor's approval. One student's performance earned it for everyone else in the class (collegenation9389 2017).

Its like that with Jesus. We would never earn God's approval on our own, but he can earn it *for* us.

Apply

Do you think God is pleased with XiJinPing, Vladimir Putin, or Donald Trump? They may build the biggest military or the best economy the world has ever seen. But none of that will help us once we come face to face with God as judge one day. The most powerful human leaders cannot give us the most important thing: the approval of almighty God.

But Jesus can. Because of him, all we need to do is trust in Jesus to receive God's approval! Stop living our own way, and embrace Christ! Stop trying to *earn* God's approval, and depend on Jesus instead!

Jesus is the ultimate leader because he brings us divine approval. And as the ultimate leader, he's worthy of your trust.

Divine Character (v12-13)

State the Point

Secondly this morning, Jesus is the ultimate leader is because he brings divine character. Jesus brings divine character.

Show from the Bible/Explain

In Mark chapter 1 verses 12-13, we suddenly get a jarring contrast. In v11, God says “You are my Son, whom I love…” But then immediately the Spirit drives Jesus into the desert! If God loves Jesus so much, why would he do that to him?

Well it gets worse. Jesus is sent out into the desert, to meet…Satan. For *forty* days. Doesn’t sound like my idea of a good time, if I’m honest!

Why? Well Jesus needs to be tempted by Satan. The Greek word for “tempt” here revolves around the idea of testing, or proving something (France 2002, 85; Garland 2015,220-221).

Illustrate

> When I worked as an engineer, I helped test computer systems that would be mounted on vehicles. To make sure they wouldn’t break too easy, we put them through shock and vibration testing. So we’d screw these computer systems onto a big plate, and a machine would vibrate and bounce around and slam the computer system to try to make it fail.
>
> And if your system still works after the testing, it passes! Then you know you’ve got a good quality system. But without shaking it around a bit, you don’t *know* - maybe it just seems good on paper.

Its the same with humans, isn’t it? Someone can seem kind and polite until they’re in their car at peak hour, or until someone fouls their kid during weekend sports!

The Hostile conditions of life strip off the makeup and the gloss and reveal what we’re really like inside! You can’t blame your circumstances, they’re just the test. They just show you what you’re really made of!

And none of us pass. We’re morally corrupt, you and I. We can have the best ideals in the world until things get hard.

But not Jesus. The Spirit drives him into the wilderness - not because God doesn’t love his Son - but to show us WHY he loves his Son so much!

Jesus passes the test. Mark doesn’t say it directly, but he gives us two reasons to think that:

Firstly, in vv14-15 Jesus comes back out of the desert preaching the good news. That wouldn’t make sense if Satan’s just made a meal of him (Garland 2015).

Secondly, Mark says “He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.” And here, he’s probably referring to Psalm 91, written hundreds of years beforehand. Let me read you a few verses:

Psalm 91:11–15 NIV

11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

12 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

13 You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

14 “Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

15 He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.

See Jesus is out there with dangerous animals - wild dogs, lions, scorpions, - but God sent angels to protect him. Why? Because Jesus was faithful! So Mark is showing us that Jesus passed the test (France 2002, 86).

Apply

This is great news for us, because we’ve all already *failed* under testing. Haven’t we all done things we knew to be wrong when our circumstances got hard? Haven’t we all sometimes taken the easy way out, the shortcut, the cheat code?

But Jesus passed the test. See *that’s* the kind of leader we need, worthy of our respect and trust, one with a tested and proven character.

And just a side note: even Jesus endured hardship. Being God’s beloved Son didn’t spare *him* from suffering, so why should we think following him will get *us* out of hardship (Mike Russell, 2026)?

Rather, Jesus leads us *through* difficulties. He uses them to form our character, to deepen our faithfulness and integrity.

But Psalm 95 teaches us that when we’re tested, we don’t get through it using our own strength. Rather, we call on *God* for strength to get through. We focus our eyes on Jesus, who was strong through temptation, who went ahead of us. Trust in him.

Jesus is the ultimate leader because he brings divine *character* - he has character as a leader, and he forms character in us.

Divine Rule (v14-15)

State the Point

Thirdly this morning, Jesus is the ultimate leader because he brings divine rule. Jesus brings divine rule.

Show from the Bible/Explain

In vv 14-15, Jesus returns to Galilee where he grew up, and he starts "proclaiming the good news of God": "The time has come…The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

What's the good news? Well probably what he says in the first bit: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near." But what does that actually *mean*?

Well the Greek word kingdom here doesn't just refer territory ruled by a king. Here its probably talking about a king's royal *reign*, or *kingship* (France 2002, 91-94). So when Jesus says the "kingdom of God has come near", he means, "you're about to be touched by God's rule! God has come to act as king for the people!"

See the Jews had been ruled for centuries by corrupt Jewish kings, oppressive Greek kings, tyrranical Roman kings. These leaders looked after themselves rather than the people, and their moral corruption resulted in poverty, injustice, and conflict.

But hundreds of years beforehand, through the prophet Isaiah, God promised that one day he would come and rule his people, and the nation would flourish. Isaiah ch42 says this:

Isaiah 42:1–4 NIV

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.

2 He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.

3 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness
he will bring forth justice;

4 he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the
islands will put their hope."

Notice the similarity between that first verse and the Father's words to Jesus at his baptism? Jesus is the one he delights in, and he puts his Spirit on Jesus (Watts [2007] 2011).

And this promised leader brings justice. He doesn't publicise himself or try to get famous. Instead, he's incredibly gentle. A bruised reed is useless, but he won't break it. A smoldering candle doesn't give much light, but he won't snuff it out.

This promised leader doesn't falter or give up til his mission is finished.

And now Jesus says, "the time has come," and "The kingdom of God has come near" - its come near because Jesus the promised king is here!

Jesus brings *divine* rule. He's God's special Son, so he brings *God's* rule to earth. God is love, so when he's in charge we see gentleness, justice, liberty, and human flourishing, not self-centredness, corruption and injustice. And Jesus showed in the wilderness - he doesn't give up when times get hard.

As we flip through the pages of Mark's Gospel in this series, we're going to see just this kind of leadership from Jesus. He brings divine rule.

Before he left, though, he set up his church to demonstrate his rule on earth within her walls. Now of course, the church hasn't always *followed* Jesus teaching. Sometimes we've gone our own way and done horrible things as a result. But in churches that *do* follow Christ's teaching, you see Jesus' divine rule producing kindness, gentleness, justice, and flourishing.

And one day Jesus is coming back to rule the world. What a great day that will be! He'll bring divine rule to earth and set everything right.

Apply

What hope do we see in humanity without God? Do we really think we can fix everything? Most of the world's problems were caused by us!

John Dalberg-Acton said that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The Bible disagrees. The corruption was always inside us. Anyone who has young kids can see that! Sorry, they don't start out "innocent"! Rather, when we get authority, who we really are starts to come out.

So who will you hope in? Politicians? Political parties? Some ideal of innate human goodness? Technology? Relationships? They will all fail you, because they're all vulnerable to that same moral corruption in every human. They'll ultimately disappoint you.

Instead, repent and believe in the good news about Jesus. When he says "believe," Jesus doesn't just want you just to agree in your mind. He wants you to trust him to lead your life (France 2002, 93-94). And there are three ways we do that.

Firstly, we come to Jesus to *fix* the corruption inside us. God's Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism, and he gives the Spirit to his followers. God's Spirit changes us to become more like Jesus. We stop being part of the problem and start being part of the solution! Come to Jesus and receive his Spirit.

Secondly, we trust Jesus by obey ing him instead of our own desires, instead of the culture, instead of others' opinions. Learn his teaching and obey it. We repent, and bow to Jesus' divine rule in our lives.

Thirdly, we do what Jesus did - tell this good news to others! There are so many lost people around. They're confused and despairing because of the evil in this world and inside them too. But when we give them the good news, we extend Jesus' divine rule to another precious person. We give them real hope and a future to look forward to.

Conclusion

> When I lived in China as a boy, I visited the Terracotta warriors. Emperor Qin Shi Huang made thousands of them and buried them with him to protect his tomb in the afterlife. But they're actually a replacement for something darker. Ancient Chinese emperors before him would bury their subjects *alive* with them, so they could serve and protect them in the afterlife (Sun Jiahui (孙佳慧) 2021).

What evils and corruption we humans are capable of!

But Jesus is different. Instead of asking his subjects to die to save him, **Jesus dies to save his subjects**! Yes, this leader let himself be nailed to a wooden cross by his hands and his feet to save his people.

All other humans will fail us, but he is the ultimate leader. He brings divine approval, and he can give that to us! He has divine character, and he can form that in us! And he brings divine rule, leadership that creates true peace and flourishing!

Jesus is the ultimate leader - he's the only one worth hoping in, so let's trust him completely with our lives.

- Attribution slide
- After 8:30: What a Friend We Have in Jesus
- After 10:30: For the Cause
- After Confession/Assurance: Prayer (David Wong)

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